

"When the Bell Rings we Go Inside and Learn":
Children's and Parents' Understandings of the Kindergarten Transition

by

Lacey Peters

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Approved June 2012 by the
Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Beth Blue Swadener, Chair
Joseph Tobin
Kathryn Nakagawa
Robert Weigand

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

August 2012

ABSTRACT

The transition to kindergarten is a significant milestone for children and families in the United States. Education reform movements and early childhood policy initiatives have had significant impact on the transition process in recent years, and as a result, there is greater emphasis on promoting “ready children” for school. Previous research on the transition to kindergarten in the U.S. consists primarily of adult perspectives, examining parents and teachers’ expectations for kindergarten and explicating their concerns about the transition. While adults impart important considerations about the transition to kindergarten, members of the early childhood community should also pay attention to children’s perspectives as they too offer critical insight on getting ready for school. This dissertation foregrounds children’s and experiences getting ready for and being in kindergarten, bringing attention their participation in transition activities and school routines. In addition, this study examines ways parents structure children’s participation in transition activities and school routines to provide background information on children’s experiences preparing for school. This study used data from a large-scale qualitative research project conducted in Arizona to understand children’s experiences transitioning to kindergarten. Specifically, interviews with preschool-aged children, kindergarten-aged children, and mothers were analyzed to impart a deeper understanding of children’s viewpoints becoming and being kindergarteners. Findings illustrate how mothers’ understandings of kindergarten, and constructions of readiness have influence over the transition process. Moreover, findings offer thick descriptions of how

children learn about kindergarten, make meaning of school rules and routines, and form membership within classroom communities of practice. Moreover, interpretations of children's viewpoints contribute nuanced understandings of situations that promote or hinder children's participation in transition activities, and subsequent engagement in kindergarten classrooms. This study contributes to the ongoing discourse on kindergarten readiness. The viewpoints of children and parents on getting ready for and being in kindergarten provide alternative perspectives, contributing to a more holistic understanding of the transition experience. Further, a key implication of this study is that children's perspectives be given due weight in practical, programmatic, and policy initiatives aimed at promoting positive and successful transitions to kindergarten.

DEDICATION

To every member of my family (even the nonhumans).
For your unwavering support
and for always believing in my dreams....

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I extend my utmost gratitude to the many people who provided me with the support and guidance I needed to pursue my doctoral degree. The relationships I've cultivated throughout my years as an early childhood educator have had a tremendous influence over my scholarship, and will continue to make a lasting impact on my future work advocating for children, families, and early care and education professionals on the ground.

I am forever indebted to my committee chair Dr. Beth Blue Swadener. Her approach to advising the “whole” student has taught me a lot over the years, but most importantly she honored my convictions, and showed me ways to practice what I profess. She also made me realize the significance of community, solidarity, collective action, and mutual support. I also give thanks to the members of my doctoral committee, Dr. Joseph Tobin, Dr. Kathryn Nakagawa, and Robert (Bob) Weigand for sharing their time and expertise, and for passing on their critical feedback. And Bob, thanks for bringing me into the preschool classroom. I am not sure this accomplishment would be possible if not for you asking “so, what are you doing after graduation?” I also extend my gratitude to Dr. Gaile Cannella for encouraging me to pursue a doctoral degree.

I appreciate all the staff members at the ASU Child Development Lab but especially Mary Zuzich, Maureen Jobe, and Jadene Evert. Thank you for giving me my first lessons on recognizing, acknowledging, and using children's perspectives to inform the decisions I made in the classroom, usually for and about younger people. I also give thanks to the children I worked with all

throughout my years as a preschool teacher. I am still listening to you and learning from you.

I am grateful for the encouragement of my dear friends and colleagues, Dr. John Ng'saike, Dr. Maggie Bartlett, Dr. Sonya Gaches, Dr. YiRen Tsai, Kimberly Eversman, Amy Papacek, and all the members of the infamous “Tuesday” dissertation support group. Keith, your generosity is also very much appreciated.

To the participants of the First Things First Family and Community Case Study, thank you for sharing your stories with the research team, without them this dissertation would not be possible.

Last, but certainly not least I am forever grateful for my family. Our resilience and our camaraderie has carried us through many significant life experiences. This accomplishment is yours just as much as it is mine. Ever onward.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF TABLES.....	x
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION	1
Context of the Study	1
Why Study the Transition to Kindergarten?	6
Studying Children’s and Parents’ Perspectives	12
Statement of the Problem	14
Theoretical Framework	16
Purpose of the Study.....	31
Objectives	33
Research Questions	34
Significance of the Study	34
Organization of the Dissertation	35
2 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE	37
The Significance of Pre-K.....	37
Kindergarten Readiness: Policies and Programs	39
Defining Readiness.....	47
The Significance of a Successful Transition	52
Parents’ Perspective on the Transition.....	53

CHAPTER	Page
Early Childhood Professionals’ Perspectives on the Transition	58
Children’s Perspectives on the Transition	60
Implications of Children’s Participation in Research	63
Concluding Remarks	68
3 DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY	69
Introduction.....	69
Purpose of the Study.....	74
Organization of the Chapter	75
Overview of FTFEE and FCCS Projects	76
Overview of the Child Interview Protocol.....	78
Interviewing Child Participants.....	80
Child Participants.....	86
Parameters Associated with the Child Interview Data.....	89
Primary Caregiver Participants	90
Research Questions	92
Analyzing Child Interviews	93
Analyzing Mothers’ Interviews.....	98
Combining the Perspectives of Children and Adults	99
Ensuring Validity and Trustworthiness	100
Potential Biases.....	100
Parameters of the Study.....	101

CHAPTER	Page
Concluding Remarks	104
4 BACKGROUND: MOTHERS' UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE TRANSITION.....	105
Introduction.....	105
Organization of the Chapter	107
Defining Readiness Communities of Practice	108
Today's Kindergarten.....	109
School Readiness	116
Children's Needs for School	121
Preparing Children for Kindergarten	127
Participation in Pre-K Programs	130
Participation in School-Based Transition Activities	133
Culture Shock: Children's Responses to the Start of School	136
Concluding Remarks	137
5 FOREGROUNDING CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES	139
Introduction.....	139
Organization of the Chapter	141
Making Sense of Children's Talk about Kindergarten.....	142
Children's Involvement in the Transition Process	143
Peers' Roles in the Transition Process	146
Teachers' Roles in the Transition Process	151

	Page
CHAPTER	
Childrens’ Perceptions of Learning in Pre-K	154
Children’s Preconceptions about Kindergarten	155
The Significance of Not Knowing	157
Going to “Big Kid” School	160
The Move into Kindergarten	163
Children’s Perceptions of Play in Kindergarten	166
Children’s Perceptions of Learning in Kindergarten.....	171
Children’s Perceptions of Rules and Routines	175
Cultural Tools in Kindergarten	177
Concluding Remarks	180
6 DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS.....	185
Introduction.....	185
Dissertation Review.....	186
Summary of Findings	189
Examining Broader Discourses.....	189
Mothers’ Constructions of Academic Readiness.....	190
The Significance of Social Readiness.....	193
Children’s Learning Throughout the Transition.....	194
Facilitating the Transition.....	197
Children’s Participation in Pre-K Programs	202
Schools Ready?.....	203

	Page
CHAPTER	
Children’s Perspectives on Kindergarten.....	204
The Significance of Peer Culture	212
Integrating Children and Mothers’ Perspectives	214
Discussion of Findings/Implications.....	215
Recommendations for Programming and Practice	218
Researcher Reflection.....	221
REFERENCES	225
APPENDIX	
A FCCS PUBLIC ACCESS DATA APPLICATION	238

LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
1.	Pre-kindergarten Child Participants	88
2.	Kindergarten Child Participants.....	89
3.	Sub-sample of Mothers' Interviewed for FCCS	91

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Context of the Study

Countless transitions occur throughout the early childhood years and beyond, from the solitude of the womb to birth into the human, social world. Introductions to new people, new places, and new objects, or shifts into unknown spaces provide opportunities for children to enter into transition periods. Whether it is a child meeting her or his family members for the first time, being dropped off at a babysitter's house, going to the bathroom on the toilet, learning to ride a bike, or going to school, people use specific day-to-day events to define transition periods that occur throughout the early years and across the human lifespan. While transitions are sometimes routine events, people typically indicate important milestones or points in time to acknowledge progressions through life's most significant transition periods. As Rogoff (2003) explains, "transitions across childhood can be considered cultural, community events that occur as individuals change their roles in their community's structure. Often, developmental phases are identified in terms of the person's developing relationships and community roles" (p. 150). For instance, the transition out of infancy into toddlerhood can signify an individual's promotion from passive to active participation within families and communities; the start of preschool or child care represents individuals' transitions towards more independent lifestyles; while the entry into kindergarten marks the period in a child's life when they can *start* learning. Rogoff (2003) states age has long been used as a "defining characteristic of

individuals and an organizing principle for people's lives in some communities" (p. 152). She also mentions communities establish cultural "rites of passage" to acknowledge people's progressions through their cultures and society in various "socially recognized events" (2003, p. 157).

The transition to kindergarten is one of the most notable transitions and/or "rites of passage" for children and families in the United States. The significance of transition to kindergarten is derived from a variety of beliefs about the importance of a child's entry into school. For children and families the start of kindergarten marks a period of change. Pianta & Kraft-Sayre (1999) make the assertion the start of kindergarten marks the beginning of "formal schooling" and has been described as a period that "sets the tone and direction of a child's school career" (p. 47). Ramey and Ramey (2010) describe the transition to kindergarten as a "multi-year, multiperson, multiple resource process that is directly relevant to a child's success in school and later in life, as well as to community well-being" (p. 19). The words of these scholars provide rationale for a need to promote children's "readiness" for kindergarten in pre-k education. And, in line with ideas on kindergarten "readiness," family members and early childhood professionals have a heightened awareness that children's first year of formal schooling has changed significantly (Wesley & Buysse, 2003). More specifically, the transition process has changed as children are expected to meet higher expectations and standards as a means to show they are "ready to succeed" in school.

The continual changes made to kindergarten instruction are having influence over the ways adults and children learn about kindergarten in tandem.

When I was teaching preschool, I noticed the field of early childhood was in the midst of a transition. More specifically, policy makers started recognizing the importance of early childhood education and sought mechanisms to bring heightened regulations, increase quality and expand access to early years programming. Brown and Mowry (2009) assert early childhood educators were asked to “put into place policies that mimic K-12 education reforms” (p. 173), with the intention of aligning pre-k programs with K-12 education. As such, entities like the National Education Goal Panel brought on considerable shifts in pre-kindergarten (pre-k) care and education, particularly a shift toward direct-instruction in pre-k settings. According to Enz, Rhodes, and LaCount (2008), the movement toward direct-instruction of specific discrete skills has placed “heavy academic demands” on young children in U.S. society (p. 59). Additionally, the push to align the two systems of early childhood and elementary school has generated enhanced focus on the concept of “readiness.” The focus on readiness in early childhood has fueled an on-going debate among scholars within the field. Moreover, the debate encompasses varied perspectives that reflect different definitions of “readiness” and encapsulate various beliefs on how to better prepare children to succeed in school.

While there continues to be much debate on how to define school readiness, the circulating discourses have affected how people working with children directly conceptualize both kindergarten and “readiness.” For instance, pre-k care providers and teachers work with children to ensure they are better equipped to follow routines in kindergarten that enable them to demonstrate

proficient skills within specified content areas defined by learning standards (Logue, 2007) and measurable performance-based outcomes (Howes, Burchinal, Pianta, Bryant, Early, Clifford, Barbarin, 2008; Scott-Little, Kagan, Frelow, 2006). Research also indicates early childhood teachers work with children throughout the pre-k years to ensure they are ready to adapt to the changes they might encounter as they enter into kindergarten classrooms (Lara-Cinisomo, Fuligni, Ritchie, Howes, & Karoly, 2008). Lara-Cinisomo, et al. (2008) report pre-k educators help children become emotionally, physically, and cognitively prepared for their first year of school. In addition, results from this study emphasize home and school partnerships, and parent-teacher relationships (Lara-Cinisomo, et al. , 2008). Studies conducted on parents' and teachers' beliefs on school readiness bring attention to the variability in adults' conceptions of preparing children for school (e.g Piotrkowski, Botsko, Matthews, 2000). Whereas teachers emphasize children's social and emotional readiness, parents have expectations that children should display stronger academic readiness skills, and emphasize learning of basic concepts across various content areas. While efforts persist to promote children's readiness, it is still important to develop more comprehensive approaches to facilitating the kindergarten transition so that anxieties that emerge by both children and parents diminish.

How do changes in pre-k instruction impact children's and parents' understandings of the kindergarten transition? Do people's understandings of school readiness and kindergarten have influence over children's engagement and membership in school? Rogoff, Turkonis, and Bartlett (2001) write "both

children and adults engage in learning activities in a collaborative way, with varying but coordinated responsibilities to foster children's learning" (p. 7). Young children's perspectives on their school experiences are not often studied, and it is not easy for adults to comprehend how children think about their participation in social routines. As a preschool teacher I supported many children during their transitions to kindergarten, and children were able to discuss any topics related to kindergarten at any time. Yet even with my direct involvement in the transition process, I was never able to fully understand children's thoughts on starting school, the reasons for their mixed feelings about starting school, nor did I take enough interest in learning about what they thought kindergarten would be like. What's more, I had limited opportunity to follow up with children and their families after they left for kindergarten, and I was always curious to know more about what happened. This reflection falls in line with an argument put forward by Dockett and Perry (2001) who said it is "often difficult for adults to see situations and contexts from the perspectives of children" (p. 16). As a teacher, I was unaware of the numerous ways to acknowledge and appreciate the ways children's voices could inform the transition practices I implemented in my classroom. However as a researcher, and advocate for children's participation, I continually seek "openings and opportunities" (Shier, 2001) to promote the voices and perspectives of children in research, policy, and practice.

This dissertation was a phenomenological qualitative research study that examined the formation of parents' and children's ideas concerning kindergarten and readiness. I share descriptive accounts of children's and parents' talk about

kindergarten to emphasize their perspectives and to illustrate the various interpretations, questions, and presumptions, people generate as they participate in transition activities and school-like routines. Further, I situate children and parents' perspectives within a broader context of early childhood education to examine how current readiness trends and initiatives affect people's understandings of kindergarten, and have influence over the ways adults structure children's participation in transition activities.

Knowing that children are dependent on "more knowledgeable others" (Vygotsky, 1978), I studied parents' perspectives and understandings of kindergarten to look at the transition through an interactionist lens. Whereas a goal of this study is to foreground children's understanding of kindergarten, parents' perspectives are used to provide an alternative view into younger people's participation in school-like routines within home, school, and community contexts. Moreover, I sought to examine discourses circulating around the topic of the kindergarten to examine factors contributing to children's and parents' learning and meaning making throughout the transition process. This study contributes to the work conducted on the kindergarten transition, and the focus on children's and parents' perspectives serves as an impetus for shifting the focus of research towards an examination of the transition process from a "bottom-up" perspective.

Why Study the Transition to Kindergarten?

Meanings and constructions of readiness, along with the discourses used to communicate the changes that occur after a child enters kindergarten

continuously (re)shape the approaches used to facilitate the transition process. For instance, discourses on kindergarten “readiness” are used to outline expectations for children to have acquired specific skills and knowledge prior to the start of kindergarten. In recent years, efforts have been underway to generate comprehensive definitions on readiness so that people involved in the transition (e.g. pre-k educators, kindergarten teachers, parents, and other family members) are well equipped to support children as they move into elementary school. Wesley & Buysse (2003) outline four conceptualizations of kindergarten readiness including:

- (a) readiness resides within the child and unfolds in stages until the child reaches maturation;
- (b) readiness can be supported or accomplished through environmental interactions;
- (c) readiness must take into account both child characteristics and experiences in the child’s environment;
- (d) readiness represents a set of ideas or meanings constructed by communities and schools. (p. 353).

The conceptualizations on readiness are used in turn to inform transition practices and develop transition programs that aim to enrich children’s experiences moving into formal school systems. However, there are inconsistencies among the meanings of kindergarten readiness, resulting in a divergence of meanings circulating within the discourses of early childhood education. In recent years the literature on the transition is primarily focused on improving children’s outcomes on performance-based testing and assessments (Young, Chandler, Shields, Laubenstein, Butts, & Black, 2008; LoCosale-

Crouch, Mashburn, Downer, Pianta, 2008; Schulting, Malone, Dodge, 2005) .

Further research on transitions in the United States is commonly carried out in an attempt to alleviate disparities between children and families living at various socio-economic levels, and close gaps in achievement typically reported more broadly in education (Pigott & Isreal, 2005; Mantzicopoulos, 2004). While a benefit to emphasizing performance-based outcomes for children in studies on the transition is that there is stronger momentum to align the systems of early care and education and elementary school, I argue the focus on performance oversimplifies the transition process, normalizes children's school experiences, and discounts significant nuances that play into children's learning. As such, the transition process is becoming a more ritualized process due to the influences of current education reform movements and important interactions that take place as families prepare for school are discounted - along with children's views and experiences.

For example, the Office of Head Start has long used transition programs to support children and families of low-income status by implementing comprehensive approaches to pre-k education that encompass the promotion of physical health and development across the domains of cognitive, emotional, and social learning. The Head Start program has approached school readiness through "systems perspective" and "child outcomes perspectives" as a means to improve the transition process to kindergarten for all children. Pigott and Isreal (2005) point out Head Start programs are helping children enter kindergarten in low-SES schools achieve better in specific academic content areas, such as reading and

mathematics, and are better prepared to start kindergarten, however there still exist disparities between children from low SES communities and children in more affluent communities.

In 2010, the Office of Head Start revised the framework used to delineate their program's goals for children, parents and families to promote school readiness. The updated framework is comprised of three components including the 1) Parent, Family and Community Engagement Framework, 2) Framework for Programs Serving Infants and Toddlers and their Families, and 3) The Head Start Child Development and Early Learning Framework (retrieved from <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hsl/sr/approach>). Of interest in this study are the frameworks used to support family involvement and those that make clear Head Start's definitions of "school readiness" for children, parents and families. Several mothers interviewed in this dissertation brought to light their experiences participating in Head Start programs, and discussed their perceptions of the benefits and complexities associated with the approaches teachers used to facilitate the transition process.

Additionally, Pianta & Kraft-Sayre (2003) developed a guide for early childhood educators to develop transition plans at a programmatic level to implement direct and indirect transition practices used to support children and families moving out of pre-k education settings and into kindergartens. A fundamental aspect of their approach is the promotion and maintenance of collaborative relationships with all involved members of the transition process within communities. The authors suggest home, school, and community

partnerships should be established in order to maximize opportunities for children to participate in positive transition experiences. They also recommend specific transition practices that connect people with resources within schools and communities and encourage participation in activities that will foster “readiness.” Two examples of these transition practices are having a teacher or transition coordinator contact families to initiate “mutual information sharing” and coordinating practice transition rituals while children are in preschool (e.g. children practice standing in line). The purpose of transition programs is to help build people’s awareness of kindergarten, provide opportunities for children and family members to learn more about what to expect as they move into elementary school, and ultimately reduce anxieties for children and families as they prepare for a more formal school experience. Schulting, Malone, and Dodge (2005) studied the effectiveness of school transition practices in easing children’s and families’ entrance into kindergarten, citing a need for empirically-backed reasons for implementing transition programs and policies. Their findings suggest that transition policies have a positive-effect on children’s academic performance, as well as parental-initiated involvement in kindergarten.

The work of Pianta and Kraft-Sayre (1999) and colleagues lays the groundwork for positive transition processes, and the recommendations put forward are useful, however there is more to be learned about how families and children engage and participate in these practices. More specifically, how are families benefiting from the opportunities to learn more about kindergarten? What do people gain as participants in transition practices? Further, there is a need to

study parents' and children's own views of their roles as members of pre-k and kindergarten communities of practice.

Research on transition programs advocates for family-based programming (Enz, Rhodes, LaCount, 2008; LaParo, Kraft-Sayre, Pianta, 2003; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003), yet even though parents are described as their child's first teachers, and families are encouraged to help children become better prepared for kindergarten, many express concerns and ambivalence about facilitating the transition. According to McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGennaro, and Wildenger (2007) parents do not fully understand the expectations for kindergarten and would like to know more about how to support their children during the transition. Transition programs also aim to promote family involvement, and strengthen the home-school partnership from the onset of people's elementary school experience. Considering there is a high degree of ambiguity surrounding the kindergarten transition, it is important to keep a pulse on parents' constructions of kindergarten to gain more insight on whether their ideas about school align with those of early childhood professionals and scholars. Additionally, a shortcoming within the readiness movement is that there is little attention brought to children's roles as social agents within the context of "family based programming," and there is minimal consideration for their capacities to influence the transition process. The recommendations put forward to build family-based programs emphasize strategies adults can use to enrich the decisions they make *for* or *about* their children. This study is an attempt to push for recommendations to be made *with* children's viewpoints considered so that young people can contribute more

directly to the decisions made about the approaches used to support their schooling. Despite their central role in the transition, adults situate children in the margins. More often than not, adults are the only constituents involved in decision-making in regards to making the transition a positive and fluid experience. In order to reposition children within the discourse on kindergarten readiness, to be considered as active participants, and to have their perspectives be given due weight, this dissertation was grounded in the theoretical underpinnings of childhood studies.

Studying the Perspectives of Children and Parents

Children and their families encounter innumerable social interactions and make sense of a cultural routines, beliefs, and values while preparing for the first year of formal school. As a preschool teacher, I saw first-hand the extent to which the transition to kindergarten was an emotionally taxing time for both younger people and adults. I noticed a range of feelings emerge once children starting thinking about the impending move to a new school. Many of my students were incredibly excited, they expected to leave preschool right when they turned five-years-old, and complained about having to do “baby stuff” while they waited for the preschool year to end. Those who were excited imagined school was a place where they could be “big kids” and were eager to explore new opportunities. Others were more apprehensive about the change. These children concerned themselves with the unknown, and rather than thinking about change as exciting, they were anxious about the differences they would encounter. In one instance, a young girl sat at the drawing/writing table and drew a picture of herself and wrote

the letters CDL (the name of our school) on her paper, which she proceeded to cross out. When I asked her why she crossed the letters out, she explained to me she was sad about leaving preschool and did not want to go to kindergarten. She was worried about missing her friends and missing her teachers. As their teacher, I was concerned about how I could quell children's reactions so they could maximize the remaining time in my classroom to play, enjoy their friendships, and continue to explore the many facets of learning. Children showed the most ambivalence when thinking about the meaning of kindergarten; however, they would offer their interpretations of what it meant to be getting ready for kindergarten. For instance, children were excited about buying new things for school, nervous about the anticipated change in routine, and sad to think they would miss their peers (and teachers). In addition to the commentary children provided about kindergarten, parents also raised a number of questions and concerns about the transition to school. "What will my child need to know before they go to kindergarten?" or "Will he/she be ready?" were two of the most frequently asked questions. Parents and I would engage in long conversations about school and I would try to provide them with as much information as possible to ensure they felt good about their child's progression into elementary school.

Looking back on my time in my classroom, I see how my interactions with children and parents about kindergarten were opportunities for us to construct shared understandings about the transition process and starting school. I also recognize how we were members of a community of practice (Wenger, 1998),

trying to establish a cogent definition of what it meant to be “ready” for school. Of course we were not acting alone to create our ideas about the kindergarten experience. A number of other influences shaped our construction of kindergarten and ultimately “readiness.” These influences included siblings, extended family members, older friends, other teachers, and the information derived from the broader discourse of research and practice. In my current position as an early childhood researcher I have a heightened curiosity about the transition process, leading me to explore the ways parents, adults, and children are working together to facilitate the transition to kindergarten.

This study examined how children and parents make sense of the information and routines they engage with during their transition into kindergarten. Additionally, I study how both children and parents use this information to decipher the meanings of school readiness, and school success. In addition, I draw comparisons between children and parents’ perspectives to examine the how children and adults learn about kindergarten as members of “readiness” communities of practice. The purpose of this research was to impart information on the kindergarten transition from multiple perspectives, and to explore opportunities to enrich adult understandings about children and childhoods, particularly in regards to kindergarten and kindergarten readiness.

Statement of the Problem

The extent to which children, parents, other family members, and teachers or early childhood professionals work in collaboration with one another to facilitate the move from pre-k experience to kindergarten experiences determines

the success of a transition experience. Collaborations formed throughout the transition process not only require people's participation in transition practices, but call for mutual engagement, negotiations of a joint enterprise, and shared repertoires – fundamental components of learning within communities of practice (Wenger, 1998). The components of a community of practice build a frame of reference so people can easily discern the expectations set forth, and in turn provide guidelines for individuals' engagement in prosocial activities. Adults' perspectives on the transition process have a commanding presence in the research on kindergarten readiness in the United States. More specifically, the research on the transition primarily examines the perspectives of pre-k and kindergarten educators and the viewpoints and experiences of parents and family members are under-studied. Further adult-oriented ideas about how to define the notion of readiness, and strategies developed by adults to identify the factors associated with continued school success are highly valued. The emphasis on adult perspectives positions children as “peripheral participants” (Lave and Wenger, 1991), limiting their opportunities to share their voices and perspectives as studies are conducted about their transition (and life) experiences. Smith (2011) writes, “If children's ‘voice’ is being sought, then children have to be positioned as participating subjects, knowers and social actors, rather than objects of the researcher's gaze” (p. 14). While adults raise important considerations about the transition and kindergarten readiness, we should also pay attention to children's experiences as they too play a critical role in the transition process, and are important members in this community of practice. Giving due weight to

children and parents' perspectives of the kindergarten transition can lead to greater continuity across the spheres of influence within "readiness" communities of practice, and generate and reproduce more comprehensive definitions of readiness.

Theoretical Framework

Gill, Winters, and Friedman (2006) bring attention to the fact there is little research on the transition to kindergarten that makes use of sociocultural approaches to studying school readiness. The limited understandings presented in research on the sociocultural aspects of the transition experience are a result of the notable shift in early childhood toward studying "measurable" aspects of kindergarten readiness. Education reform movements caused a "trickle down" of early childhood curriculum and scholars and policy makers became more interested in learning about the effects of "science-based" learning. Prior to this shift, early childhood scholars were conducting studies to examine social constructions of knowledge and the process of meaning making in school. For instance, Graue (1993) studied parents' perspectives on school readiness and the ways adults constructed meanings of readiness. Findings from her study provide insight on ways in which the transition happens within a social context, and explicate ways people generate ideas about kindergarten through collective action. Additionally, Graue discovered people's construct understandings about kindergarten using various factors within different environments or settings. Her work also demonstrates class and culture mediate social constructions of kindergarten "readiness." Further, her examination of 'readiness' within the

sociocultural context sheds light on how families living within different socio-economic groups form divergent definitions of readiness based on the resources available, and opportunities to form collaborative relationships with teachers and school personnel within their communities.(Graue, 1996).

Along with Graue's work, early childhood researchers have constructed theoretical models to describe and give meaning to readiness, and delineate the transition process. Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) conceptualized the Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition to "describe how links among child, home and school, peer, and neighborhood factors create a dynamic network of relationships that influence children's transition to school both directly and indirectly" (p. 492). This model addresses a need to evaluate programmatic and practical aspects of the transition into kindergarten with a focus on the interactions that take place among children, school, classroom, family, and community contexts. The Ecological and Dynamic Model of the Transition is also used to examine the degree to which people's participation in transition practices are influenced by social factors beyond the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), or individuals' immediate environments (e.g. levels of teacher training or experience and current trends in early childhood). In line with the Ecological and Dynamic Model of the Transition, Tudge, Freitas, and Doucet (2009) offer a contextualist perspective on the transition, asserting that Bronfenbrenner's theory on ecological systems, and notions of Vygotsky's social-constructivist theory (e.g. zone of proximal development), are essential to examining people's experiences starting school. Tudge et al. (2009) look

specifically at the activities individuals participate in to understand how local, cultural, and temporal factors influence the transition process. They write, “Children’s experiences are not simply influenced by their geographic and social context but also by their historical context (p. 126).

While constructivist frameworks are useful in explicating people’s social learning, children are often positioned outside, or are perceived as being less than active participants within the models. Further these models tend to view children as individuals who absorb information, mimic behaviors, and reiterate conversations of older people (or more knowledgeable others) without having an in-depth understanding of the meanings the words carry. Corsaro (2005) argues constructivist views also have a heavy focus on developmental outcomes and fail to take into account the complexities of children’s social worlds. As such, I turn to theories and ideas that take into account the dynamic nature of social learning, and perceive children as active participants within their life experiences.

Cultural Routines and Interpretive Reproduction. Corsaro (2005) uses the phrase “cultural routines” to describe the often taken-for-granted aspects of socialization children and adults interact with to acquire knowledge and shared understandings about cultural practices, beliefs and values. Moreover, people use knowledge acquired through engaging in cultural routines to interpret, apply, and (re)produce information derived from their participation in social groups. He states, “The habitual taken-for-granted character of routines provides children and all social actors with the security and shared understanding of belonging to a social group” (2005, p. 19). Further, he asserts that participation in cultural

routines can be empowering for children and their engagement with social routines provides a source of support when uncertainties or ambiguities arise. It is through interaction and experience children are able to construct their personal and shared understandings about the cultural practices and nuances of their day-to-day lives. Children engage with more explicit or structured practices to help them prepare for the start of school during the pre-k to kindergarten transition process. Further, the types of practices used to facilitate the transition are determined in large part by various social and cultural factors, namely the ways in which individuals and social groups define school readiness.

Corsaro (2005) believes children make sense of cultural routines through a process referred to as interpretive reproduction, which he argues is an alternative to the term “socialization.” He argues the term socialization “has an individualistic and forward-looking connotation that is inescapable” (p. 18), which in turn diminishes the value of significant social factors that have influence over the ways in which children make sense of activities and information derived from other people and resources within their communities. The notion of interpretive reproduction is used as a means to put forward a more holistic approach to examining children’s social development, bringing attention to how children creatively and actively appropriate information from adult worlds into their own peer cultures.

More specifically, Corsaro identifies two elements of interpretive reproduction: language and children’s participation in cultural routines. In this dissertation, the language and children’s participation in cultural routines was

used to explicate the lived-experiences of children living in Arizona going through the transition process. Language reveals how people make sense of their social systems and cultural patterns. It is also a tool for creating, maintaining, and reproducing ideologies and social practices. Using language as a tool to discover the ways children are interpreting and reiterating the messages conveyed about kindergarten and developing a stronger awareness of how children are talking about kindergarten gives early childhood educators the capacity to develop holistic definitions of school readiness, inclusive of the perspectives of those most directly involved in the transition.

Using a child's rights-based framework to examine the transition to kindergarten enriches adult-oriented interpretations of this experience. Therefore, this study contributes to a growing body of literature whereby adults are attempting to conduct "authentic social research with children" (Grover, 2004).

Grover states:

...allowing children to be active participants in the research process enhances their status as individuals with inherent rights to participation in society more generally and the right to be heard in their authentic voice (p. 90).

As a means to give deeper meaning to children's "interpretive reproduction," this study used Rogoff's (2003) notion of "guided participation" to understand how adults were structuring children's participation in routines and activities during the transition practice. Rogoff (2003) contends two processes underlie the process of "guided participation" including communication and coordination. Children's reproductions of their transition and school experiences allows for a

deeper analysis of the formation of shared practices, and development of communities of practice.

Communities of Practice. This study used the “communities of practice” theory of learning (Wenger, 1998) to examine children and parents’ participation, learning, and meaning making during the transition. According to Wenger (1998), all people belong to communities of practice. Participation within communities of practice is defined by four components: meaning, practice, community, and identity. Additionally, membership within communities of practice is formed by shared repertoire, joint enterprise, and mutual engagement. For instance, people involved in kindergarten transition processes are working to facilitate a child’s progression of social and academic skills so that a kindergartener starts school with higher degrees of confidence. When child interviews were compared with mothers’ interviews it became evident that children and adults discussed similar topics (e.g. learning to read); however, each person would describe a different element of the cultural routine or activity to convey the most salient aspects of their personal experiences and interactions with people or objects within their social worlds. For instance, mothers interviewed in this study would convey their sense of pride (or surprise) that their child had such advanced language and literacy skills, while children would literally demonstrate their skills and express they “just know” what to do without recognizing their actions might be considered “advanced” for their age.

The opportunity to link children and mothers’ perspectives sheds insight on the ways each person is working toward the joint enterprise of the community

of practice. Further Wenger's notion of "indigenous enterprise" falls in line with many of the assertions shared by scholars within the field of childhood studies. Through "enterprises" people form ideas on how to participate in communities of practice and respond to the influences on social practices that trickle in from sources outside of the community. Corsaro's "interpretive reproduction" provides a useful tool for examining the ways children process, interpret, and produce understandings of their social worlds. For instance, a child entering into a kindergarten classroom quickly learns that the organizational structure of the classroom differs from their pre-k setting. The children in this study talked about the practices teachers establish for classroom management purposes.

Additionally, children learn that particular aspects of learning are valued over others, and they should demonstrate progress in order for them to find success within their respective classroom environments. For example, at early ages, children learn that reading is a fundamental component of learning in a kindergarten classroom.

Making Meaning in Communities of Practice. Children, parents, pre-k teachers involved in the transition process may engage in problem solving, put forward requests for information, or seek resources to generate a sense of "shared repertoire" within a community so that all individuals can participate in learning and make meaning of social practices. Parents often reinforce children's assumptions about what they need to learn for school through guided participation (Rogoff, 2001). Shared reading activities, working together on writing/drawing activities, or exposing children to concepts in other developmental domains are

examples of practices families engage in while preparing for the entry into kindergarten. Through guided participation, children and their parents will develop “community coherence” through the process of “shared repertoire.”

According to Wenger:

The repertoire of a community includes routines, words, tools, ways of doing things, stories, gestures, symbols, genres, actions, or concepts that the community has produced or adopted in the course of its existence, and which have become part of its practice. (1998, p. 83)

At an individual level, parents, teachers, and children might actively look for information about kindergarten to prepare for the transition process. However, the extent to which members within each of the aforementioned groups work collaboratively to process information on kindergarten, examine shared understandings of school, and generate meanings representative of individuals’ perspectives in school is not well known. Typically research will compare the perspectives of parents and teachers (e.g. Wesley & Buysse, 2003; Piortrkowski, Botsko, & Matthews, 2001) to ensure shared meanings are developed, yet children’s viewpoints are examined primarily through interpretive lenses to reinforce the decisions adults are making *for* or *about* children and their daily experiences in school. Moreover, little research draws comparisons between the perspectives of children, their parents, or other family members that is focused on the transition to kindergarten.

Although Wenger emphasizes collective and shared understandings among communities, he also believes they benefit from ambiguity. Children’s

and mothers' commentary in this study about not knowing what to expect in kindergarten, or not knowing what to do during the transition, reveals the interactions that take place (or those that don't) between social groups involved in the transition. Additionally, the "I don't know" make clear where the gaps (e.g. communication between elementary school staff and/or teachers and families) exist between the systems of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten. Findings that illustrate the "I don't know" phenomena support arguments early childhood programs need to be more receptive and responsive to the needs of children and families. More to this point, early childhood scholars, educators, and advocates put forward ideas to promote "systems-ready" approaches to kindergarten preparation. Citing Ackerman and Barnett (2005), Dockett and Perry (2009) outline three characteristics within the National Education Goals Panel, framework used to define "schools' readiness for children." According to Ackerman and Barnett, ready schools "provide necessary supports for children; have teaching and learning programs that support the professional development of teachers; and are adaptable" (p. 22).

Dockett and Perry also emphasize the importance of community engagement. Building on this work, I studied both children's and mothers' participation in the transition process to examine the extent to which people are working collectively to learn about school, education, and children's development. Learning within communities of practice occurs through participation in both reified and participatory practices. Wenger writes, "To be effective, the politics of reification requires participation because reification does

not itself ensure any effect. Reification has to be adopted by a community before it can shape practice in significant ways” (p. 92). In recent years, pre-k teachers, care providers, and kindergarten teachers have made significant changes in their approaches to teaching in order to meet the increased demands placed upon them to ensure children are ready to learn and find continued success. A consequence of the shifts in pre-k education toward more academically rigorous learning experiences is that teachers and care providers are encountering tensions between their personal beliefs about early childhood education and the recommendations or mandates put forward by government or school officials. Wesley & Buysse (2003) found that parents and professionals feel restricted, or incapable of maintaining learning experiences for children that align with developmentally appropriate practices for cognitive and social development because of the increased pressure to prepare children for kindergarten (and subsequent test-taking in school). Through parents and children’s discussion of the topics of academically oriented learning and classroom routines, I examined the influence of reified practices on children’s participatory capacities within their kindergarten classrooms. For instance, the children interviewed repeatedly discussed the concept of “sight words” when asked to explain what they were learning in school. In addition, they described participating in language and literacy practices based in alphabet recognition, phonemic awareness, and word segmentation. Children’s conversations on these topics illustrate the presence of Scientifically Based Reading Research in kindergarten classrooms today and draw out the effects of direct-instruction on children’s learning experiences in classrooms.

Children's Membership in Communities of Practice. Furthermore, I use the mothers and children's talk about kindergarten to interpret younger people's identities are influenced by cultural routines in kindergarten, in school experiences, and beyond. Wenger (1998) states, "building an identity consists of negotiating the meanings of our experience of membership in social communities" (p. 146). For example, the children interviewed discussed ways their teachers encouraged or inhibited active participation in classrooms as they explained whether they were afforded opportunities to make choices or had to follow predetermined routines during the school day. The established routines such as "choice" or "work" time exemplify the variances between adults' perspectives on children's positionality within communities of practice. Whereas one teacher might acknowledge children as full members within a classroom community, another might position children as "legitimate peripheral participants." Lave and Wenger (1991) point out learning as legitimate peripheral participation is "not merely a condition for membership, but is itself an evolving form of membership" (p. 53). As such, this point implies that children should eventually be afforded roles that position them as full members within a community of practice. Wenger (1998) also contends people establish full membership within a community of practice through shared repertoire and mutual negotiation. This said children's opportunities to bring forward their opinions and views on learning are limited due to inherent power dynamics within communities. Moreover, children talked about ways teachers used physical objects in classrooms (e.g. behavior charts), or specific spaces within schools (e.g.

the playground, or the principal's office) as strategies for classroom management or guidance and discipline. Objects and spaces in classrooms are examples of "conceptual tools for learning" (Rogoff, 2003) utilized by adults to socialize kindergarten-aged children into well-behaved and focused students. The propensity for adults to use authoritative approaches to classroom management is also evidence of children's limited, but peripheral participation in their classrooms.

Further, as the parents interviewed discussed their approaches to preparing children for kindergarten, it became evident that decisions made by adults are done *for* and *about* children with high consideration being placed on how children will best acclimate to kindergarten environments. Further the mothers interviewed seemingly made decisions about school choice based on their own beliefs on education and presuppositions about their child's participation in particular classroom contexts, and did not seem to engage with children in conversations about their decision making processes. This point provides evidence that children have minimal opportunities to participate in decision-making processes beyond the school environment. I challenge the tendency to perceive children as being "legitimate peripheral participants", and contend children who have a broader awareness on what to expect in kindergarten can potentially enter into their classrooms with agency and a stronger sense of self-efficacy. Further, hearing from children directly allows adults to build a shared dialogue with younger people, reflective of the multiple perspectives that shape individuals' school experiences. Children's perspectives can foreground their

unmediated concerns about starting school, as well as highlight the most salient aspects of kindergarten. Lastly, children's conversations about kindergarten can help adults see how their decisions, and corresponding practices, are impacting the daily-lived experiences of young people as they move out of their pre-kindergarten experiences and into kindergarten programs.

Children's Rights and Participation in Research. This study drew from theories nested in childhood studies and within a child's rights based framework. In line with childhood studies scholars (e.g. Qvortrup, 1993; James & Prout, 1997; Corsaro, 2005; Lundy, McEvoy, Byrne, 2011), I perceive children as being social actors and active participants within their communities. Children's dialogue about their participation in daily social and cultural activities provides a window into important aspects of schooling. In addition, the examination of children's interpretations of their participation in transition practices sheds insight on the ways adults are mediating (maximizing or inhibiting) children's agency while they prepare for school, while also promoting their active participation within communities of practice. Moreover, acknowledging children's agency and participatory capabilities reinforces the idea that children are co-constructors of knowledge, cultural patterns and social structures.

In the present study, I acknowledge children as social actors and experts in their own lives (James & Prout, 1997; Qvortrup, 1994), therefore, the experiential knowledge shared by younger people is given due weight in my approaches to analyzing and interpreting the data. More to this point, children's perspectives were valued as being alternative to adult perspectives, rather than thought of as

inferior or different (MacNaughton, Hughes, & Smith, 2007). Corsaro (2005) points out children are members of their own culture and acquire, interpret, and produce knowledge among their peer groups. This in mind, an important question to consider is: If adults expect children to be fully engaged in school, why are they left out of important conversations about how to make their classroom experiences more worthwhile?

This study sought to challenge older people's assumptions about children being passive, inexperienced, or incapable members of society by foregrounding young people's perspectives and the ways they think and talk about school with adults. As mentioned, Corsaro's notion of "interpretive reproduction" illustrates how children's meaning making during the transition is an active process guided by adults' structuring of participation, in addition to children's direct experiences in a community of practice. Deconstructing children and parents' engagement with participation and reified practices in a community of practice reveals how their conceptions of kindergarten and "readiness" are influenced by their firsthand experiences within their familial and school-based contexts, as well as with their interactions with (or exposure to) a number of social factors that manifest at the more macro levels of society.

The theoretical underpinnings of childhood studies are embedded within the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) adopted by the UN General Assembly in 1989. Although the U.S. is now the only country of over a one million-person population, the conceptual and methodological

framework of this study is in accordance with Articles 12 and 13 of the UNCRC.

Article 12 states:

States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

Data from this study is derived from a large-scale qualitative research project that reported on the experiences of families and community members either raising or supporting children aged 0-5 years in Arizona (refer to Chapter 3 for more detailed information on the Family and Community Case Study). The findings from the study are used to inform early childhood experts in Arizona about the successes and challenges people face when utilizing programs and services intended to promote children's health and well-being. At the development phase of this project, members of the research team recognized the importance of bringing children's perspectives on growing up in Arizona into the design of the study, thus providing "openings" and "opportunities" (Shier, 2001) for children's participation. While the decision to include children's voices also enacted the segment of Article 12 that entitles children's freedom of expression, members of the leadership team continue to work towards finding ways to afford their perspectives "due weight" in the ongoing efforts to improve the systems of early care and education in Arizona. Henceforth, this dissertation takes an important step forward in bringing children's perspectives into the broader

discourses in early childhood policy, research, and practice that centers on promoting kindergarten transition.

This study made use of the Mosaic Approach (Clark & Moss, 2001) to elicit the voices and perspectives of children, thereby aligning with Article 13 of the UNCRC. Article 13 states:

The child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.

Adults in the study ensured children had access to art materials, manipulatives, and play tools throughout the interviews to acknowledge and accommodate children's tendency to share their ideas through modes of communication alternative, or in addition to verbal expression. The options provided for children helped the young participants build rapport with the adult researchers, increased children's comfort level being in an interview situation, and helped enhance the conversations that took place as they talked about important aspects of their lives.

Purpose of the Study

As an advocate for children and children's rights, I see shortcomings in the research conducted in the United States on children and childhoods, and want to promote work that acknowledges and respects young people's capacities to make significant contributions to the work typically done *for* or *about* them. The purpose of this study is to learn more about children's perspectives on going to

school and to use this information to bring forward nuanced understandings of how children participate in schooling practices, make meanings of readiness and school success, and form identities in their kindergarten classrooms. In addition, knowing that children's learning is closely connected with adults' beliefs, values, and understandings of school and kindergarten I use data from interviews conducted with mothers to better understand how constituents within "readiness" communities of practice communicate meanings of kindergarten and coordinate activities to become better prepared for school.

Furthermore, an ancillary, but vital purpose of this study is to promote children's inclusion in research, policy, and practice. Even though children are at the center of all the discussions had about transition practices and kindergarten readiness, their perspectives are discounted and often excluded. The failure to include children's perspectives in discussions had about the transition to kindergarten is an example of how they are "always othered" (Lahman, 2008) in research and society. This study is grounded in a motivation to establish policy directives and recommendations for improving early care and education experiences that are inclusive of the perspectives of *all* people involved in supporting children and families. Moreover, children and parents' perspectives are used to augment the ideas circulating about kindergarten readiness, creating implications for young people's views on their participation in schools and society. In line with the view of MacNaughton, Hughes, & Smith (2007, p. 465), "Consulting young children respectfully about the matters that affect them encourages and assists them to develop the knowledge, skills, and confidence they

need to become active citizens who can participate actively in public decision making.”

Objectives

There are three primary objectives to this study. First and foremost, information on how children and parents think and talk about school is used to unpack the process of learning within a communities of practice framework. The perspectives of mothers is used to provide background information on children’s participation in transition practices and school routines. The rich descriptions provided in this study of children’s interpretations preparing for and being in school, along with an analysis of children’s meaning making within home and school contexts, provides a window into the underlying mechanisms that support children’s socialization becoming kindergartners. Secondly, with this information, I impart practical guidance, grounded in children and parents’ perspectives, to pre-k education and care providers, family and community members to assist them in their roles as facilitators within the transition process. I support the belief adults have limited knowledge of children’s lives and experiences (Clark & Moss, 2001), and should do more to pay attention to the ways in which children are constructing meanings about significant cultural practices and patterns that occur throughout their lifetimes.

Lastly, I intend to explore opportunities to include children’s perspectives in decision-making processes that occur at political, programmatic, and practical levels so that adults are making better-informed decisions about ways to improve early childhood education. Smith (2011) argues the exclusion of children’s

perspectives “denies policy makers and practitioners access to knowledge, which could help them improve children’s well-being in difficult circumstances” (p. 19).

There is potential for the transitions to kindergarten to become a more fluid process with the inclusion of children’s perspectives on getting ready for and being in school.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following questions:

1. How do children think and talk about kindergarten?
2. How do parents construct meanings of readiness?
3. To what extent are children and their parents co-constructing ideas about kindergarten?

Significance of the Study

This study provides an inside-out look at the ecological systems that influence children’s transition to school by sharing children and parents’ perspectives on kindergarten to help adults gain a deeper understanding of how younger people make sense of the transition, and perceive the processes associated with acclimating to new school environments and routines. Further, findings explain children’s identity formation in kindergarten as they strive to find success within their respective classrooms.

There are several benefits to exploring children’s and parents’ views of kindergarten. More specifically the perspectives of both constituents can help create more holistic constructions of ‘readiness,’ and ultimately contribute to the

ongoing discourse on improving transition programs. Additionally, adults can examine the implications of their decisions on children's lived experiences in school. Examining children's perspectives provides a window into how "trickle-down" effects of adult decision-making and trends in early childhood are influencing children's school experiences. Further, this research creates an "opening" (Shier, 2001) for the inclusion of young people in the development of programming and policy related to kindergarten readiness.

Organization of the Dissertation

In this chapter, I have outlined the conceptual framework of this study, explaining the importance of conducting research on the transition to kindergarten from both children and parents' perspectives. The theoretical framework used to make sense of children and parents' experiences learning about kindergarten has also been discussed. The remainder of this dissertation is organized to explore parents' understandings of kindergarten, along with their approaches to structuring children's participation in transition activities. Moreover, this dissertation examines children's interpretive reproductions of their experiences getting ready for, and being in kindergarten. Chapter two reviews literature on the transition to kindergarten as it relates to recent policy initiatives on kindergarten readiness, along with studies conducted on how to effectively prepare children for their first year of formal school. Research conducted *with* children in cross-national contexts during the transition to schools was also reviewed. Chapter three describes the design and methodology of this study. An overview of the large-scale qualitative research project from which the data for

this study was drawn is provided. Further, data analysis procedures are explained. Chapter four will present research findings related to mothers' perceptions of the transition to kindergarten. Specifically adult beliefs about today's kindergartens, school readiness, and children's learning are analyzed and discussed. In addition, Chapter four presents mothers' experiences structuring transition activities for their children. Chapter five unpacks children's experiences becoming and being kindergartners, offering insight on younger people's participation in transition activities and kindergarten routines. Lastly, Chapter six brings together the perspectives of adults and children to impart understandings of the transition experience and school readiness inclusive of children's perspectives.

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The Significance of Pre-K Experiences

At the beginning of every school year, children enter kindergarten classrooms and follow educational pathways that lead them through formal (or institutionalized) systems of schooling. Prior to the start of kindergarten, children participate in a range of early learning experiences. For instance, many children interviewed for this dissertation attended Head Start programs, while others went to privately-owned preschools (half or full day), and several stayed at home with their parents and other family members. Children engage in early care and education settings that are diverse in their approaches to preparing children for kindergarten. Therefore, the range of “funds of knowledge” (Moll, Amanti & Gonzalez, 1992) children carry into kindergarten classrooms is reflective of the various elements comprising the system of early childhood. Whereas a child might attend a program that emphasizes (pre)academics, and employ direct-teaching strategies, another child will have attended a play-based program whereby learning to interact with peers, and social-emotional development were high priorities in the curriculum. What’s more, many children are cared for by their parents, other family members, friends, or neighbors and might not have early experiences learning through institutionalized, structured or formal curricula. Often children not able to attend child care or preschool prior to the start of kindergarten are described as being “at risk” and are identified as children in need of “intervention” to become better prepared for school. Despite the

diversity in pre-k experiences available and accessible to families, most children funnel into public school programs where the expectations for success and achievement for kindergarteners remain the same, and social or cultural factors that contribute to children's development are void. Consequently, initiatives to increase the number of "ready children" starting schools continues to gain recognition as the most effective approach to supporting children throughout early childhood education. However, the emphasis on "readiness" in this regard is cause for concern. Scott-Little, Kagan, & Frelow (2006) assert that a notion of readiness that focuses primarily on the child potentially "minimizes the importance of other elements of school readiness that play an important role in the degree of success children experience in school" (p. 167).

Although there is an extensive body of research that addresses the importance of children's engagement in quality care and education throughout the pre-kindergarten years, there are inconsistent findings on the impact of pre-k experiences on later school success (Chien, Howes, Burchinal, Pianta, & Ritchie, Bryant, Barbarin, 2010). However, there is argument that children who have increased exposure to a variety of learning experiences throughout their early years will be better prepared for the entry into formal schooling (Peisner-Feinberg, Burchinal, Clifford, Culkin, Howes, Kagan & Yazejian, 2001), and the more likely they will find later academic success (Fram, Kim, & Sinha, 2012). For this reason, early childhood researchers, policymakers, and professionals have sought to increase children's access to preschool programs, as well as examine

practical aspects within these programs to enrich children's engagement with the numerous social and academic aspects of school.

Kindergarten Readiness: Policies and Programs

A number of national initiatives have brought strong attention to children's pre-kindergarten experiences, placing particular emphasis on the notion of school readiness, and increasingly advocating for universal preschool (pre-k). Simultaneously, localized policy directives, statewide early childhood initiatives, community or school-based projects are influencing the planning and implementation of pre-kindergarten programs to meet the needs of practitioners and parents as they support children's transition into kindergarten. Following is an overview of several initiatives in the United States that have made a profound impact on kindergarten readiness, while also providing foundations for more comprehensive transition programs.

Head Start is the country's longest-standing, low-income serving preschool program, developed as anti-poverty, comprehensive family centered project. Head Start continuously serves as a mechanism for exploring the effectiveness of instructional practices aimed at facilitating children's social, cognitive, and emotional development. Studies examine the extent to which Head Start's approach to school readiness is helping children transition into kindergarten, and achieve later school success. For instance, Pigott & Isreal (2005) used data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study (ECLS) to examine Head Start children's math and reading assessment scores, and compared them to their same-age peers at the start of kindergarten. Their findings suggest

while children who attend Head Start achieve higher assessment scores than their peers living within the same socio-economic status, they remain lower than peers living in more affluent areas. The disparities among children and families across socio-economic statuses are confounded by a number of other factors, including (but not limited to) culture, race, gender, and ability. Therefore, the on-going efforts to ensure all children enter kindergarten “ready to learn” must embody a systems-ready perspective to make certain schools are ready for children. Ritchie, Clifford, Malloy, Cobb, and Crawford (2010) write, “We must work carefully to make children’s first school experience one that will meet their present needs and launch them on a successful trajectory” (p. 173).

Seefeldt, Galper, & Denton (1997) surveyed children who attended Head Start to study their conceptions of Head Start and kindergarten (and subsequently first grade). Children considered kindergarten to be a work-oriented environment, and expected their teachers would be harder and meaner in kindergarten. In addition, Seefeldt, et al. examined children’s participation in “Transition Demonstration” (TD) programs, and found those engaged in TD talked more in-depth about their ideas of how Head Start would be different than kindergarten. Findings from this study suggest children know more about what to expect and feel more comfortable going into kindergarten when they are told more their future schooling. This dissertation builds on this study, particularly answering the authors’ recommendation to study children’s participation in specific transition activities and explore how participation in various practices influences the formation of ideas and meanings of kindergarten.

The Office of Head Start (OHS) requires that each of their programs establishes clear readiness goals with families, defining school readiness as “children possessing the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for success in school and for later learning and life” (retrieved from <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/sr/approach>). Recently OHS disseminated a report on their approach to school readiness that outlines a framework for staff, parent, family, and community engagement in efforts made to enhance school readiness. This framework grounds much of Head Start’s programming, professional development, and classroom practices as a means to maximize children’s experiences prior to their entry into kindergarten.

OHS’s framework draws from a number of early childhood policy directives developed to promote a more cohesive system of early years education. Additionally, the integration of early childhood policies is an effort to build stronger alignment between preschool experiences and elementary school. While it is important to recognize the influence of OHS on the shift towards more comprehensive approaches to supporting quality preschool experiences and school readiness, it is also worth exploring the impact of other governmental efforts to create stronger buy-in for building the capacity to support early years education.

Members of the National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) set a number of goals aimed at influencing fundamental changes within the country’s system of education in 1989. Among these goals were the development and implementation of content standards, as well as forming protocols for reporting effective policies

and practices. Additionally NEGP challenged states and regionalized areas of the U.S. to have children start school “ready to learn” by the year 2000. Heeding the call of educational objectives set by NEGP, taskforces within states began developing and adopting early learning standards aligned more closely with standards developed for elementary school students. Additionally, states worked to develop provisions to increase families’ access to quality pre-k programs, and provide stronger resources within communities to provide health, education, and community supports for people raising young children. Thus, the notion of continuity of care, and alignment of education took on different meaning in that adults became increasingly aware of the benefits to maximizing children’s learning experiences throughout the first years of life, within contexts outside of the home environment. Scott-Little & Reid (2010) argue standards, curriculum, and assessment are key elements to aligning the systems of early childhood and promote continuity and successful transition for children; asserting early childhood programs must do more than “prepare children to move from one physical setting to another” (p. 123). Their point of view falls in line with numerous efforts intended to address policy and programmatic issues within the field, and reflects principles central to various movements in early childhood.

In 2002 President George W. Bush’s administration introduced the “Good Start, Grow Smart” Initiative as part of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. This initiative intended to support early childhood education primarily within three different areas including early learning guidelines, professional development plans, and program coordination. While the initiative called for capacity building

within the systems of early childhood, the implementation of the program at the state level caused fragmentation of the organizational structures that had influence over the programming of care and education settings. Further approaches to classroom instruction were changing, early childhood educators increasingly critiqued the disappearance of play in classrooms and other early learning contexts, and members of the early childhood community commented on the “shove-down” of curriculum. In brief, preschools were becoming more like kindergarten classrooms, and subsequently preparing children for school getting younger people “ready to learn” became a main purpose of pre-k education. However, while well-intentioned, adults’ focus on school preparedness has shifted the discourses in early childhood in a direction emphasizing the politics of early care and education. At present initiatives aimed at promoting stronger performance on discreet skills remain at fore as early childhood experts and policy makers build the argument “early childhood matters.” .

More recently the PEW Center on the States started the Pre-K Now campaign, which intends to further research and bring “unique voices” into ongoing advocacy efforts to promote publicly funded and state supported pre-kindergarten programs. The driving force behind the Pre-K Now campaign is a challenge to generate stronger investments in pre-kindergarten programs. Numerous reports published through this initiative report on the use a growing body of early childhood research to support the need for pre-k programs to become part of the public education system. Further, the organization analyzes the impact of quality pre-k experiences with an objective to strengthen the

alignment between Pre-K-K-12 systems of education. Bringing attention to the myriad of services of and programs available to children and families, along with the lack of structure within the early childhood, the PreK Now campaign advocates for increased public support for programs that promote “readiness.”

As such, there continues to be strong motivation to establish comprehensive pre-k programs in the United States that ultimately provide all children the opportunity to have quality early years experiences. In Arizona, early childhood advocates and professionals are working to build the capacity to promote quality pre-kindergarten experiences so children are “ready to succeed in school and life” through a number of statewide and local early childhood initiatives. The Arizona Early Childhood Development & Health Board (otherwise known as First Things First) was established in 2006 through a voter-approved initiative. The organization’s website states FTF aims to create “a family-centered, comprehensive, collaborative and high-quality early childhood system that supports the development, health and early education of all Arizona’s children birth through age five” (retrieved from <http://www.azftf.gov/whoweare/pages/default.aspx>). First Things First, a “quasi state agency,” supports a number of early childhood programs and services through a system of Regional Partnership Councils that aim to improve the quality of pre-kindergarten experiences, increase families’ access to health, child care and education supports within communities across the state, and build awareness on the significance of children’s experiences in the early years. Teachers and practitioners are involved in professional development experiences that help to

maximize their potential to support children and families; parents and caregivers receive guidance on childrearing, along with learning more about ways to build partnerships with professionals; and children have greater opportunities to interact within enriched environments designed to enhance their growth. As the First Things First program moves off the ground, early childhood professionals, families, and community members are discovering ways to ease the transition to kindergarten. Additionally, key stakeholders in the field are working to operationalize the definition of kindergarten readiness so the practices used in early childhood programs align with common core standards, elementary school teachers' expectations, as well as the values and cultural beliefs within and across communities. For instance, the Arizona Department of Education Early Childhood website has compiled a list of resources for teachers and families to disseminate information regarding kindergarten readiness, with a particular emphasis on outlining indicators used to make determinations about a child's level of readiness (see. <http://www/azed.gov/wp-content/uploads/PDF/ECP&.pdf>).

A growing body of research emphasizes the use of empirically based practices to prepare children for the rigors of elementary school. The National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) has been instrumental in disseminating empirically based strategies to enhance (and to some degree, or within some contexts standardize, universalize, or formalize) pre-kindergarten experiences. Early childhood stakeholders can also look to the What Works Clearinghouse organized by the U.S. Department of Education, a collection of

“early childhood education interventions that examines the evidence of the effectiveness of center-based curricula and practices designed to improve children’s school readiness” (retrieved from <http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/topic.aspx?sid=4>). Studies that examine the instructional practices teachers are encouraged to use to facilitate children’s acquisition of cognitive and social emotional skills that generate positive outcomes for children in kindergarten exemplify the alignment of empirically based research and early childhood practices (e.g. Fram, Kim, & Sinha, 2011; Burchinal, Howes, Pianta, Bryant, Early, Clifford, & Barbarin, 2008, Bracken & Fischel, 2007).

The coordination of early childhood programs, policy directives, and research initiatives have influenced many of the most significant trends in the field pertaining to kindergarten, or school readiness. While discourses circulate on ways to improve student performance, close achievement gaps, and align pre-k care and education with the public school system, it is important to examine particular nuances of the early years to understand how people’s daily experiences influence their socialization into school and help build confidence and self-efficacy for later life experiences. There is also great potential to explore the benefits of early childhood education through alternative research lenses that contribute more nuanced perspectives. For example, Adair (2011) examines the process of connecting ethnographic work to policy as a means to examine the significance of using of qualitative studies to inform policy and programmatic

decisions, while also bringing attention to the complexities involved in using qualitative research to enrich early childhood practice.

A purpose of this dissertation is to build on the work conducted on the impact of pre-kindergarten learning experiences to shed insight on the extent to which the discourses circulating with early childhood are functioning, and, in turn, facilitating children's entry into kindergarten. A missing component in much of the research on kindergarten transition is children's perspectives on their experiences getting ready for school.

Defining Readiness

The notion of "readiness" lays the groundwork for establishing and maintaining transition programs and practices. In an attempt to create more continuity between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten experiences, early childhood researchers are constantly deconstructing the notion of readiness as it pertains to preparing children for the entry into school. Ackerman & Barnett (2005) state "...the exact definition of readiness depends on who is doing the defining. Whether a child is 'ready' will always depend on the demands kindergarten places on the child and the supports it provides, as well as the child's knowledge and skills" (p. 1). Along these lines, early childhood scholars have argued "kindergarten readiness" is a construct bound by sociocultural mechanisms. Graue (1996, 1993, 1992) argues that readiness is defined as a "way of being" framed by "local meanings." Different interpretations on readiness and varying ideas on transition practices are formed based on the context of a community or situated experiences in people's lives. Further, Graue (1992)

makes the assertion that readiness is “better thought of in social and cultural terms; that it is a set of ideas or meanings constructed by people in communities, families, and schools as they participate in the kindergarten experience” (p. 226).

Kindergarten readiness has been described as being a “challenge” (Guilino, 2008), a “messy” construct, and is a relative phrase that bears many different connotations. Although kindergarten readiness is an ambiguous concept, adults internalize their own interpretations and meanings to determine the degree to which a child is ready for kindergarten. In addition, parents and teachers make several important decisions about a child’s school experience using their definition of readiness to predict how children will adjust to new school routines in kindergarten and meet the demands of formal schooling. In her research, Graue (1992) outlines the ways parents use definitions of readiness to make decisions about school enrollment and by teachers as an influential factor for “sorting, placement, and instructional planning” (p. 225). More specifically, she asserts adults will use the following levels of readiness (independently or in combination) to make decisions about children’s capabilities to function within kindergarten classroom:

- Instructional level – aligned with testing, readiness is used to guide instruction
- Age used to determine the level of readiness
- Maturity, social, and academic readiness
- Cultural values on readiness
- “At-risk” children getting ready for kindergarten

In a recent NIEER policy brief on preparing children for kindergarten, Ackerman & Barnett (2005) delineate factors associated with defining readiness. The authors note age and level of maturity, performance on readiness assessments, and adult perceptions of children's skills and capacities to follow routines are nuances of human development that determine whether a child is prepared for kindergarten. It is common for pre-k teachers, care providers, and family members to evaluate readiness skills through children's performance on developmental assessments and screening tools, especially if a child does not meet the age-eligibility requirement for starting school. Various assessment tools measure different components of readiness (Maxwell & Clifford, 2004). For instance, Ladd, Herald, and Kochel (2006) argue the school readiness has a 'social component' and assessments used to measure 'school entry skills' should encompass the relational and behavioral aspects of children's adjustment into kindergarten classrooms. However, defining readiness through the testing perspective has placed higher demands on early childhood professionals and practitioners, parents and other family members, and children - thus reinforcing the focus the "ready child." The trends in early childhood to promote ready children have taken responsibility away from schools becoming better prepared for children. What's more, the emphasis on ready children has situated many children and families in "deficit models," perpetuating a discourse of "risk factors" situated within particular social groups (Swadener & Lubeck, 1995), rather than social and educational institutions or practices. This dissertation aims to shift the focus away from "ready children" and bring attention to the degree to

which “readiness” communities of practice (Wenger, 1998) are facilitating children’s learning and supporting the transition to kindergarten.

In response to the “ready child” emphasis in early childhood, Graue (2006) further scrutinizes the “readiness,” deconstructs the numerous interpretations of the notion, and problematizes the ambiguity of the various meanings circulating within U.S. society. She argues the definitions used to guide decisions about readiness are often narrow and make grand assumptions about the resources available to children within their homes and communities.

Additionally, the definitions of readiness, and policies and practices aimed at helping children become more prepared for the entry into school, are often situated within deficit models, and are critiqued as being ‘normative.’ Previous to Graue’s work, Wesley and Buysse (2003) examined professionals’ and parents’ perceptions of readiness, and discovered teachers face “philosophical conflicts” between what they consider to be age appropriate and what children are expected to demonstrate in terms of skills and knowledge in kindergarten. They also report there is “too much pressure” placed on children in schools. Despite the criticisms of professionals and parents, Wesley and Buysse make the assertion “They seem unwitting players in a movement that they perceived as replacing kindergarten’s previous mission to optimize the simultaneous acquisition of knowledge, skills, desirable dispositions, and feelings with a primarily scholastic focus” (p. 368). Advocates for child-friendly, age-appropriate, and holistic approaches to early childhood education turn to alternative viewpoints to negotiate meanings on readiness.

Drawing from the perspectives of “pre-kindergarten stakeholders” including principals, pre-k teachers, and district administrators, Brown (2011) carried out an ‘instrumental case study analysis’ to find out how readiness was defined among these individuals, and to explore their thoughts on an assessment tool used to measure children’s readiness skills. Additionally, this study examined the extent to which stakeholders’ opinions and expectations aligned with a district’s standards for elementary and secondary education. More specifically, interviews were conducted with 21 different stakeholders including district administrators (n=5), principals (n=5), pre-k teachers (n=5), and members of a pre-k assessment task force (n=6). Brown demonstrates how definitions of readiness, and the purposes of preschool education, are situated within the context of a particular social setting, or community, and delineates the variability of definitions on ‘kindergarten readiness’ as constructed by school administrators and teachers. This research also highlights the challenges that exist in terms of early childhood educators wanting to carry out a curriculum that is holistic in nature. Knowing that readiness is such a relative term, I set out to explicate the regularities and discontinuities embedded within the transition experiences of children participating in a range of pre-k contexts. Brown’s study also exemplifies ways in which the perspectives of educators are becoming narrower, as a result of policy mandates and recommendations that intend to bring the systems of early care and education and elementary education into alignment. With this in mind, this dissertation examines how the “narrowing” of curriculum and teacher beliefs has influence over children’s kindergarten experiences.

Further, I am curious to study how the circulating discourses in early childhood, that specifically relate to kindergarten readiness impact the ways the first year of schooling sets the tone for children's later academic performance, attitudes about schooling, and life-long achievement.

The Significance of a Successful Transition

Ramey & Ramey (2010) define the transition to school as:

a process that starts when families, educators, and communities engage in activities to prepare for children's school entry and end when the child, family, teachers, and other key individuals perceive that a positive state has been achieved – when they have mutual agreement regarding expectations, roles, and actions to ensure that a given child will make good progress in the school setting (p. 20).

Ray and Smith (2010) argue smooth transitions help children develop a “sense of security and independence” which may help them “be better able to cope with the new requirements of kindergarten” (p. 11). A positive and successful transition experience is defined by a number of factors including, children's acquisition of academic competencies and socialization experiences. Successful transitions are also contingent on partnerships between families and early childhood professionals. While these elements create a sense of preparedness during the transition, there are socio-cultural variances that also determine how children experience the kindergarten transition making this a more complex time period for children and families.

As a means to better understand how to better prepare children for kindergarten, researchers have examined specific aspects of children's development, and early childhood curricular content to determine strategies that have lasting impact on children's school experience. Researchers strive to evaluate the effectiveness of early childhood programs, as well as the teaching practices used to prepare children for their entrance into "formal" school. Specifically, studies examine teachers' reports on the use of transition practices (Early, Pianta, & Taylor, 2001; Pianta, Cox, Taylor, & Early, 1999). Ray and Smith (2010) reviewed current research on three key influences on children's kindergarten adaptation and success including transition, parental involvement, and retention. Findings suggest there is great variability among early childhood practices; additionally, the aforementioned studies show that preschool teachers and kindergarten teachers do not interface during the transition. As such, there is a greater motivation to open communication across early childhood settings, as well as between preschool and kindergarten programs. Research indicates parents and family members play a pivotal role in establishing continuity between children's pre-k and kindergarten experiences, and family involvement is highly encouraged during the transition process. Dockett and Perry (2009) write "Families provide a range of support for children that can be particularly important in facilitating a positive start to school" (p. 24).

Parents' Perspectives on the Transition

It is clear adults play an instrumental role in facilitating the transition. Historically, researchers interested in studying the prekindergarten to kindergarten

transition have examined this phase primarily from the perspectives of adults, namely early childhood educators and parents or primary caregivers. This research is used to describe what adults think children need to know when they start kindergarten (Ray & Smith, 2010; La Paro, Kraft-Sayre, Pianta, 2003; Piotrkowski, Botsko, Matthews, 2001); brings attention to adult concerns surrounding the transition to school and kindergarten readiness (Wildenger & McIntyre, 2010); in addition to measuring the degree to which specific transition activities are effective (La Paro, Kraft-Sayre, & Pianta, 2003; Murphey, 1992).

Studies conducted with parents have brought forward some interesting, and multifaceted findings regarding their roles supporting their child's transition to kindergarten. Mashburn & Pianta (2006) assert the variability of people's experiences and opinions is largely determined by the ecology of social systems. Moreover, parents and teachers structure the transition experience based on the resources available within communities, in addition to the relationships, partnerships, and collaborations that form over time. In line with the ecological perspective of the transition, Dockett and Perry (2009) attribute the ambiguous nature of children's entry into school to a sociological change in perspective on readiness from a developmental transition to an interactionist transition. Dockett and Perry write (citing Miesels, 1999, p. 58) "readiness is something that happens in situ, over time" and contend that readiness is influenced through interactions that take place within situated learning contexts. In one regard, several of the mothers interviewed in this dissertation report not having major concerns during their child's transition to kindergarten, and trusted their child would successfully

adjust to a kindergarten classroom. Even though some parents report not having major concerns about the transition, research indicates the transition experiences produces anxieties for family members (McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGennaro & Wildenger, 2010; 2007). In their most recent study conducted with 132 caregivers of preschool students (in both general education and special education) McIntyre et al. (2010) found caregivers expressed worries about their children adjusting to a new school, forming relationships with peers, separation from family, and getting along with the kindergarten teacher. The authors detail important considerations early childhood educators can take into account to ensure the transition to kindergarten is a fluid and positive experience for children and their families. For instance, recommendations are made so families can access more information about kindergarten, and that early childhood educators work more closely with elementary staff, creating a more systematic approach to facilitating the transition. With regards to the benefits to practitioners, they write “...adequate planning and preparation, both before and after the student transitions, may help support students as they negotiate the heightened school demands and foster and maintain strong collaborative partners with families” (McIntyre, et al. , 2010, p. 263). Parents also set different expectations for their child than pre-k or kindergarten teachers (Piotrkowski, Botsko, Matthews, 2001). More specifically, parents tend to emphasize academic readiness, whereas teachers express a desire for children to enter kindergarten with heightened social-emotional competency.

Parents see themselves as key advocates for their children, and see there is a need to be actively involved in facilitating the transition process (McIntyre, et al. , 2010; 2007; Wildenger & McIntyre, 2010; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). Parents surveyed by Wildenger & McIntyre (2010) reported a desire to have more information on the academic expectations of kindergarten, in addition to knowing more about their child's current abilities. Additionally, parents felt disconnected from their child's kindergarten program and teacher and expressed an interest in learning more logistical or programmatic information. La Paro, Kraft-Sayre, and Pianta (2003) argue adults involved in the transition process will participate in activities and events to learn more about kindergarten, provided they are given opportunities to do so. However,

In certain communities and localities, families have the opportunity to participate in parent education programs as a means to build home and school partnerships. Enz, Rhodes, and LaCount (2008) identify three types of parent education programs: Family Support Programs, Family Interactive programs, and Traditional Parent Education Programs. Family Support Programs are those “focused on the needs of the entire family, providing a range of services, including parent education, adult education, and family health care services” (p. 64). These programs partner with early childhood health, child care, and education organizations to provide holistic support aimed at promoting the well-being of children. An example of a family support program in Arizona is the Educare program situated within the Central Phoenix region. Family interactive programs “focus on both parent and child working/playing together through an

interactive curriculum” (p. 68). Family literacy programs (e.g. Let’s Get Ready to Read and the Even Start Literacy Program) are examples of family interactive programs. These programs serve a number of purposes for children and parents, but primarily serve as a mechanism for children and their caregivers to gain confidence in exploring different aspects and skills centered on literacy. The Leaps and Bounds program in Arizona is another example of a family interactive program, and focuses on supporting low-income families build awareness on how to prepare for kindergarten. Traditional parent education programs “provide school readiness information to parents” (p. 70). The New Directions Institute in Arizona was developed to “provide parents and caregivers with training and tools to help every infant, toddler and pre-schooler develop a healthy brain and enter school ready to learn” (www.newdirectionsinstitute.org).

Studies conducted on the transition to kindergarten bring to light the discrepancies between the systems of early childhood and elementary education, thus providing some explanation why adults have uncertainties on how to best provide support to children during the transition process. Ray and Smith (2010) argue the system of early childhood is fragmented and there are not any established policies or programs within the field to support continuity across the early childhood care and education settings, or to support families and children as they make the transition from preschool to kindergarten. While these studies reinforce the argument that there is a greater need for collaboration and continuity among the most significant people involved in the transition process, they also

reveal opportunities to afford children's perspectives due weight in matters affecting their school experience.

Early Childhood Professionals' Perspectives of the Transition

Studies have been conducted with early childhood educators to explore the extent to which transition practices are utilized by practitioners in both pre-kindergarten and kindergarten settings (Rous, Hallam, McCormick, Cox, 2010; LoCasale-Crouch, Mashburn, Downer, & Pianta, 2008). Findings from this research suggest there is little collaboration occurring between educators within pre-k and kindergarten programs during the transition process. Early childhood experts are seeking ways to develop comprehensive approaches to aligning the systems of pre-k-K-12 education, emphasizing the importance of school-based transition activities. Schulting, Malone, & Dodge (2005) found transition practices have a significant positive effect on children's academic achievement and parents' involvement in school. LoCasale-Crouch, Mashburn, Downer, and Pianta (2008) argue children's participation in transition activities leads to positive adjustments to first school experiences. Moreover, teachers are likely to form positive judgements about children's competencies. Although there is evidence that supports children's participation in transition activities, kindergarten teachers report significant challenges to facilitating school-based transition activities. For example, teachers will report time constraints, and lack of compensation as barriers to implementing transition practices (Early, Pianta, Taylor, and Cox, 2001). Nelson (2004) examined kindergarten teachers' use of transition activities as they prepared to welcome families into their classrooms.

Drawing from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study - Kindergarten Cohort, Nelson used the survey data of 3101 teachers to determine the extent to which they employed formal or informal transition practices. Findings reveal that while kindergarten teachers employ various strategies to try and get to know families better before the start of the school year, it is difficult. Nelson reports kindergarten teachers are more likely to interface with families by sending out introductory letters in mail/email, and they do not employ direct strategies (e.g. home visits) that are described as being more effective transition practices. Nelson explains that teachers reported numerous constraints to carrying out more direct transition practices including time limitations, large class sizes, as well as not having information on families in a timely manner. This said, this research also revealed teachers' preferences for meeting face-to-face with families in a classroom or school setting. This evidence is used to build an argument to substantiate the need to build the capacity for direct transition programs, specifically those that encourage kindergarten teachers to develop and implement comprehensive transition practices.

Considering preschool educators, families, and children have primary concerns about the kindergarten teachers' expectations, it is important to point out these stakeholders have minimal interactions with one another, and while early childhood educators have identified this shortcoming, the rigors and demands placed on kindergarten teachers' has also been acknowledged. For this reason, various community-based programs have taken the initiative in planning and implementing transition programs (as discussed in Chapter 1).

While the authors studying family involvement emphasize community and collective action to help-children prepare for kindergarten, children's perspectives are noticeably minimized, and given attention only after they have entered into formal school. Current research on the transition within the U.S. sheds light on the fact children's perceptions and experiences are seldom considered when exploring the processes of the transition (as mentioned by Ackerman and Barnett); what's more children's perspectives are often disregarded when definitions of school readiness are constructed and/or perpetuated.

Children's Perspectives on the Transition

This study draws from a number of international projects conducted with children aimed at building awareness on younger people's capacities to contribute to the work conducted to improve systems of schooling the world over, and enhance children's learning experiences throughout life (Einarsdottir, 2011, Loizou, 2011; Mirkhil, 2010; Lam & Pollard, 2006; Dockett & Perry, 2005).

Of particular interest in this dissertation is the work conducted within various European nations (e.g. Iceland, the United Kingdom, and Italy), along with research carried out in Singapore, Australia, and New Zealand. For instance, Corsaro and Molinari (2005; 2000) observed 'priming events' in Italian schools and children's Interpretive reproduction of school practices among their peer cultures. Peters (2003) examined the influence of social interactions on children's experience transitioning to kindergarten in New Zealand. Yeo and Clark (2005) examined children's perspectives on the adjustment to school by paying close attention to children's interpretations of rules and routines in Singapore. Coraso

and Molinari's (2005; 2000) work is noteworthy in that the theoretical underpinnings of this study are drawn from the work they conducted with children in Modena, Italy. Their ethnographic study explicates the school routines, and priming events employed to prepare children for their first year of formal school, and showcases the significance of community support. Corsaro and Molinari (2005) observed ways teachers planned activities to orient children to the practices and routines they would engage with and follow in their first grade classrooms, and also studied how children made sense of school through a lens of "Interpretive reproduction."

The Starting Schools Project (Dockett & Perry, 2005) conducted in Australia is an example of a child rights based approach used to inform education policy and practice. This project was established to learn more about children's experiences transitioning into school, from the perspectives of children. Children were considered to be experts in their own lives, and were actively involved in the research process. Children were invited to participate in classroom discussions and photograph things that were important to them, in addition to being involved in creating resources for the classroom to help other children build understanding on the kindergarten environment. The children's reflections offered deep insight on their experiences, and revealed their concerns and interests within the school context. What's more, findings from the Starting Schools Project support the belief that children are competent and participants "knew a great deal about themselves and school" (p. 14). In this instance, researchers took the steps

necessary to empower children and help them realize their opinions would be acknowledged and respected by adults.

Additionally, Dockett and Perry examined the ways in which they could make improvements to programs based on the information they obtained from children. Picture books were created as a means to disseminate children's input on the kindergarten environment. The child photographers shared reflections on their photos, and helped write and edit the text in the book. The production of children's books, created and authored by children in collaboration with the adult researchers, exemplifies a creative approach used to make opportunities for children's ideas to be integrated into the discourse of kindergarten and kindergarten readiness.

Einarsdottir (2011) studied children's perspectives on their transition primary school in Iceland. Utilizing group interviewing strategies and children's drawings, Einarsdottir examined ways children differentiate their playschool and primary school experiences. Additionally, she sought to explore the aspects of playschool children considered helpful in preparing them for primary school. Examples of the differences children described included variations in the curriculum, differences in teachers' instructional practices, as well as shifts in their roles and responsibilities. Additionally, children explained that the acquisition of academic skills and knowledge and the learning of school rules in playschool benefitted them as they transitioned into primary school. In a similar vein, the children interviewed in this dissertation expressed views on the changes they perceived between their pre-k and kindergarten experiences. However, they

did not, or were not able to describe in great detail information on their participation in transition activities. What I refer to as the “I don’t know” phenomenon in this dissertation is evidence children may not be aware specific routines or activities are intended to help them prepare for school, and consequently they are made less aware of what to expect when they start school. Children’s lack of awareness sheds light on another issue younger people face in the U.S. – the lack of opportunities to participate in school, community or cultural routines as full members, or active participants within society.

Implications of Children’s Participation in Research

It is clear the efforts to acknowledge children’s rights and increase their levels of participation are making important contributions across multiple disciplines and paving a way to redefine children’s agency across social contexts. Continued focus on children’s rights will ideally make participation and inclusion embedded practices or “obligations” (Shier, 2001) within various cultures and communities. Swadener, Peters, and Gaches (in press) review research conducted in cross-national contexts to explicate the complexities involved in carrying out child rights based research as a means to inform future projects and initiatives that seek to promote children’s participation in research, policy, and practice. As evidence in this review, the recognition of children being “social agents,” as well as the acknowledgment of children’s rights to inclusion and participation is growing within and across a number of disciplines, including education, sociology, anthropology, medical science, and planning and development. More specifically, adults bring attention to the fact children should be acknowledged as

“active participants” in social matters rather than “subjects” merely positioned within their communities and expected to passively participate in activities and interactions.

Brooker (2001) attributes the increased attention to children’s rights and participation to two ‘complementary principles including the belief in children’s rights and the belief in children’s competence. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC; 1989) not only reinstated rights to provision and protection for children, it introduced the notion rights to participation (Skelton, 2007) opening “opportunities and obligations” (Shier, 2001) for children to engage in efforts aimed at promoting their well-being. The UNCRC is attributed with causing shifts in people’s perspectives on children and childhood, and since its conception has served as a foundation for creating rights based approaches to children’s social engagement.

Of particular interest in the proposed study are Articles 12 and 13 of the UNCRC, as they mandate the inclusion of children’s voices and participation in any matter that affects them. Specifically Article 12 decrees children have the right to express their views freely, and that the views of the child should be given due weight “in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.” Article 13 states that not only “the child shall have the right to freedom of expression,” but has the child has the right to express themselves in any medium that is individually or age appropriate.

While the UNCRC is associated with many important contributions to work carried out *with* children, it is not void of shortcomings or discrepancies.

For example, Skelton (2007) critiques facets of the document, pointing out the language and rhetoric used to define ‘rights’ can be exclusionary or inapplicable to certain individuals. For instance, she writes, “What about the children in such levels of despair that they have learned the futility of having hopes and dreams? How can these children begin the difficult path toward participation?” (p. 177).

Lundy (2007) disentangles the complexities of Article 12 as it was applied within the context of school and education in an Irish community. Her work explains the successes and barriers schools faced as efforts were made to consult with children, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of Article 12. Lundy pointedly critiques the language of the CRC, and examines the ways in which different meanings of compliance are inferred from the “open” nature of the rhetoric embedded within the document. Lundy contends a consequence of open interpretation is the chance children’s rights based practices could be “endorsed by all” which she refers to as being a “dangerous side effect.” She argues that, “one of the inherent difficulties with this is that initial goodwill can dissipate when rhetoric needs to be put into practice, especially when the effect of this is to challenge the dominant thinking, generate controversy or cost money” (p. 931).

It is important to note, the United States has yet to ratify the UNCRC. In fact, Walker, Brooks, and Wrightsman (1999) write although the United States Constitution affords its citizens rights, “there is no consensus on the rights to which children are entitled - or even whether they have rights at all” (p. 12). Additionally, the dominant belief in the United States is that children’s rights should emphasize protection and nurturance, rather than children’s participation.

This sets an important precedent for children's participation in the United States, and explains why research with children is not often conducted with children to inform policy or change.

Despite people's skepticism, there is a growing interest in the United States to reframe ideologies about children, as well as assumptions made about children's competence and participatory capabilities. Children and youth advocates across disciplines looking for "openings and opportunities" (Shier, 2001) to listen to and advance children's voices and perspectives are finding ways to do so across disciplines, and projects emphasizing children's participation are becoming more prevalent (e.g. Factor, 2009; Swadener, 2008; Knowles-Yanez, 2005; Clark, 2003).

Early childhood scholars who study children's perspectives on kindergarten (e.g. Einsardottir, 2011; Corsaro & Molinari, 2005) contribute to a growing body of research that focuses on children's inclusion and participation in the research process, as well as the decision-making processes that inform program development and policy. Projects have taken shape within the academic world, as well as public domains particularly within international, national, and local organizations. UNICEF (Hart, 1992) has provided numerous avenues for child participation across different levels of society, including planning and development parks and playgrounds; conferences for children; and school encourage genuine community participation. For example, early childhood professionals and community stakeholders aimed to develop a more "child-friendly" city in Port Phillip, Victoria, Australia (City of Port Phillip, 2005). In

order to carry out this project, researchers consulted with children of all ages. Children were asked to express their ideas and opinions on topics ranging from enhancing community or recreational events and activities (such as library story times), making things safer around town, asking children to discuss things they enjoy, and also things they see as being detrimental or in need of improving. Adult researchers used various tools to interact with children in a way that respected their right to expression (UNCRC, Article 13). Children's ideas informed decisions made by personnel working with municipal agencies, and used to make changes within the city.

One of the predominant issues is that too often adults employ tokenistic strategies (Hart, 1992) wherein people are led to believe children were (are) actively involved, when in fact they have been given little to no choice or opportunity to share their opinions or perspectives. Other critiques state children's rights based approaches are becoming misused, misappropriated, or fetishized practices, claiming adults want to hear children's perspectives on nonessential topics, and only are obtaining superficial understandings of their perspectives. Also cautions are put forward to thwart assumptions that all children are going to want to participate in the research process or decision making processes for programs and policies directly affecting them (Einarsdottir, 2011; Eide & Winger, 2005). Furthermore, adults are assuming all children are going to want to share their perspectives, or that children will be willing to share their perspectives all the time. Other critiques include the privileging of the

individual over the collective (Einarsdottir, 2011), and the privileging of “voice,” over other communicative mediums (Lewis, 2010).

Concluding Remarks

The review of literature in this chapter explains the broader societal constructs that build and have influence over the systems of early care and education in the U.S. The attention brought to several of the most influential education policies and initiatives that have shaped the course of the pre-kindergarten movement provides insight on how early childhood scholars, professionals, and practitioners are conceptualizing their roles and responsibilities as members of a community of practice functioning to teach and prepare children for kindergarten. Additionally, the entities within macro-level of early childhood have made significant impact on people’s conceptions of readiness. With this in mind, I described how adults (early childhood professionals and parents) use socially constructed meanings of readiness to facilitate the transition process. Although studies on parent perspectives impart more in-depth understanding on how people are learning and making meaning within “communities of practice” context, there is little consideration brought to children’s perspectives. Further, research on the transition to kindergarten determines the implications of adult decisions on children’s entry into school (e.g. whether specific activities have worthwhile, or long-term effects on children’s performance). Therefore, this dissertation seeks to bring forward children’s voices to explain how the choices adults make for and about younger people are shaping their lived experiences during the transition to kindergarten and beyond.

DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

As previously discussed, children's transitions into kindergarten classrooms are significant in that research indicates the start of school sets the tone for later school experiences. Accordingly, "readiness" communities of practice are established to ensure children are a part of cultural routines and transition activities centered on learning specific practices that increase the likelihood they will be "ready" to meet the heightened expectations that go along with being a kindergartener. While adults strongly influence the meaning of readiness, children by nature of their participation in cultural routines and a community of practice also have a significant influence over the socially constructed meanings of "readiness." Kupfer (2011) writes:

So if on one hand, children's voices are a power that has to be socialized, one the other, they can be regarded as a socializing power themselves, by producing a 'surplus' of meaning that may bring new and unexpected content into interaction routines, or may open up these routines by involving others (p. 102).

Children's alternative viewpoints on kindergarten can be used to enrich adult understandings of getting ready for, and being in school. Eide and Winger (2005) argue "One of the main challenges for children in a postmodern world is the search for meaning, a sense of belonging, and constructions of identity." As adults continue to operationalize the "relational concept" of school readiness (Dockett & Perry, 2009), what are the implications for children? As a means to

explore answers to this question, I offer an interpretive analysis of children's talk about kindergarten to examine how younger people are learning, making meaning, and forming identities throughout the pre-k to kindergarten transition.

The data analyzed in this study are drawn from a large-scale qualitative research project, the Family and Community Case Study project, part of a larger evaluation project. I was a member of the research team throughout much of the data collection, serving as a qualitative interviewer (QI) for the primary caregiver, community stakeholder, and child interviews. In addition, I was a part of the planning team for the child interview component of the study. My engagement with the child interview component of the FCCS project led me to further study children's conceptions of kindergarten, along with their perceptions of being a part of a transition process. To become more familiar with the various strategies used to interview children, I reviewed studies conducted internationally, focused on children's participation in early childhood research (Pascal & Bertram, 2009; MacNaughton, Smith, & Davis, 2007; Clark, 2005; Irwin & Johnson, 2005; Grover, 2004). Additionally, I reviewed studies that examined children's perspectives of going to school (Loizou, 2010; Mirkhil, 2010; Rosen, 2010; Corsaro & Molinari, 2005; Dockett & Perry, 2005; Peters, 2003; Brooker, 2002; Mauthner, 1997). "Child-friendly" interviewing methods were used in the FCCS project to elicit the perspectives of children. Research indicates that interviews with children require a different approach to building dialogue than interviews with adults (Dockett, Einarsdottir, & Perry, 2011; Clark, 2011; Clark, 2005; Brooker, 2001). More specifically, adult researchers working with children have

discovered children make meaning of their lived experiences in ways alternative to adult perspectives. Clark (2011) describes the ambiguity in children's talk and notes younger people often use symbols and semiotics to explain their perceptions of their social worlds. Further, children's varied abilities to engage in conversations with adults create challenges in interview situations. For instance, children's limited vocabulary can hinder adults' capacities to understand younger peoples' thoughts clearly enough to develop shared understandings. Additionally, children may make use of non-verbal forms of communication making it difficult to draw out their "unmediated perspectives" (Swadener & Polakow, 2011). There are also cultural factors that influence how children engage in interviews with adults. Brooker (2001) asserts one of the key elements to interviewing children requires the researcher takes on the role as "sensitive" interviewer. She explains that the interviewer must plan questioning appropriately, with considerations made to an individuals' emotional and social maturity; respond to distress or discomfort with empathy and understanding; provide as much information as possible; and maintain a positive and playful disposition throughout the interview. For these reasons, approaches to conducting research *with* children are dynamic, and call for continual adaptations and modifications to meet the individual needs of young children. In addition to facilitating culturally and individually responsive interviews, researchers working with young children have also deconstructed important ethical considerations (e.g. Smith, 2011; MacNaughton & Smith, 2008; Danby & Farrell, 2004)

While I made significant contributions to the development of the child interview protocols, it is important to point out I played an indirect role in the actual data collection phases of this study. Even though I met and got to know many of the people participating in the FCCS project, in many ways I am an outsider to these children, their families, along with their life experiences. For this reason, I describe this dissertation as being interpretive and exploratory in the sense I rely heavily on interview transcripts (written text) to make meaning of the lived experiences of a small group of children going through the kindergarten transition.

Additionally, this dissertation is phenomenological in that findings are used to describe the nature of children's experiences becoming and being kindergarteners. I deconstructed children's interpretations of their social worlds, and engagement in a community of practice during the transition period, to make sense of what younger people encounter during their first year of formal school. Drawing from Lam and Pollard's (2006) framework for understanding children as agents during the transition, this study sought to examine what children encounter as they move into kindergarten classrooms. I used analytical tools to look beyond the text to examine social mechanisms within home, school, and community contexts that have influence over children's understandings and reproductions of kindergarten routines, family beliefs and values on school, as well as the expectations of teachers and school personnel. This information is used in turn to study the mediating factors that shape children's roles and membership within kindergarten classrooms (or

communities). Inter-textual interpretations of children's talk about school sheds light on the ways common school routines and practices during the transition to kindergarten systemically position children at the periphery within their social worlds. In addition, I examined how children's membership within classroom communities is confined by the rules and reified practices set by adults, particularly as teachers and parents strive to shape children into "ready" and successful students.

Further, I analyzed interviews from a sub-sample of primary caregivers interviewed for FCCS to gain more in-depth information on children's pre-k and/or kindergarten experiences. Whereas a primary intention of this study is to foreground children's perspectives, parent perspectives are used to provide background to the situations and contexts children interact within at the beginning of their school experiences. Interviews with mothers were also used to bring in multiple perspectives on the transition. The analysis of parent interviews was conducted to better understand children's dialogue and to make more holistic meanings of younger people's conceptions of "readiness" and kindergarten. As such, this study sought to investigate parents' perceptions on their child's involvement in transition activities, or school routines, along with their conceptions of kindergarten. This information was used to determine how parents' perspectives are affected by readiness discourses circulating among early childhood scholars, researchers, practitioners, and professionals.

In addition, parent perspectives were used to make sense of children's talk about kindergarten through an interactionist lens. Boocock and Scott (2005)

describe social interactionism as “a process by which people create themselves and their social worlds through *social interaction* with cultural objects and ideas as well as with other people” (p. 21). It is obvious to point out children and adults co-construct conceptions of kindergarten and school readiness. However, Wenger (1998) asserts, “Different participants contribute to and benefit differently, depending on their relations to the enterprise and the community” (p. 118). Thus, children and parents’ ideas about school carry different weight within the transition process. Moreover, Griebel & Niesel (2002) assert, “what parents expect, fear, and hope influences their child both through verbal and non-verbal messages, as well as through parental efforts to support their child” (p. 73). For this reason, this study sought to examine the similarities and variations between children and adults’ perspectives to identify the points of continuity and discontinuity within “readiness” communities of practice.

Purpose of the Study

Findings from this study are used to give adults (e.g. early childhood researchers and professionals) more nuanced understandings of children’s lived experiences during the transition process. For instance, children’s perspectives on getting ready for kindergarten, or going to school exposed ways broader societal and educational influences have shaped children’s early learning experiences. Children are often described as being “legitimate peripheral participants” (Lave & Wenger, 1991) within communities of practice, however I problematize adult tendencies to position children as such, and with this in mind offer alternative interpretations on children’s participation in the transition process, along with

their participation within early learning environments and kindergarten classrooms. Therefore, my “conversations” with younger people about kindergarten afforded the opportunity to examine the degree to which children perform as social actors, or active members within home, school and community contexts.

Additionally an aim of this study is to promote younger people’s participatory capacities within the context of research and policy. Moreover, this research elevates children’s understandings of their own lived-experiences, as a means to diminish adult-centric viewpoints that often mediate the decisions adults make *for or about* children. Children’s voices matter and it is important to acknowledge the significance of listening to children.

As a means to explore children’s perspectives on school, this dissertation addressed the following questions: How are children thinking and talking about going to kindergarten? How do parents construct meanings of readiness? To what extent are children and their parents co-constructing ideas about kindergarten?

Organization of the Chapter

First, I provide a brief overview of the larger study from which the data for this study were drawn, the First Things First External Evaluation (FTFEE) Family and Community Case Study (FCCS). The FCCS project demonstrates how researchers worked to gather information about families and communities in Arizona. Additionally, the overview of the project delineates the steps members of the FCCS team took to employ a child’s rights based approach to conducting

research *with* younger people. Having played a significant role in the planning and development of the child interview component of FCCS project, I impart the background of the overall child interview project, as well as the processes involved in creating, using, and making modifications to the interview protocols. A brief description of the procedures used to train other QIs is also provided.

The subsequent sections describe the ways interview transcripts are interpreted and analyzed to shed insight on how children are thinking and talking about the transition from their prekindergarten experience to elementary school. Additionally, I explain how particular ethical considerations were used to ensure analysis of children's thoughts followed procedures to maintain their 'unmediated' perspectives (Swadener & Polakow, 2011). In line with data analysis procedures, I discuss the steps taken to ensure validity and describe the potential biases I perceived that had influence over my interpretations of children's and parent's talk about kindergarten. In closing, I outline parameters and limitations to this study and share ideas on how to carry out future research *with* children.

Overview of FTFEE and FCCS

FTFEE was a study conducted by an interdisciplinary team of researchers from the three public universities in Arizona. The mission of FTFEE was to conduct a five-year, mixed method longitudinal project evaluating the impact of the First Things First (FTF) early care and education initiative on children's readiness for school success, family support, and early childhood system-building in Arizona. FTF is a "quasi-state agency" and a system of 31 regional partnership

councils. Established in 2006 as a voter-approved initiative, its mission is to increase the quality of and access to early childhood programs that support children aged 0-5 and their families. Additionally, the overarching goal of FTF is to help children enter kindergarten healthy and better prepared for school and academic success.

There were three components of FTFEE, the Arizona Kindergarten Readiness Study (AKRS); Longitudinal Child Study of Arizona (LCSA); and Family and Community Case Study (FCCS). The purpose of project was to evaluate the impact of FTF on several child and family outcomes, ideally providing evidence that the increase in quality and access to early childhood and family support programs is beneficial to Arizona's children and families. AKRS and LCSA made use of standardized assessment tools to assess outcomes for young children; FCCS employed qualitative methods to draw out the experiences of primary caregivers (parents or other family members), those of community stakeholders supporting children and families, as well as preschool and kindergarten aged children. The stories told by primary caregivers and community stakeholders reveal the successes and challenges adults encounter as they guide children through the early childhood years. Child participants were asked questions on family, community, health, and care and education, and in turn their narratives highlight the daily-lived experiences of four and five-year olds across the state, providing an in-depth look at how children describe their general well-being and interests.

Moreover, child interviews for FCCS were carried out to provide adult researchers, policy makers, and professionals with a window into the lives of Arizona's younger citizens, as told from perspectives of younger people. Considering the overall mission of the FTF initiative is to improve the quality of early childhood for children and their families, members of the FCCS team considered it critical to take children's perspectives into account. Moreover, FCCS took steps to acknowledge and respect children as being competent "social agents" and experts on their own lives with the intention of using their perspectives to inform the decisions adults make *for* or *about* younger people. Information on the FCCS child interview component provides context on how this study came to fruition, and provides evidence for how "openings and opportunities" (Shier, 2001) were created for children to participate in research and decision-making. With this said, I turn to the planning stages of the FCCS child interview component to explain the techniques used to elicit children's perspectives during two phases of data collection for the project.

Overview of the Child Interview Protocol

Members of the FCCS team took a unique approach to planning the child interviews in that "child consultants" were encouraged to collaborate with adult researchers as we decided on the questions to include in the child interview protocol. Children (aged 6-8 years of age) at three different school sites across the state were invited to participate in a "consultation meeting," and during the meeting children were asked to respond to two different questions: "what should we ask five-year old children about?" and "how can we make interviews more

fun?” The consultation meetings took place in elementary school classrooms, and largely followed the classroom routines already established by the classroom teachers. For instance, the meeting I helped facilitate was modeled after the “Think, Pair, Share” technique commonly used as an approach to cooperative learning in education (Kagan, 1989). Children came up with a range of ideas on what adult researchers should ask children about during the FCCS interviews. The following are examples of questions children from Arizona State University thought we should ask child interview participants (written in their own vernacular):

- What are their interests?
- Do you think you would like school?
- What is your favorite color?
- What makes you laugh?
- What time do you go to bed?

After the consultation meetings, members of the FCCS team met and discussed ways to integrate the consultants’ perspectives into the interview protocol, and in turn, child consultants added to the child interview component of FCCS in a variety of ways. On one hand, the information we gained from children validated some of our assumptions about children and childhoods. For example, the questions children brainstormed about going to school were similar to those we had created for our child participants. On the other, children demonstrated their capacities to think critically about social issues they face (e.g. taking on the role of “interpreter” for their parents who speak a language other

than English); discussed complex aspects of their lives (e.g. the social dynamics within their peer groups); and posed questions we were surprised to hear (e.g. “what do you do when you have two friends, but one friend only likes you and not the other person?”).

Moreover, children’s ideas were not only incorporated into the interview protocol, but their ideas offered useful suggestions for adult researchers to build rapport with the child interview participants. More to this point, the questions consultants told us to ask our participants centered on “favorite things” were helpful in acquiring information to individualize the interview protocol and create a more personalized interview. Although there are a number of key implications to point out as a result of our work with the child consultants, of most importance is adult researchers realized (in some cases were reminded) of the potential for children to impart their views, highlighting the “alternative” ways younger people relate to the most salient aspects of their social worlds.

Interviewing Child Participants

Members of the FCCS team, referred to as Qualitative Interviews (QIs), asked children about what they like to do at home and in their neighborhood; about the people in their family; where they go to school or child care; as well as going to the doctor. QIs were provided a training to help them develop a better understanding of processes involved in interviewing children. Examples of topics discussed include developing and maintaining positive rapport with children, and facilitating the conversation during the interview in a manner responsive to children and their personalities. Throughout the training, QIs were reminded

children tend to have a lot on their mind, are eager to share what is most pressing to them, and may try to direct the conversation to topics not included in the interview protocol. This in mind, QIs were encouraged to follow the lead of the child participants as the interviews took place; were advised to adjust the conversation according to the child's responses; and were told not to make the child follow the order of questions on the protocol. Additionally, QIs were informed patience, flexibility, and creativity would be needed to ensure that all (or most) areas of the child interview would be covered. Even though all team members were trained to work with children as participants in research, some people were reluctant as they felt uncomfortable interacting younger people, or were unsure they had the competencies to facilitate "quality" interviews.

Child interviews took place within the children's homes; more specifically, interviews took place at kitchen tables, in children's bedrooms, family rooms, as well as in backyards. The child was encouraged to find a space in the house where they would feel most comfortable. Once with the child, QIs explained the interview procedures, obtained assent, and children were provided opportunity to explore the recording equipment. Additionally children were encouraged to ask any questions about the interview at this time. QIs also dedicated some time before the interview to get to know the child better. The QI and child participant played games, drew pictures, and engaged in conversation. While the tools provided for the interviews were essential to helping children feel more comfortable during the interviews, at times they became a distraction as child participants grew interested in playing with the toys, or preferred to engage

in the activities provided, such as drawing pictures. In addition despite the protocol in place for QIs to build rapport with child participants, several of the adult researchers reported on the variations they made in the process in order to meet the needs of individual child interview participants. For example, there were interviews with children that required little effort in regards to building rapport. The QI who interviewed Dakota (a kindergartener) wrote in field notes, “Dakota was happy to interview with me. There was no coaxing . . . our play turned into a recorded chat.” In another interview, conducted with Emerson (a pre-kindergartener), the QI wrote “The interview itself was perhaps the easiest and most successful child interview I have conducted to date [...] she was happy to sit down with me for the interview, and unlike other interviews I have experienced, she was very cooperative.” However, other interviews did not run as smoothly as the two just discussed. Describing her experience interviewing Jack (a kindergartener), a QI wrote “I found this interview to challenge my interviewing skills. I found the one word responses difficult to negotiate and felt I had to do a lot of probing to get Jack to talk with me beyond the one word responses.”

Interviews were conducted using a Mosaic Approach (Clark & Moss, 2001). During both waves of data collection for the child interview component of FCCS, children were invited to talk in response to the interview questions, draw pictures to create visual representations of their ideas, or could have made use of materials such as play dough or Legos to construct artifacts that could demonstrate their thoughts. Additionally, a photograph of a classroom environment was used with the kindergarten child participants as a tool to bring

children “in situ,” and served as a catalyst to generate dialogue on their school experiences. Puppets were used with the pre-kindergarten child participants as an instrument to elicit children’s perspectives on getting ready for and going to school. These strategies were presented to children as options for engaging in conversation as adult researchers recognized the importance of providing accommodations for individual children. The protocol used for both waves of data is described as being a tool for constructing “conversational interviews.”

Examples of questions asked to the kindergarten child participants include:

- What do you do at school? Are you learning to read?
- What do you like to do best at school? Is there anything you don’t like?
- Tell me about your teacher?
- Did you go to another school before kindergarten (last year)? Did you like it? Is kindergarten different? Harder?

The interview protocol used for the pre-kindergarten cohort was modified to address feedback gained from interviews conducted with the kindergarten group. More specifically, adult researchers noted an issue with the first interview protocol was the use of questions that were too general or broad. In order to resolve this, QIs were instructed to fill out “quick reference forms” to provide substantive information about the child participants prior to starting the interviews. The forms consisted of information that detailed specific information about the child derived from interviews with their primary caregiver. As an example, QIs noted the name of a child’s preschool, recorded activities the family

enjoyed doing together, along with any other information that could provide deeper context. This step of the interview protocol was intended to accelerate the rapport building process in a sense so that children became aware the adult researchers had some familiarity with their life and family experiences. The following are examples of questions children in the pre-kindergarten group were asked about kindergarten.

- Tell us about your preschool. What do you do when you first get there?
Do you get to choose what you do there?
- Are you going to kindergarten? What do you think happens in kindergarten? Are you getting ready for kindergarten?
- What does your mom/dad tell you about kindergarten? Does your teacher talk to you about kindergarten? What does he/she say about kindergarten?
Do you want to go to kindergarten?

The interviews typically went on for 15-20 minutes, but times varied depending on how much the child wanted to talk. According to the QIs, child participants expressed a range of opinion regarding being in an interview situation. Adult descriptions of children's demeanor during the interviews were documented in field notes shortly after the interviews were conducted. For example, one QI described wrote the following in regards to Larita (one of the pre-k participants), "She is shy and answered mostly in short responses, rarely initiating talk." In a different interview with a pre-k participant (Ariana), a QI reported, "Overall, Ariana's demeanor stayed consistently pleasant, and when I brought out the puppet, she appeared to be more open to talking; she engaged in

dialogue with “Sheldon” and would ask him questions.” In this excerpt, the QI refers to a puppet named “Sheldon” used to elicit children’s responses to interview questions. Children also showed variability in their preference for the tools provided to make them feel more comfortable during the interviews.

I personally conducted three interviews with kindergarten child participants in the central region of the state. In my direct experience, I noticed the children I interviewed offered a range of responses to being in the interview situation generally speaking, in addition to the types of responses they shared to the interview questions. For instance, Jack was a very talkative participant and had a lot to say about his school and life experiences. Soon after we started the interview, he spontaneously decided to bring his backpack to the table and pulled out the contents within to show me materials and papers he used in both the classroom and at home. The artifacts within his backpack were incredibly useful in drawing out detailed descriptions of the daily routines that comprised a typical day for him in kindergarten.

The two other child participants I interviewed, Michael and Jordan, were not as engaged in the interview situation as Jack. For instance, their responses to the interview questions were often brief and they expressed some disinterest in participating in the interview situation. In one such interview, Michael was keen on playing with the play dough rather than talking at length about the topics embedded in the interview protocol. In order to maximize our opportunity conversing with one another, and to meet the expectations of the FCCS project, I utilized various tactics to encourage more full participation in the interview. As

an example, Jordan and I wrote a letter to his kindergarten teacher as a means to bring his attention to topics related to school. I used the information he provided to construct interview questions that reflected more contextualized understandings of his life experiences. The purpose of this was to also show Jordan I was actively listening to his responses, and was curious to learn more. Each interview conducted for FCCS was audio-taped and transcribed. Transcripts were read several times during the analysis phase for different purposes.

Child Participants

A total of 45 children were interviewed for FCCS, across various communities within Arizona. More specifically, the sample was drawn from 11 regions of the state, including urban, rural, border and tribal communities in northern, central and southern parts of Arizona. The children who participated in this study were members of “focal families.” Focal families were selected from a larger sample of primary caregivers interviewed at the onset of the FCCS project, and represented the distinctive geographic, socioeconomic, cultural, and linguistic region of the state (Arizona University Consortium, 2012). Two groups of children were interviewed for FCCS, one group was interviewed in the spring 2010 prior to the start of their kindergarten year (n =20), and the other was interviewed after they started kindergarten in the late fall/early winter 2011 (n= 25). Children interviewed ranged in age from 4.5 to 5.5 years, and were selected to participate because they either were getting ready to make the transition to kindergarten, or had just recently started kindergarten. Child interview participants also experienced a range of early childhood experiences in that they

either attended a Head Start program, public preschool program, private preschool program and/or child care facility, stayed home, or were cared for by friends, family, or neighbors. 25 of the child participants were male, and 20 were female. Of the 45 children participating in FCCS, 11 lived in the northern region of Arizona; 19 lived in the central region of the state; and 15 lived in the southern region. While all regions of the state are diverse in terms of their demographics, the northern region of Arizona is described as a rural area, whereas the central region is considered metropolitan, and the southern region of the state is a transitory locale considering its proximity to the U.S./Mexican border.

34 transcripts were analyzed for this study. 11 of the 45 interviews were excluded in that six interviews were conducted in Spanish, due to time constraints and a number of bilingual staff on the larger project, the transcripts were not translated to English; three child participants were members of a tribal community; and two interviews had missing data (e.g. incomplete transcripts). Of the 34 child participants whose interviews were analyzed, 13 lived in the central region of Arizona, nine lived in the northern region, and 12 lived in the southern region of the state. Table 1 provides information on the child participants within the pre-k cohort (including gender, description of pre-k experience, and a description of where they lived in relation to the three regions in Arizona). I deduced information about the children's pre-k experience from their interviews, field notes, and in some cases primary caregiver interviews conducted for FCCS. Each child participant was given a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality.

Table 1
Prekindergarten Child Participants

Child's name	Gender	Pre-K Experience	Area of Residence
Emerson	Female	Home-schooled	Central Region
Cameron	Male	Preschool	Central Region
Ana	Female	Some preschool, stayed home with mother	Central Region
Amari	Male	Preschool	Central Region
Thomas	Male	Head Start	Central Region
Kendall	Female	Preschool program for children with disabilities	Central Region
Jaden	Female	Does not specify	Northern Region
Dominique	Male	Head Start	Northern Region
Jamie	Female	Head Start	Northern Region
Kasey	Male	Preschool	Northern Region
Cole	Male	Preschool	Southern Region
Larita	Female	Preschool	Southern Region
Joseph	Male	Preschool	Southern Region
Ariana	Female	Preschool	Southern Region

Table 2 provides information on the child participants within the kindergarten cohort.

Table 2
Kindergarten Child Participants

Child's Name	Gender	Pre-K Experience	Area of Residence
Dakota	Female	Preschool	Central Region
Angeles	Female	Home Schooled	Central Region
Tyler	Male	Head Start	Central Region
Jordan	Male	Preschool	Central Region
Jack	Male	Preschool	Central Region
George	Male	Head Start	Central Region
Michael	Male	Head Start	Central Region
Pat	Female	Head Start	Northern Region
Chris	Not specified	Head Start	Northern Region
Devon	Not specified	Head Start	Northern Region
Jo	Not specified	Preschool	Northern Region
Ali	Not specified	Preschool	Northern Region
Bailey	Male	Does not specify	Northern Region
Kennedy	Female	Does not specify	Northern Region
Ariel	Male	Does not specify	Southern Region
Shea	Male	Preschool	Southern Region
Micha	Female	Does not specify	Southern Region
Jessie	Female	Does not specify	Southern Region
Rowan	Male	Does not specify	Southern Region
Skylar	Male	Preschool	Southern Region

Parameters Associated with Child Interview Data

Researchers on the FCCS team did not systematically collect certain demographic information on child participants (e.g. race/ethnicity). While interviews with primary caregivers may imply information in this regard, this

background information would not always be the same for children and their primary caregivers. In addition, analyses of the child interview data does not take into consideration culture, class, or gender as comparative variables for children's experiences transitioning to kindergarten. As such, findings presented in this dissertation present a generalized interpretation of children's perceptions of kindergarten. However, children's pre-k and kindergarten experiences are a means to explicate the regularities and diversity of children's participation in the transition.

Primary Caregiver Participants

As mentioned, a sub-sample of primary caregiver data from the FCCS project was used to provide background and deeper context for the findings from the child interviews. Specifically, I analyzed transcripts from interviews with 12 of the focal families living within the central region of Arizona to learn more about the approaches families used to prepare their children for kindergarten. I specifically analyzed the interviews from the primary caregivers whose children participated in the FCCS project. Note 13 mothers are included in this sample as both parents within one focal family co-participated in interviews. Among the 12 families, nine lived in metropolitan areas, while three lived in rural communities. Moreover, While FCCS used the phrase "primary caregiver" to encompass the range of family members caring for children; I describe the participants as "mothers" considering everyone within this sample identified as such. Table 3 provides further demographic information.

Table 3

Sub-Sample of Mother's Interviewed for FCCS

Mothers' Name	Related to Child Participant:	Total Number of Children in Family	Ethnicity
Reese and Margaret	Dakota	2	White
Barbara	Emerson	4	White
Florence	Angeles and Ana	2	Latina
Destiny	Amari	2	White
Kendra	Tyler	2	African American
Larissa	Cameron	2	White
Ann	Jack	2	White
Melissa	Thomas	2	White
Madison	George	3	White
Joan	Michael	2	White
Susan	Jordan	2	White
Catherine	Kendall	2	Mexican

It was evident the mothers in this sample had a range of educational backgrounds; however it was difficult to deduce more precise information from the interview transcripts. With this said, two mothers specifically mentioned they were working on their doctoral degrees, one mother said she earned her bachelor's degree, while another said she was close to earning her bachelor's degree. In addition, information about the educational background of the mothers was gleaned from the mother's discussions on their employment. For instance, Destiny explained she worked as an occupational therapist for a local school

district, which indicates she holds a Master's degree or other higher education credential in order to fulfill the obligations of this job.

The majority of the mothers interviewed said their primary job was parenting, and raising their children. Of the 13 mothers, 10 said they stayed at home, and four mentioned they worked outside of the home either full-time or part-time. The mothers who described their work primarily as being a “stay at home parent” explained this happened for a variety of reasons, including family choice, inability to secure a job, or that they were self-employed and conducted business from their homes. One mother interviewed was raising her children as single parent, but mentioned she received extensive support from their family members. Many of the families interviewed received support for health and human services through a number state and public agencies. For example, mothers discussed receiving support the Department of Economic Security (including Arizona Health Care Cost Containment System and the Department of Developmental Disabilities), Women, Infants, and Children (WIC), as well as the Head Start program.

Research Questions

The following questions are used to guide this study:

1. How are children thinking and talking about going to kindergarten?
2. How are parents thinking and talking about kindergarten?
3. To what extent are children and their parents co-constructing ideas about kindergarten?

Analyzing Child Interviews

To address my research questions, I analyzed transcripts similar to the “inductive and interpretive” approach used by Corsaro and Molinari (2005), looking for patterns within the data to identify themes that emerged as children talked about their experiences as pre-kindergarteners and kindergartners. What’s more, I turned to Clark’s (2011) notion of holistic insights to make sense of children’s references to kindergarten. Clark likens holistic induction to a kaleidoscope and explains qualitative researchers working with children make sense of children’s conversation by putting together bits and pieces to make sense of a whole concept or phenomena. She writes,

The small pieces of glass and colored materials in the toy, peered at with intensity, are flexibly adjusted and looked at in different lights and with different arrangements of the pieces on view. Qualitative researchers also regard their research material flexibly, trying out varied conceptual approaches and frameworks as potential explanatory structures (2011, p. 183).

First, transcripts from the child interviews were read in their entirety, along with the corresponding field notes, to help me become more familiar with the interview participants and the contexts of their lives. I learned about child participants’ likes and dislikes in relation to games and activities they do at home and within various community settings, their thoughts on family members and their descriptive accounts of their interactions with people considered to be significant others. In addition, I gained a better understanding of their ideas on

maintaining healthy lifestyles, and their experiences going to medical professionals. Reading the field notes was beneficial in that it helped me imagine the interview situation, and provided insight on how a child responded to engaging in such a structured form of conversation. I also used the field notes to determine whether children had a more difficult time, or were resistant to responding to certain questions over others. In addition, listening to the audio tapes during this phase of analysis gave me a chance to hear the flow of the conversation and allowed me to draw inferences about how comfortable a child was while speaking to the QIs. The practice of listening to the audiotapes also falls in line with the recommendations of several researchers working with children who assert important meanings or messages conveyed in spoken conversation may be lost or blurred in a transcribed interview (e.g. Clark, 2011)

Each transcript was read again but at this stage excerpts from each interview that specifically reflected periods whereby the child participant and the QI discussed topics relating to the child's preschool and/or kindergarten experience, as well the transition to kindergarten were extracted and compiled in a separate document. This step allowed me to organize the sections of the interview needed to complete in-depth analyses of children's perspectives about going to and being in kindergarten. Further, through the multiple readings of the transcripts I gained a better sense of how children's talk could help address my research questions. Following, the interviews were organized into two groups for data management purposes. More specifically, a file was created for transcripts of

interviews conducted with the pre-kindergarten child participants and another for kindergarten child participants.

In order to address the research question regarding how children think and talk about school, I sought to draw out “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973) of children’s perceptions of the most salient aspects of their own learning experiences both before and after they had entered kindergarten. I maintained notes and research memos to document the regularities and variances in the topics children discussed when asked questions like “What happens in kindergarten?” or “What do you learning in kindergarten?” Moreover, I drew on these points in the interview to create “thick descriptions” of children’s perceptions on being involved in pre-kindergarten and kindergarten routines and practices. In addition, the “thick descriptions” detail the child participants’ assumptions about kindergarten, as well as their reactions to being in kindergarten. In some instances, interviewers asked children to describe how they prepared for kindergarten, and explain who (or what) helped them get ready for school. The interpretive analysis of the data proved to be instrumental in this regard as the deeper reading of the text made it possible to discern the sources of support children interacted with as a means to construct their own ideas about kindergarten.

Transcribed interviews were sorted, categorized, and coded. At the onset, transcripts were sorted into basic categories so that I could address the research questions relating to the perspectives of children who had yet to enter kindergarten, and those intended to guide the analysis of the perspectives of

children who were already in kindergarten. General themes were created reflect children's descriptions of kindergarten. For example, the following codes were applied to the analysis of children's responses when examining the question "How are you getting ready for kindergarten?": a) transition activities b) transitional objects c) people as sources of support. In many instances, responses were double-coded to account for exactly who was cited as a source of support (e.g. mother, brother, teacher, nanny), or to describe the specific types of objects (e.g. storybooks, worksheets, flashcards) used to facilitate the transition process. The following are a few examples of themes used to code the interviews for children who had already started kindergarten: a) classroom routines, b) management strategies, c) language and literacy practices. Again, these codes were broken down to reflect the more specific information children shared with QIs, and were used to create sub-themes to explicate the most salient aspects of kindergarten children discussed during the interviews. I bring attention to the broad theme of "language and literacy" to illustrate this point. More specifically, many children talked about their experiences learning to read and write when asked to talk about what they did in kindergarten, while others talked about abilities to recognize letters, or identify sight words. Children's focus on language and literacy instruction when talking about kindergarten provided an opening to explore how their experiences are influenced by the current trends in early childhood. Additionally, the examination of their experiences engaging in language and literacy practices is used to align their perspectives with the discourses about kindergarten circulating among their parents, and even within a

broader sociological context. This comparison was done for each of the broader themes to reveal how meanings of kindergarten and kindergarten readiness are exchanged through the dynamic interactions and intersections nested within social systems, and to explore how perspectives are situated within a community of practice (Wenger, 1998).

Further, I conducted an inter-textual analysis of the data as a means to give deeper meaning to children's participation in early childhood education settings. Dell Clark (2011) writes, "The analyst of kids' material must work harder to find interpretative paydirt; the analyst must read between the lines, and painstakingly reflect analytically on social exchanges and patterned behaviors" (p. 179). More specifically, I read the through the text "looking awry" (Tobin, 2001) at children's discourse to provide more nuanced understandings of their perceptions of becoming and being kindergartners. This reading required the use of specific "tools," to find examples of binaries, repetitions, double-voicedness, non-dit, and aporias to generate more in-depth interpretations of children's talk about going to school. As an example, core binaries extracted from the text include work/play, choices/structure, and teachers as mean/nice. The binaries that emerged from the data shed insight on the elements of school that are valued and devalued by children (and adults by comparison). The inter-textual interpretations of served as a magnifying glass as I used the aforementioned tools to look closely at the data to make sense of what children were saying, to bring together the pieces of their conversations to find patterns across the child participants perceptions of school,

and to share holistic insights of their lived experiences during the transition period.

Analyzing Mothers' Interviews

Although the transcripts of the child interviews provided rich information about children's perceptions on becoming and being kindergarten students, I discovered I was missing important contextual information about their early learning experiences. For instance, child participants in the pre-k cohort did not share much in relation to their participation in transition activities. Children repeated the phrase "I don't know" often and I was curious to know why. Looking for more understanding, I read the parent interviews to figure out whether children genuinely did not know, were not participating in transition activities, or cared not to discuss the topic of the kindergarten transition.

As I examined the parent interviews, I discovered the mothers who participated in FCCS had very interesting things to say about the culture of kindergartens today. They also shared their conceptions of human development, how children are learning during the early years, and explained their thoughts on the purpose of pre-k and kindergarten. Upon this revelation, I decided to incorporate parent perspectives into this study. As such, data analysis for the parent interviews followed a similar procedure created for the child interview data. I read the interview transcripts as a whole, and then reduced them to sections that pertained only to parents' conversations about their child's school experiences. Following, I read and reread the data to identify, form and document impressions of the topics parents discussed. For instance, parents were asked to

describe their impressions of kindergartens today. An overarching impression (or theme) from this data was that their child's first school experience would be much different from their own. I then looked for data to support or disconfirm my impressions and interpretations of parents' perceptions. Additionally codes were created to provide in-depth explanations as to why parents imagined (or perceived) their child's school experience as being different from their own. This process of inquiry and analysis was repeated continuously as I took the steps necessary to address my research questions and to apply parents' perspectives to the broader context of this study.

Combining the Perspectives of Children and Adults

Dahlberg, Moss, and Pence (2007) discuss the discourse of meaning making and assert that contextualizing the work of early childhood institutions within a particular space and time is of critical importance. Considering there are multiple meanings of readiness circulating within the broader systems of early childhood in the U.S., parents and children are met with a complex task of figuring out how to make the most sense of what it means to get ready for school, and subsequently find success in throughout their educational trajectories. The analysis of parent interviews provided the opportunity examine how discourses about kindergarten are intersecting and circulating between children, families, and members of the early childhood community. Opening my interpretations to include parent perspectives gave way to analyzing the approaches parents use to prepare their children for school, and this examination was used to gain an

awareness of the degree to which parents and children have acquired “shared understandings” (Rogoff, 2003) about kindergarten.

Ensuring Validity and Trustworthiness

It is important to note the findings from this study illustrate the experiences of children and adults at particular time and within localized spaces. I compared the perspectives of parents and children with discourses circulating within the broader contexts of early childhood to give meaning to people’s perspectives on the kindergarten transition. In order to add to the validity of the data analysis I use rich, thick descriptions of the data to convey my findings. In line with symbolic interactionism, I situate the narratives of parents and children within the discourses circulating on kindergarten, readiness, and the transition process. The data used in this study is meant to provide in-depth understandings on the transition process from multiple perspectives, and is used to contextualize the transition experience from the viewpoints of children and adults within political, programmatic, practical realms of early childhood education. Each transcript was given a close read, and the themes used to guide data analysis emerged as I noted the repetition of particular phrases or references to specific tools or topics.

Potential Biases

One of the most significant biases in this study is the fact my adult lenses are used to interpret the child interview data. Moreover, children’s views on participating in various social routines during the transition process are presented without the process of member checking, meaning children did not have the

chance to validate my interpretations. In turn, my adult-oriented understandings and biases of early school experiences raise ethical concerns, and potentially cloud children's "authentic" experiences engaging in social interactions during the kindergarten transition. For example, I offer an interpretation of the repetition of the phrase "I don't know" in children's responses to questions like "What do you think happens in kindergarten?" Whereas the repetition of the phrase can be read through multiple lenses, reflect children's preoccupations with the topic of kindergarten, reveal their genuinely not knowing, or signify other underlying concerns, I build an argument the repetition of the phrase indicates a central issue in children's participation in the transition practices. More specifically, I contend children's positions as "legitimate peripheral participants" (Lave & Wenger, 1991) narrows or limits their understandings of the kindergarten. In order to validate this argument, I turned to interviews conducted with mothers in the FCCS project to gain a deeper understanding of how adults structured children's participation in transition activities. While findings from this aspect of the study are insightful, they are exploratory and lend themselves to further study.

Parameters of the Study

One of the most significant parameters to this study is the fact I did not interview the child participants myself. More specifically, I failed to connect with children on a personal level making it difficult to hear and see all of their expressions, censoring my understandings of their exchanges with adult researchers. Children have been described as expressing themselves in "a hundred different languages" (e.g. Edwards, Gandini, Forman, 1998). The use of

transcripts as a primary source of data made it difficult to understand how children's multimodal utterances contributed to the messages they intended to convey during the interviews.

Moreover, as I read and interpreted the child interview transcripts, made meaning of children's dialogue about their learning and school experiences, I was challenged by the fact I imposed many of my "adult ideological biases" on children's perspectives on the transition to kindergarten. Mandell (1988) argues adult ideological biases are formed through a combination of older people's personal histories, adults' experiential knowledge, in addition to personal beliefs about children and childhoods. Thus, as a means to resolve the internal conflicts I experienced, I reviewed research that examines the ethical considerations associated with conducting research with children (e.g. Alderson & Morrow, 2011; Alderson, 2006; Grover, 2010; Powell & Smith, 2009; Eide & Winger, 2005; Farrell, 2005; Davis, 1998). This body of literature was used to quell the ethical tensions that emerged as I analyzed children's data. I gained a stronger awareness of the complex challenges adult researchers face working with younger people – particularly in regards to the challenges associated with diminishing adult lenses, power, and authority within the context of research on children and childhoods. Further, these studies were used to inform my researcher reflections as the experiences of other researchers substantiated my critiques about my work "with" children (as discussed in the final chapter).

The variability in the skills of the QIs in regards to working with children, in addition to the range of responses children had in relation to being in interview

situations also created limitations to the data used in this study. More to this point, the substance and quality of the interview transcripts varied significantly. On one hand, it was clear children took the lead in many of the interviews and discussed topics that were interesting to them at the time the conversations took place. In these instances, children talked at length about the games they enjoyed playing, described activities that were taking place “in situ,” and led QIs on “tangents” to reveal nuances of their lives unrelated to school. On the other hand, adult researchers interviewing children demonstrated a range of ability in terms of their skills conversing with children. I attribute some of these variations to beliefs adult researchers held about conducting interviews with children. Through conversations I had with several members of the FCCS team, I learned adults were unclear of the purpose of the child interview, and expressed concern about whether children’s perspectives would help answer the questions of the larger research project. However, looking at the data through a metaphorical kaliedescope helped to make meaning of the sometimes very brief utterances children shared about going to school.

Other methodological challenges faced while analyzing the interviews included children responding to what they perceived to be “known answer” questions. While reading and analyzing the transcripts, several excerpts in the child interviews were interpreted as “enthymemes” (Tobin, 2001) in that child participants seemed to assume adult researchers had the contextual information needed to fully understand their conversations without having to make reference

to the aspects of their lives they brought up. Some child participants found the interviews to be awkward as well (as reported in field notes shared by the QIs).

Concluding Remarks

The research design and methodology were explained in this chapter, providing an overview of the FTFEE FCCS study, and data collection procedures for the child interview component. The approaches used to guide data analysis were also discussed, in addition to a brief review of the study's parameters. Chapter four presents the findings on parents' perceptions of the transition to kindergarten, providing background information on children's experiences preparing for the start of formal school. Chapter five brings children's voices and perspectives to the foreground to illustrate the learning and meaning making that goes on during their transition to kindergarten.

Chapter 4

BACKGROUND: MOTHERS' UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE TRANSITION

In this chapter, I explore findings related to my research question regarding parent perspectives on readiness, and their conceptions of kindergarten. I answer this question through an interpretative analysis of data regarding parental views on children's learning and engagement in participatory practices throughout the pre-k and kindergarten years. In addition, I analyzed parent's understandings of kindergartens today to examine how their perspectives on school are shaping children's routines, experiences, shared practices throughout the pre-k years into "readiness" practices. I share "thick descriptions" (Geertz, 1973) of parents' opinions about their children's first school experiences, paying close attention to adult perceptions of how kindergarten has changed in recent years or is different than their personal memories. The "thick descriptions" are used in turn to examine how parents' understandings of kindergarten influence the transition process. In addition, Rogoff's (2003) notion of guided participation was used to uncover the varied ways parents, early care and education professionals, and children structure children's participation in various routines and activities intended to promote school readiness. "Structuring occurs through choice of which activities children have access to observe and engage in, as well as through in-person shared endeavors, including conversations, recounting of narratives, and engagement in routines and play" (Rogoff, 2003, p. 287).

Throughout the early years, parents are their children's first teachers, and carry much responsibility for bringing children into communities of practice defined by kindergarten readiness. Adult privilege within the context of the U.S. affords parents greater power to control how children gain access to and participate in various routines and practices throughout their pre-k experiences. Corsaro (2005) argues children enter culture through their families at birth, and subsequently (or simultaneously) interact within different institutional locales (e.g. economic, cultural, educational, and community) as a means to acquire new understandings about their social worlds. Through these experiences, Corsaro writes, "It is these institutional fields, as well as in the family, that children begin to produce and participate in a series of peer cultures" (2005, p. 25). The analysis of data on the types of educational settings families interact within, along with an analysis of the joint enterprises established by parents, early care and education providers, and children provides a window into how specific experiences and tools are used to facilitate the transition process.

Moreover, findings from the interviews conducted with mothers provide a window into the broader spheres of influence affecting children's participation in transition processes and subsequent membership within kindergarten classrooms. This analysis brings attention to a pattern that illustrates parents' tendencies to share information and address issues about the transition with other adults, and seemingly limit children's participation in the transition process to observation and peripheral participation. With this in mind, I explore how power dynamics

within situated learning contexts, or localities of practice, serve to promote or inhibit children's participation during the transition to kindergarten.

In addition, data on mothers' viewpoints are aligned with the core elements of communities of practice to better understand children's "evolving form of membership" (Lave & Wenger, 1991, p. 53). This information allows for a close examination of the mutual structuring of participation (Rogoff, 2005) that transpires during the transition process, and provides an in-depth look at children's experiences through the perspective of Interpretive reproduction (Corsaro, 2005). The purpose of such an analysis is to problematize children's positionality within the transition process, and serves as a mechanism to diminish the prevalence of adults' perceptions of children being "legitimate peripheral participants" (Lave & Wenger, 2001), rather than full participants in their own right as they prepare themselves for kindergarten.

Organization of the Chapter

The sections in this chapter highlight the dominant themes that emerged from the data on parent perspectives. The information provided within each section illustrates how the mothers interviewed are making sense of today's kindergarten and school readiness. These perspectives are used to examine how transition experiences are influenced by "generational encounters" (Wenger, 1998, p. 99) that emerge during the pre-k years. In addition, this chapter gives insight on mothers' perceptions of their child's most basic needs in respect to school readiness, which in turn gives meaning to shared practices formed throughout the transition process. The beliefs of the mothers interviewed about

their child's basic needs delineate the elements embedded within the shared repertoires formed during the transition to kindergarten. Moreover mother's beliefs about children's basic needs are used to gain better understandings of how meanings of readiness are reproduced within communities of practice. Lastly, I draw out mothers' descriptions of the transition process to illustrate how children are engaged in participatory and reified practices as they prepare for school. Ultimately, the data derived from interviews conducted with mothers is used to provide answers to the research question that examines the extent to which parents and children co-construct ideas about kindergarten.

Defining Readiness Communities of Practice

The communities of practices that form in early childhood manifest in a number of ways, however the intentions of each are to prepare children for the entry into formal school. The families who participated in the FCCS study experienced a range of readiness routines and activities nested within the context of early childhood care and education, resulting in varied approaches to the transition process. While the mothers interviewed for FCCS primarily identified as "stay at home" parents, the majority also enrolled their child in some type of pre-k program. Of the 14 mothers included in this study, six mentioned their child went to a privately owned or center-based preschool; six said they participated in Head Start; and two parents cared for their children at home. It is important to note, most children were enrolled in half-day (or part-time) programs, and spent a good amount of time at home with their parents or other family members at home. In this regard, mothers had an integral role in

structuring children's participation in transition activities, and the narratives that unfold throughout this chapter draw out the elements of shared practice, and the processes of guided participation that facilitate the transition to kindergarten. The mothers also refer to the institutional locales that have influence over families' participation within readiness communities of practice.

Today's Kindergarten

There's no talkin' back to your teachers, there's no 'if you don't feel like playing, you don't play, so you go to that area if you want to play.'

There's no none of that with kindergarten. You can't talk back to your teacher and be like 'well I don't want to do this today, I'd rather do that.'

They don't have that in kindergarten. Kindergarten is just structure.

(Kendra, Tyler's mother)

Kendra's commentary about kindergarten is representative of what the mothers interviewed are finding out about the culture of kindergartens today. Further, The mothers described kindergartens as being "intense," "academic," "more educational," "when the going gets tough," and several parents were surprised to find out how "structured" or rigorous the kindergarten environment has become. Madison (George's mom) said her son encountered "culture shock" after starting school. Larissa (Cameron's mom) placed her son in an alternative program, but offered the following commentary on mainstream public schools:

[His teacher] makes him slow down [...] He gets like; he wants to do multiplication today. She's like okay. You probably could but let's start with where—you know. I don't know that the regular kindergarten

classroom is like that. I think it's pretty structured in terms of like what you're learning when and everybody is doing it pretty much at the same time.

Some mothers noticed the significant changes in kindergarten as they as they used their own memories on going to school as a point of comparison, often much different from what their child is currently experiencing. Destiny (Amari's mom) commented, "I mean I definitely probably think it is more academic than it was when I was younger." When asked if kindergarten has changed, Ann (Jack's mom) exclaimed, "Oh my gosh. A lot. It has changed a lot. I think it's like every grade has like shifted down. What he's learning now in kindergarten, I remember learning in first grade." Reese (one of Dakota's moms) offered this viewpoint, "Well, the kids are, I'd even think, are probably higher acuity. They're expected to do so many more things. Like she's already reading and writing. I'm pretty sure I didn't do that until I got out of kindergarten."

It is important to point out that while some mothers were surprised about the changes within kindergarten contexts, many were impressed with the advanced skills and knowledge their child displayed while participating in both pre-k and kindergarten contexts. Kendra succinctly stated, "So, to me, kindergarten is just an open avenue to figure out what alley Tyler may go down as far as education goes." Joan also expressed her impression of kindergarten in a positive light: "It has changed so much what they learn now, and it's amazing. You now I see Michael being able to read now. And now starting math. You know it's amazing what they've done." Echoing a similar opinion Madison stated,

[My son] is always coming home with something that he's done in school. I mean he's learned to write all of his letters since July. He could write his name before, but it's gotten a lot better. His confidence is a lot better than it was when he was just in Head Start.

While not many mothers explicitly talked about why there is change in the kindergarten culture, they give the impression they understand shifts in the systems of education brought on by current policy reform movements. And, of the 13 mothers interviewed two referred to No Child Left Behind, exemplified in the following excerpt.

I guess there's more push for like No Child Left Behind nowadays which can also go the wrong way and sometimes—it's like No Child Left Behind, 'Okay, let's just push you on to the next level. Let's let the next person deal with you,' kinda thing. It can be a good thing too, to where it's like, 'Okay, this kid needs to learn how to read before he can move on. We need to make sure everyone is to a certain area and certain part of the system before we move him on.' I don't know... (Catherine, Kendall's mother)

In addition, the mothers also demonstrate awareness recent initiatives to promote quality programs in early childhood education have restructured children's participation in pre-k experiences. For example, in the interview with Margaret and Reese (Dakota's mom), Margaret brought up the fact more children attend preschool programs, and alluded to children's participation in institutionalized settings becoming a more universalized practice. This realization

demonstrates one way adult beliefs about children's early learning experiences are different from their own childhoods. Margaret said,

I think for us, there are different expectations. I didn't go to school knowing how to write, cuz preschool was at that point really optional. I mean, I think, at that point there were only well-advantaged people who went to preschool. There were no Head Starts. There were none of that. So our first introduction was kindergarten. And then it was half day.

It also became evident that mothers interviewed are unsure about whether kindergartens have actually changed, as expressed in Larissa's comment:

I have a friend in my program who was helping prepare like her niece for kindergarten and she was looking at this list of things that they're supposed to know and it just seemed really intense in terms of like how much they have to have going in and maybe it's always been that way.

The mothers interviewed seemed to engage in personal debates while talking to QIs providing evidence they are also in the process of learning about kindergarten, and what they should expect during their child's first year of school. For example, Destiny's response to the question on today's kindergartens, and her use of words "definitely probably" brought my attention to a point of ambiguity embedded in mothers' beliefs about kindergarten. More specifically, Destiny stated, "Yeah, I mean I definitely probably think it's more academic than it was when I was younger. Probably what preschool, you know back then what preschool is now, but I mean now I expect Amari to lean a lot more like math and maybe pre-reading, and starting to do handwriting and everything." The way the

text falls apart in her remarks illustrates ways the mothers interviewed struggle to make a clear determination on whether kindergartens have changed. Moreover, I argue this is indicative of a “generational encounter” (Wenger, 1998) adults experience as they strive to make meaning of their child’s school experiences. Moreover, the mothers interviewed acknowledged they look through the transition experience “through a different lens” and in some ways realized their memories of their own childhoods created “boundaries,” (Wenger, 1998) or points of discontinuity within their understandings of kindergarten.

Thus, the mothers interviewed sought information from external sources within school and community contexts to validate whether their beliefs about kindergarten are reflective of the definitions on kindergarten perpetuated in today’s broader school contexts. Several mothers interviewed would draw comparisons between “normal” constructions of children and their own kin. Susan explained how she used a checklist to ensure her child was following “typical” development, she said:

Five-year-olds are really moody. I just started thinking what’s wrong with Jordan? Why is he doing this? Why is he acting this way. I finally just had to get on the computer and Google five year olds. All this information came up and it was true. One of the universities that I can’t remember, maybe Illinois? I can’t remember. They had your typical five year old. J- - was exactly spot on to every single one of those things. I just had to keep reminding myself he’s a normal five year old. He still is at that

transition stage where he's testing his boundaries but he's also very tired still from these new things that he's learning every single day.

For the most part, the mothers interviewed seemed to accept the changes in curriculum and instruction believing that the more "academic" kindergarten would "pay off in the end." However, several mothers interviewed placed their children in kindergarten programs alternative to public schools as a means to provide their sons and daughters with learning experiences that fell more in line with their family beliefs and values on education. They recognized they have power in shaping their child's educational experiences through open enrollment or school choice, and parents' foreshadowing about kindergarten played into their decision on the type of program they put their children into for school. For instance, Larissa placed her son in a full-day public Montessori program because of misgivings she had about "mainstream" public schools. She said, "I think we are struggling a bit just in terms of it's a lot for him but I think it's been really nice because he gets to do art and music and P.E. and library, what they call specials. That is probably his favorite piece to have because before he thought school was all work."

The mothers who placed their child in private or charter school programs were mainly concerned about the class sizes in public kindergarten classrooms as brought up in Margaret's remark, "their kindergarten has a 1 to 20 ratio. I can't even imagine. That's like a herd of kids. Twenty five -year-olds? It's got to be hard, which means there is only so much you can do." Joan placed her son, Michael, in a charter school because she thought he child would get "lost" in a

public school classroom. She said, “I think he would get lost, or pushed to the side. Put in a chair, and putting his desk over to the side, and not have the attention he needs, or the help he needs.” In addition to the concern on the high student/teacher ratio common to most public kindergartens, mothers also explained that school’s curricular approaches weighed on their decisions to forego public school education. Florence mentioned she prefers a “classical” approach to education over those she considers to be more contemporary. Her older daughter participated in a lot of “group learning” during kindergarten and she questioned the effectiveness of a cooperative learning approach. During the interview she also critiqued the use of computers in the classroom, and shared a belief that the children who are having “more trouble do a lot of computers instead of personal teaching instruction.” The presence of technology in kindergartens came up in several other interviews, and this topic is a point of contention for some of the mothers interviewed, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

Margaret: The other thing that we have to negotiate too is a lot of these schools really highlight the fact that they have all this technology. And to be quite honest, that’s...

Reese: That doesn’t impress us.

Margaret: No. I mean I think that’s a hindrance personally. They’re like, oh they log and do their –

Reese: Yeah, they get in the computer, put on their headphones, and do their work. I’ve heard parents really talking this up. They’re really impressed by the schools. They’re doing this in kindergarten.

Seemingly, adults will choose programs that support more individualized approaches to education when they have opportunities to place their children in

schools of that align more with their preferences. The mothers interviewed also allude to finding schools that align their child's interests and needs, but upon close examination of the interviews it appears children are consulted with at minimum when decisions about school placement are made. I also bring attention to mothers' discussions on their preferences for alternative schools, as their beliefs about appropriate pedagogy and practice in kindergarten shows how adults' align with different constructions of children and childhoods. The critiques on technology support the argument that adults strive to preserve certain types of childhood. Mothers' beliefs about the practices "appropriate" for children and childhood gives meaning to the "localities of practice" established within communities that define children's ways of belonging (Lave and Wenger, 1991).

Mothers' use their perceptions of kindergarten to generate beliefs about school readiness. The following section exemplifies ways the mothers interviewed hold beliefs about readiness that align with the definitions conceptualized in recent research (as described by Ladd, et al., 2006; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003; Wesley and Buysse, 2003; Graue, 1996) and are used to determine whether their child's "readiness" skills fall in line with the reified expectations set within the broader context of schooling.

School Readiness

"They say they don't want to push the child but then now they have that No Child Left Behind..." (Kendra). Keeping in mind the circulating discourses on kindergarten, mothers' meaning making on the notion of readiness provides a window into the ripple effects of the systemic influences within the early

childhood community. The interviews with mothers reflect a variety of meanings on “readiness,” illuminating the vastness of the socially constructed, varied ideas of this notion. For instance, some mothers used age as a determinant to define readiness, and it perpetuate assumptions children at a specific stage of life will have reached the level of maturity required to participate in a kindergarten classroom. Kendra talked about her daughter’s age in the context of readiness: “[My daughter] was born after the school mark, so she’s goin’ to be a late starter when it comes to her education.” In this perspective, older (or bigger) children should have the abilities to hold their attention for extended periods of time, and understand more complex aspects of their social and academic worlds. Parents will use the age criterion as a reference point gauge how their child might compare with their peers in the classroom. Susan talked about her younger son’s age as a deciding factor for his entry into kindergarten (along with his physical stature), she said, “He just turned three so I think he could start in two years for kindergarten. Based on his size, I think he’ll need to go because he’s just a bigger kid.” Later in the interview she articulated her thought-processing:

I mean, I would like to see him in that aspect because size-wise he will be bigger than a lot of the kindergarteners going in cuz he's a big boy. I would like to see him academically there as well so the teachers don't look into him as this young, inexperienced kid who should have been held back.

Joan’s statement brings attention to other aspects of “readiness” in that she described a “ready” kindergartener through a more social-constructivist

perspective. Moreover, in line with social constructivist beliefs, the mothers described a “ready” child as someone who displays pro-social behavior including following classroom rules and routines, working cooperatively with others, and developing positive relationships with peers. Through a social-constructivist perspective children are also expected to exhibit specific skills connected to developmental domains and academic content areas so that adults can determine whether students are making and sustaining adequate progress.

The divergent meanings of readiness circulating within the discourses in early childhood complicate mothers’ perceptions on how they should engage their child in specific participatory practices throughout the transition period. In line with the common perspectives on children’s development, the mothers interviewed seem to view readiness through two lenses – either they trust their child will be just be “ready” for school and minimal intervention is needed, or they will systematically provide opportunities for their child to acquire the basic skills needed for a successful transition. Findings suggest mothers use varied processes of guided participation to facilitate the transition to kindergarten. For example, Larissa perceived Cameron’s (her son’s) early learning experiences as a means to help him acquire intrinsic motivation to develop new or different understanding of his social world. She explained “right now it’s really about exposure and being positive.” Yet even though Larissa seems more holistic in her approach about the transition, later in the interview she expressed some ambivalence about her son’s readiness. She said,

I mean academically I'm not too concerned because he's I mean he already knows quite, he seems like he already knows quite a bit. He still has a hard time, I mean like when I think of it like writing letters and numbers, but I mean to me that's what he's supposed to learn in kindergarten so I don't [laughter]. Like he tries it, practicing writing and stuff, but I mean I'm sure it's just a developmental stage where we're at, but I don't—that's not really a concern.

Several mothers who also expressed feeling comfortable with their child's readiness made similar comments. For instance, Joan stated:

The kindergartens are there to teach 'em. Even if they haven't had the preschool. That's what kindergarten is for. Is, you know most parents now a days teach their kids the ABCs. They teach 'em, you know, their numbers, and stuff like that. So I mean they're, they've got a base of what they need to know before they go in.

These conversations highlight discontinuities in parents' beliefs as they strive to acknowledge and appreciate their child's skills and abilities, while also examining how these skills and abilities fit into what others would define as being a "ready" kindergartner. The commentary by both Joan and Larissa is particularly intriguing in that it raises the question, "what is learning?" as well as "how do children learn?" In contrast to Wenger's definition on learning and the notion of Interpretive reproduction (Corsaro, 2001) parents perceive children's meaning making and construction of knowledge as a non-participative activities. It is evident parents have the impression children "just know" things or "absorb"

information, rather than actively acquiring new knowledge or enhancing their current understandings of their social worlds. The following narrative illustrates Barbara's interpretation of her younger daughter's (Emerson) development of alphabet knowledge and phonemic awareness.

Emerson did sit through a lot of that with [myself and Caitlin, older daughter] last year. And she's actually I would say probably she's probably a year ahead reading wise than Caitlin was. That like I kinda could see her reading in the next six months, because she sat through Caitlin in kindergarten, and she knows her letters by sight, which Caitlin did not know. She knew—Caitlin knew most of her letters by sight when we started kindergarten, but she did not know them all. Emerson also knows most of the sounds they make, because we sat and did our aaa apple, bbb butterfly song. And Emerson absorbed it even though I wasn't making it a requirement that she knew it.

In this reflection, Barbara seems to be interrogating her own understanding of how children pick up new information. As she mentions, she noticed her daughter "absorbed" information as she employed didactic teaching approaches with her older daughter, and as a result is "ahead" in her development of literacy skills.

The mothers interviewed used their understandings of kindergarten to substantiate their beliefs about whether their child would be "ready," and subsequently find success in school. Meanings of "readiness" set by benchmarks and standards for academics as well as social skills and knowledge has influenced

mothers' understandings on what are necessary participatory practices for school preparedness. As such, parents noticed that school's expectations narrow children's opportunities to engage in activities that reflect a more holistic social experience. Moreover, a binary emerged in the data that revealed a valuation over children's performance over learning. Consequently, the mothers interviewed seemed complacent with the propensity for schools to discount children's individual interests, and pay attention to the skills identified as having long-term effects on children's later school experiences.

Further, parents' ideas about kindergarten and school readiness appeared to influence the types of transition practices that happened at home. In addition, the information the mothers obtained from various institutional locales was seemingly used to build dialogue with their children as a means to develop shared understandings of what to expect when kindergarten starts. The following section deconstructs parents' perspectives on children's basic schooling needs, which in turn gives context for the types of transition practices children participate in as a means to get ready for school.

Children's Needs for School

Joan described her thoughts on children's social, emotional, and academic needs today. In her response she stated,

The kids do need something before they go into kindergarten. You can tell especially in [my son's] class the ones who did not go to pre-school before they hit kindergarten. You can tell just you know the way they

can't deal with the changes in the classroom. You know. I think it makes a difference.

Joan's comments are very open to interpretation; however, she raised an interesting point when she asserted that children need "something" before they start school. Her opinion repeated among the other mothers interviewed, and they described children's needs in more detail throughout the interviews. More specifically, the mothers interviewed described their children's needs for kindergarten entry in three different categories: the need to know the "basics", to develop a "love" for learning, and to feel comfortable interacting in a classroom environment. I argue the mothers' beliefs about their children acquiring only basic knowledge influences younger people's membership within readiness communities of practice, and reinforces their positions as legitimate peripheral participants. The parents interviewed explained that part of their roles in supporting children throughout the transition was to introduce their young learners to the "basics". The 'basics' according to the mothers interviewed are a set of academically-oriented skills comprised primarily of language and literacy concepts and mathematics concepts. Larissa also offered her perspectives on "the basics," or what she refers to as "base knowledge" when asked to talk about what she saw on a "list" delineating readiness skills she described:

A good bit of math and like obviously like all the letters and the colors and numbers. There's just a lot of base knowledge, which again, maybe kids know but I could see how it'd be easy for a parent that didn't know to be

preparing kind of all along to get to that point and realize, oh my gosh.

I've just been taking care of this little person. There's a lot do.

Joan also brought attention to concept of the "basics" as she discussed the types of things children need to know before kindergarten. She stated:

Most parents now a days teach their kids the ABCs. They teach 'em, you know, their numbers, and stuff like that. So I mean they're, they've got a base of what they need to know before they go in.

When asked to discuss her child's most pressing needs for school, Catherine said, "To learn her phonics, and to be loved." Mothers' commentary shared on language and literacy is evidence of the impact of Science Based Reading Research on early reading programs on family or home literacy practices. Instead of talking about literacy in the sense of enjoying good books with their child, the parents interviewed discussed their child's understandings of specific concepts including alphabet recognition, phonemic awareness, and sight-word recognition. Further the mothers' attention to language and literacy, and mathematics activities demonstrates a form of "mutual bridging of meanings" (Rogoff, 2003) that occurs between parents, early care and education professionals and the institutional localities situated within early childhood education. Moreover, the focus on the aforementioned content areas is reflective of the narrowing of curriculum that has occurred as performance-based instructional practices have moved into the field.

Mothers' also held beliefs that children should demonstrate proficiency with 'basic' social-emotional skills before they enter into kindergarten

classrooms. Catherine shared her thoughts in regards to the value of her daughter's preschool experience; she explains, "She needed it. She needed the socialization with other kids to get away from her [siblings]. It helps them to know that there are other people that are out there, kids my age that I can play with." The mothers interviewed expressed a desire for their child to demonstrate proficiency over "basic" skills. On one hand, they see how the "basics" lay the foundation for their continued learning, while on the other hand they recognize basic knowledge as a mechanism for easing the transition.

While the topic of the 'basics' might seem mundane, a deeper examination of mothers' meaning making in this regard sheds insight on their underlying beliefs about children and children's participatory capacities within the systems of education. Several mothers interviewed described learning in kindergarten as more educational, than a pre-kindergarten learning. For example, when asked to describe the preparation her son's preschool provided, Destiny said,

They don't do any real like academics per se like I've even asked because he has been expressed interest in learning how to read, and I asked them if they had any type of like reading program, and they said, "No" it's all like pre-reading.

As mothers' discussed their child's acquisition of 'basic' skills it became apparent that some believed the basics were undermining their child's full capacities to engage with specific tasks or activities. For example, Florence shared her thoughts on the basic curriculum children follow in the beginning years of school, she asserted:

They know their letters. They know their phonics. I think there should be a more intense like push with those kids to actually start reading and do that, instead of like coming home with—we're on letter C today. Writing C's, you know it's just—also like their dexterity or their writing skills are good [...] That's just very still basic and standard.

Ann expressed a similar opinion with regard to her son's experiences learning basic concepts in kindergarten, she said: "He brings home the papers. It's reading. They do a lot of words in reading and writing. They've done some math. Basic math concepts like adding the numbers and stuff." She also mentioned that she has a hard time engaging her son in schoolwork at home, and attributed his lack of interest to the type of work teachers ask them to do. Additionally she credits her son with having the wherewithal to grasp basic concepts. She explained:

He is a smart boy [...] When he gets something, he doesn't want to be told 50 times how to do it. When he comes home and I sit down I'm like okay, read this, sound it out like this or try to do that. I think he just gets frustrated. Like, 'I know how to do it mom so just get off my back.

Mothers' flat impressions on the work children do in kindergarten indicates children are challenging adults' beliefs about their own learning and motivation, and supports the argument schools aren't doing enough to be ready for children. To counter dominant practices in kindergarten, Reese shared this insight: "I think in kindergarten kids need to be interactive with each other. They

need to be developing their creative skills. They need to be manipulating things with their hands, hands-on learning.”

Further, the mothers interviewed expressed hopes that their children would develop a “love” for learning. Reese and Margaret alluded to the pre-k years as a time whereby their children were “still coming into themselves,” and for this reason should be provided with lots of opportunity to explore a variety of interests, topics, and skills. Even though mothers interviewed want their children to benefit wholly from their educational experience, and maintain an identity as a life-long learner, they face the reality of working within today’s school system. As such the ambitions parents express for their child to “love to learn” are clouded by the demands for children to demonstrate proficiency in specific skills and knowledge, that are often measured through performance-based assessments. Larissa’s statement exposes some uncertainty she faces in regards to learning and schooling, she stated:

I want to find a balance of not like making Cameron feel like there’s pressure, which I think sometimes the schools - there is this kind of sense of like you have to know, and the testing stuff, and all of that that there’s things you have to know. That kinda bleeds into how parents feel about what their kids should be knowing or learning.

She made this comment when reflecting on a time her son asked her “when am I done?” It is hard to discern whether her son was asking her about being done with school, or done with learning, but she replied to the question by saying “hopefully never” and explained, “you are always learning throughout

your whole life.” Florence also shared an interpretation of the “balance” she tried to establish between her children’s love for reading, and meeting schooling requirements. She said:

I just really want them (her daughters) and want her to have a love for reading and not being frustrated with reading and she can read level one and two books, which is fine. I know once she can read like level three and four – that love of reading is what I really want them to come away with more or Elisa to come away with more.

The mothers interviewed also recognized the importance of classroom procedures, and hold an expectation their child identify as being a “good student” by adhering to the rules and routines set by kindergarten teachers. One of the most significant changes parents discuss in terms of children’s routines relates to the shift toward more structured learning, as discussed by Barbara. She said:

I’m anticipating doing kindergarten at home with her, I want her to get more into the idea that at some point you have to sit down and do some work, because next year it won’t be an option. It will be a requirement.

Preparing Children for Kindergarten

To explore mothers’ perspectives on readiness in greater depth, I examined the shared practices (e.g. activities, tools, and routines) they established to facilitate the transition to kindergarten. Moreover, mothers’ conversations about their families’ involvement in transition practices were examined through a lens of “guided participation” (Rogoff, 2001) to make sense of the different approaches parents used to prepare their child(ren) for kindergarten. The mothers

interviewed provide accounts of the opportunities children have to participate directly and indirectly in transition activities.

As a means to build excitement for school, some mothers would use the practice of purchasing new materials, tools, or objects to promote children's feelings of becoming "bigger" as Madison puts forward. She told her son (Gabe):

Oh you get all these cool things. You get a backpack. You get new clothes. You get crayons of your own and pencils and a folder. He kind of was like, 'Oh I get all this new stuff just to go to kindergarten?' I'm like, 'Yeah, if you don't go to kindergarten you don't get all this cool stuff.' You know the preschool kids don't get this stuff.

Later in the interview, Madison shared in more detail her perception of the importance of buying new things as part of the transition process. She said, "We made sure we went shopping for kindergarten clothes. You know and made it a big, a big deal. You know, Oh here's your backpack for kindergarten. Here's your new clothes for kindergarten. You know?" The products bought for kindergarten symbolize one aspect of the process of children's progression into "big kid" status wherein parents indicate the new things are important for acculturation within the kindergarten classroom.

In the following excerpt Reese and Margaret also discuss how shopping for new things served as a transition practice:

Interviewer: Now, did you guys do anything special to help kind of prepare her for kindergarten so to speak?

Margaret: She got a new backpack.

Reese: Yeah, she got a new backpack.

Margaret: And a new water bottle.

Reese: I think she might have—yeah. Pretty much, yeah, yeah, that's it. Well, and they started in June.

Margaret: She got a new outfit for the first day of school.

In addition to the new backpacks, lunch boxes, and clothing children acquired, parents also brought to light the other artifacts, or 'cultural tools' children used as they transitioned to school – namely books and other concrete learning materials. Their discussion on these types of materials reinforces a trend many children experience during the transition whereby a shift away from play-based instruction and hands-on learning occurs, and adults introduce children to more structured activities taught through didactic modes of instruction. For example, as Larissa's eldest child (Cameron) transitioned to kindergarten, she developed a heightened awareness of the opportunities available to create (or maximize) "teachable moments" that emerged while interacting with her children. In the following excerpt, Larissa described how her perspectives on book reading changed as she became more cognizant of different aspects of literacy development, she said:

I know even now there's a Dr. Seuss book, Dr. Seuss's ABCs and Cory loved that book. I read it a lot because it has a lot of rhythm, but now looking back like he got a ton of his letter sounds from that book because it uses all these words that start with each letter. I don't know if you guys have seen that. Even just thinking about what books you choose and why.

There's a lot of books out there but they don't necessarily focus on things that are educational.

Participation in Pre-K Programs

As Reese and Margaret discussed their approach to the transition they brought up the fact their children started school in June, highlighting another transition practice that occurred among some families interviewed – participating in summer school. She made the following comment:

I think part of the transition too that I think made it easy, transitioning to the new school was that we started in summer school, which is essentially a la carte. You go as much or as little as you want. So what we did with both of the kids. He was starting school for the first time. And they started together at the new campus. So there's some security in that. And for a while, in fact, this year on the days when he doesn't go, because he goes Monday, Wednesday, Friday. On Tuesday and Thursday, she would get kind of nervous, cuz just the security of knowing her brother was on campus was nice for her because she does struggle socially, especially at the beginning of the year having trouble settling in [...] She felt comfort knowing her brother was there so we went all summer, Monday, Wednesday, Friday both kids went all summer. And so I think that was a good part of the transition too. Summer school is a little bit— Summer school is more laid back. Summer school is more laid back, and then she had a couple of months to kinda settle into the new campus.

Whereas Reese and Margaret described summer school as being instrumental in instilling a sense of security for their daughter (Dakota), Kendra's description of her son's (Tyler) experience in a summer program shed insight on the ways in which participation within summer school serves as a priming event to teach children about the more rigorous kindergarten culture. She said,

When Tyler was goin' to the –at the summer school program, it was just like a regular Head Start. They did the same work that they would do but just more –it was more of a structured setting to get him ready for kindergarten, but see, with Head Start it's all fun and games. When they get to kindergarten that's when the goin' gets tough.

While some mothers associated their child's participation in "summer school" with a positive transition experience, many others credited their child's general preschool experience with providing their child with the basic skills and knowledge needed to support the entry into kindergarten. As discussed, most of the mothers interviewed enrolled their children in some type of pre-k program ranging from private preschool centers to Head Start programs. The mothers whose children attended Head Start programs for instance were highly complementary and "amazed" by the opportunities provided throughout the pre-k experience. Several commented on the advantages to social-emotional development as conveyed in the excerpt from Larissa's interview:

I think socially there's a lot to be said for being in kind of a group setting.

I mean the things that you have to negotiate are pretty big. I think he feels

like he's part of something and I think he feels valued. He teaches younger kids so he feels important and it reinforces his own learning.

Some mother's interviewed also explained how preschool helped children develop understandings on schooling routines, as exemplified in Catherine's comment:

I think they need preschool cuz it gets them ready for all-day kindergarten now cuz preschool ends up being the half-day kindergarten. I mean the kids that don't have it, you see when they get to kindergarten, it's like, "I can't handle this." I don't know. I think this pre-school is one that they should have [...] I think preschool helps by being away from them so they don't have that separation anxiety.

Melissa and Paul shared their opinions about building awareness on new routines, but in a different light. When asked to talk about what it means to prepare their son (Thomas) for kindergarten they said they wanted to get him used to "taking care of himself." They further elaborated on this point by stating specifically they would like for their son to achieve "getting up in the morning, and taking showers, and finish up with potty training." In many ways, children's identity as a "big kid" centers on their capacities to function independently in communities. In another regard, Madison believed her son is less "sheltered" in the kindergarten classroom because of his participation in a Head Start program. She said her son acquired the "developmental skills to interact with other kids" while attending Head Start.

Participation in School-Based Transition Activities

Only a small number of mothers within this sample commented on taking part in direct transition practices organized by kindergarten teachers or elementary school personnel. The activities mentioned by the mothers interviewed related mainly to visiting schools, attending open houses or curriculum nights, filling out enrollment papers, and corresponding with teachers. Madison experienced an exemplary transition wherein her family participated in a “Meet the Teacher Night,” received a letter from the teacher, was provided a school supply list, and continually engaged in conversation with the kindergarten teacher as the transition moved forward. She expressed appreciation by stating, “I felt it was helpful because I kind of knew what she [the teacher] expected. I kind of knew how she was gonna have things going.”

The mothers’ opinions on school-centered practices provides some evidence that families’ connections with kindergarten classrooms before the start of school are instrumental in assuaging anxieties for parents in that they are better acquainted with the classroom environment, curricular matter, rules and routines, as well as teacher expectations. These perspectives also give credence to the recommendations put forward in the broad literature base. As parents prepare for the start of school, it is important for them to be well informed as they believe this will help them gain a better sense of ‘control’ over their child’s school experience.

Despite mothers’ appreciation for opportunities to be more acquainted with the kindergarten context during the transition phase, some offered critiques of the practices organized by schools. Susan recounted her family’s experience,

“We did have a back-to-school meet-the-teacher night, but when you have 46 kindergartners and their parents all coming in, it was difficult to kinda just see—they had just built a new classroom as well I should say.” Ann had limited opportunity to engage in any of the school’s planned transition activities because of issues she faced finding child care. When she was asked to describe her expectations for kindergarten she mentioned,

I don’t really know. I know that they had a curriculum night where we could go and learn all about it. I couldn’t go because I had [my younger son] with me. It was at night, and [my husband] wasn’t here. I can’t sit and learn about that stuff when I have two kids.

Several other mothers interviewed said they had no opportunities to participate in school-initiated transition activities. For instance, Larissa said she did not have contact with anybody at her child’s school because they had just moved to town; additionally Melissa did not discuss kindergarten with anyone at her son’s elementary school. It is important to note these mothers were specifically asked about whether they had contact with anybody at the elementary school. Other parents in the sample might have interacted with kindergarten teachers, or school administration but it is hard to ascertain whether these experiences actually occurred. I bring this up as I think it is important to acknowledge the inconsistencies of the practices employed throughout the transition to kindergarten. The mothers not involved in school-initiated transition practices seemed indifferent to the fact they were not afforded opportunities to interact with their child’s kindergarten teacher. Instead, they sought information

from alternate resources, or simply trusted their child would be “ready” for school. When asked if she had any feelings about not communicating with staff at the elementary school Ann replied by saying “No. Not Particularly.” She went on to explain she felt her son would do “fine” during the transition, and said “He’s ready for it. [...] I’d probably be more concerned about it but he likes to learn. He comes home and is willing to sit and read books, do math homework, play games...” She also expressed confidence in her son’s “readiness” in that he participated in playgroups, church, and preschool.

As mentioned only a few mothers talked about participating in transition practices initiated at schools, which leads to the question - what are parents doing at home, or within the familial context to support their child’s transition?

Parents shared information on their children’s participation in learning activities at home prior to the start of kindergarten, as illustrated in Madison’s commentary:

We did a lot of stuff during the summer as far as writing and coloring and teaching him to use scissors properly. How to glue things together. I have a lot of like little workbooks and stuff that I picked up from the Dollar Stores and Walmart and stuff. We would sit down in the afternoons when the other two would go to sleep, and we would two or three pages of letters or words or numbers or whatever, shapes and stuff.

As mothers discussed the practices they engaged their children in at home, it became evident there is a belief among families that part of the responsibility in preparing their child for kindergarten involves “exposing” them to particular facets of school as a means to familiarize the expectations set by the communities

of practice for learning and doing school. In the following section, I describe mothers' perceptions of their roles as their child's "first teacher," and later in this chapter I use mothers' conceptions of children's learning to examine how families make meaning of readiness, and analyze the factors parents consider to be significant as part of children's early experiences.

Culture Shock: Children's Responses to the Start of School

A pattern emerges in mothers' recollections of their child's first few weeks of school (the adjustment period) that indicates the entry into kindergarten is not as smooth as families anticipate. The following excerpts exemplify some children's experiences entering into kindergarten classrooms, and illustrate the challenges families face as children make meaning of the kindergarten experience. Susan described:

[My son] was really excited about it. That first week I just felt so bad for him though. He was so excited the first couple days. He was real excited and then Thursday or Friday came that first week of school and he freaked out. I don't want to go to school and ran upstairs and was crying and hiding behind his bed.

Reese mentioned:

I think we're what three months into school now, and she's finally, I think, kind of settled in socially. I mean she's always struggled socially. And now, I think, she's doing better than she's probably ever been before. And lately, she's been really, I mean, it's been up and down kind of with her behavior at home and stuff. But she's been lately seeming a lot more

mature and a lot more like on top of things. And helping around the house more without being asked or at least without grumbling. And so, yeah, she's matured a lot. And I think this kindergarten class has really helped her, especially being in a class with older kids and just in a place where more is expected of her, so she can expect more of herself.

While adjustment periods exist in any new situation or experience, and children's uneasiness or "rough" transition could be described as being typical it think the entry into school could be more fluid if children have a stronger awareness of the changes they will encounter once the school year begins. And even though children are directly participating in transition practices, often times they are left unaware that they are engaged in activities to help them prepare for kindergarten. I argue this unawareness leads to the "culture shock" some children experience when they start school. I argue adults and "more knowledgeable others" can do more provide children with more nuanced information about kindergarten to prevent or diminish the likelihood of "rough" transitions.

Concluding Remarks

This chapter provided an interpretive analysis of parents' opinions about kindergarten, kindergarten readiness, along with an examination of their beliefs on children's basic needs for the first year of school. Additionally, I examined how parental approaches to the transition process position children within the transition process to make deeper meaning of children's membership within a communities of practice. The following chapter brings children's perspectives to the foreground. Children's perspectives are examined to highlight young people's

“interpretive reproductions” of their engagement in a readiness communities of practice. Additionally, children’s talk about transition practices, and kindergarten routines allows for a close analysis of the processes involved in becoming and being kindergarteners.

FOREGROUNDING CHILDREN'S EXPERIENCES

What do children know about kindergarten? What do children know about learning? These two important questions require thoughtful and deep consideration. My assumptions entering the study were that children enter into kindergarten classrooms with an understanding that the “rules” have changed; the expectations for their participation within the school context is different; and that they are (or will be) acquiring new identities as kindergartners. Findings from this study provide evidence children’s conceptions about kindergarten, whether they are preparing for the start of school or already engaged in a kindergarten classroom, form through the numerous interactions and shared practices that comprise school contexts. Children and parents followed cultural routines to make sense of the transition to kindergarten and this important “rite of passage” in children’s school experiences. A point emphasized in this dissertation is the fact children are members of a community of practice and engage in a myriad of activities structured by other “more knowledgeable others” (Vygotsky, 1978) and peers to gain better understandings of their roles as people growing up within schools and society. Rogoff, et al. (2001) write “both children and adults engage in learning activities in a collaborative way, with both varying and coordinated responsibilities to foster children’s learning” (p. 7). As I examined the child interviews, I focused specifically on children’s references to cultural routines and tools to gain a deeper understanding of the resources they used during the kindergarten transition to learn about the new phase of their school experience.

Corsaro's (2005) notion of "interpretive reproduction" was used as a framework for understanding children's talk about becoming and being kindergartners. Corsaro asserts, "interpretive reproduction views children's evolving membership in their cultures as reproductive rather than linear" (2001, p. 24), and he emphasizes children's participation in communities and social contexts as mechanism for children to make sense of cultural routines and practices. Wenger (1998) also contends learning and membership within communities of practice are established through "shared repertoire" and "mutual negotiation." He writes,

Through the negotiation of meaning, the interplay of participation and reification makes people and things what they are. In this interplay, our experience and our world shape each other through reciprocal relation that goes to the very essence of who we are (p. 70-71).

Moreover, a joint enterprise for children and families engaged in "readiness" communities of practice is that children experience positive transition into elementary school wherein individuals feel equipped to adapt to the rigors of a more formal classroom environment. This chapter offers an interpretive analysis of children's talk about getting ready for, and being in kindergarten to make sense of their engagement in participatory and reified practices comprising readiness communities of practice.

The purpose of this chapter is to give more nuanced understandings of the numerous ways children think and talk about kindergarten. Additionally, I "listen" to children gain a better understanding of how their participation in

particular transition practices and school routines have influence over their learning experiences throughout pre-k and kindergarten. For instance, during the interviews, children would literally demonstrate their proficiency with academically-oriented concepts to show interviewers what they know in terms of educational practices. The child participants' proclivity to 'perform' their skills provided a window into the school routines children interact with throughout the pre-k to kindergarten transition. More specifically, I analyze children's descriptions of the kindergarten context, paying close attention to the routines and practices they consider significant to their school experiences. Further, I examine how children participate in school routines to gain a better understanding of their roles and membership during the transition process, and within kindergarten classrooms.

Organization of the Chapter

First, I analyze pre-kindergarteners' talk about kindergarten, specifically examining the "interpretive reproductions" of getting ready for school. Subsequently, I deconstruct children's discussion of being in kindergarten, looking specifically at how they talk about differences between kindergarten and their pre-k experience. I also draw out kindergartners' ideas on participating in various practices within classroom contexts, particularly as they relate to learning skills that are more advanced and knowledge. Children's voices are used to explore the extent to which adults facilitate or inhibit children's agency and membership within schools. Findings presented in this chapter bring attention to children's alternative viewpoints on the transition to kindergarten. Further,

children's dialogue on going to school provides adults with a better understanding of how adult-child interactions influence the life experiences of younger people while preparing for the start of school. More to this point, the information children provide about their experiences going to school illustrates ways they are participating in structured activities intended to promote a fluid transition. In addition, the child interviews are used to better understand how children make meaning of shared practices produced throughout the transition. While I attempt to present the findings from the child interviews in a linear or sequential manner, the voices of pre-kindergartners and kindergartners are interspersed throughout this chapter to impart a depiction of children's experiences transitioning to school from perspectives representative of vantage points.

Making Sense of Children's Talk about Kindergarten

This chapter imparts my views on children's dialogue about getting ready for school, and learning new school routines. Young children make use of a range of verbal and nonverbal expressions to convey their thoughts about their daily life experiences. In order to make sense of children's talk about kindergarten, I gave each transcript a close reading and searched for clues within the text to make sense of patterns and themes that emerged from the data. For instance, I present an interpretation of the repetition of the phrase "I don't know", and argue children's tendencies to use this phrase indicates a central issue in the transition process. More specifically, I assert children are not well aware they are direct participants in transition processes and school routines. Interesting to point out is

the fact my interpretation is drawn from “non-dits” brought to light as children were asked to discuss their knowledge of kindergarten and school routines.

I bring attention to this point in that I “listened” to children’s conversations about school by studying their direct utterances, but also looked beyond their words to give meaning to their understandings on kindergarten. I recognize children’s abilities to express their views are varied, and influenced by age and experience, however I attempt to give each perspective “due weight” in accordance with my perceptions on each participants’ abilities to convey their thoughts and opinions. As such, this chapter shares thick descriptions of children’s interpretations of kindergarten routines, and my lenses as an adult and researcher are used to situate children’s narratives on school in the broader discourse on readiness and the kindergarten transition.

Children’s Involvement in Transition Practices

As discussed in previous chapters early childhood care providers and teachers are encouraged to implement “family-based” programs when helping children prepare for kindergarten. I argue school orientations, “meet the teacher” events, or planned visits to classrooms primarily serve to provide parents with direct information about kindergarten. Corsaro and Molinari (2005) found that schools planned special events to signify “new phases” in children’s school experiences. The authors use the phrase “priming events” to describe situations children, schoolteachers, family and community members were a part of considered to help younger people adjust to the different demands and expectations of elementary school. Only a few children interviewed in the pre-k

group discussed their participation in transition activities. As the children interviewed reflected on their participation during their visits to kindergarten classrooms, it became evident their experiences centered on observation and passive participation. Moreover, it seemed the purpose of the transition activities was to give children a general sense of the new school environments, rather than being used as opportunities to help them learn nuanced information about what to expect in terms of new rules or routines. Some of the pre-k children interviewed said they drove by their future schools and talked about the buildings or playgrounds, but also admitted they had yet to see their kindergarten classrooms. Those who saw their classroom, or met their future teachers discussed the most salient aspects of their visit, talking specifically about eating snacks, playing games, or making creations. The following excerpt illustrates Larita's (a pre-k participant) perspective of visiting her future classroom.

- Interviewer: Are you nervous about kindergarten? No. Why?
- Larita: It's gonna be so fun.
- Interviewer: Cause it's gonna be fun? Do you want to go to your new school and check it out?
- Larita: I already did.
- Interviewer: You already did. What did you see?
- Larita: Lemonade.
- Mother: They're making lemonade at home.
- Interviewer: You're making lemonade. They were making lemonade. Oh, I want some lemonade too. Did you get to taste some?
- Larita: They were actually doing a science experiment at school.

Interviewer: Oh, a science experiment in kindergarten. You must be really smart. You must be really smart to go to that kind of kindergarten. Wow. What else did you see at your new school?

Larita: Snacks.

In another interview, two sisters (Ana and Angeles) brought attention to another aspect of the transition process in that they discussed how Ana (the younger sister) had exposure to kindergarten while going to Angeles' classroom during pick-up or drop-off times. Moreover, Ana and Angeles' mother was a frequent volunteer at the school, and Ana would be in the classroom while she worked with the teacher and other students.

Interviewer: So, you've heard about kindergarten right? Have you even gone to kindergarten with your sister?

Ana: No.

Interviewer: Have you seen it though? Gone to the school?

Angeles: Yes, because she went there to eat with me sometimes.

Interviewer: Yeah, do you ever pick her up there?

Ana: Yeah. Sometimes Miss Tollar does.

Interviewer: Yeah?

Angeles: Helps mom.

Interviewer: Helps mom? Does your mom volunteer sometimes at school?

Ana: Yeah.

Angeles: They asked her to volunteer the last day, and she didn't.

It was clear that Ana's perceptions about kindergarten were reproductions of her older sister's experiences. For instance, when asked to describe what would happen at school Ana said "First, we play, and when the bell rings, you go inside and learn. After you are done doing it, go to different places like Spanish, and music, and art." Corsaro (2005) argues children's exposure to cultural routines provides children with the language needed to convey their understandings of shared practices within their social worlds. Corsaro writes, "It is through collective production of and participation in routines that children's evolving memberships in both their peer cultures and the adult world are situated" (2005, p. 110). Ana expressed her understanding of school through her explanations of what she observed at her sister's school. Her references to the "specials" (or extracurricular classes) her sister participated in reflect one way language conveys her interpretive reproduction of school. Ana and Angeles discussed in greater depth school practices throughout the interview. Interactions such as these are instrumental in shaping children's constructions about kindergarten.

Peers' Roles in the Transition Process

From the interviews it became evident the child participants' siblings and other younger family members played a significant role in the transition process. Moreover, children not only had opportunities to gather information about kindergarten through observations in their older sibling's classrooms, but they also talked to each other about what to expect in school. In the following excerpt,

Kendall explained her sister was the one person who talked to her about kindergarten.

Interviewer: Does your Mommy tell you anything about kindergarten?

Kendall: No.

Interviewer: No? Does your Daddy tell you anything?

Kendall: Just my sister.

Interviewer: Your sister. Wow. Has she been to kindergarten?

Kendall: Yeah.

Interviewer: She has? What did she tell you about kindergarten?

Kendall: I don't remember yet.

Children discuss and generate meanings of kindergarten with their peers, and as Kendall's last comment "I don't remember yet" exemplifies their conceptions about school are evolving forms of understanding. Jaden (a pre-k participant) said she talked to her cousins about kindergarten. In addition, George (a kindergarten participant) talked about the connection he had with his cousin while going to school. The child participants' friends also played a significant role in facilitating the transition process. Several of the children formed opinions about kindergarten depending on whether their friends from their pre-k experiences would be with them in the same kindergarten. The following excerpt is just one instance where a pre-k child participant described her feelings going to

kindergarten, and explained her reasons for feeling apprehensive about the transition.

Interviewer: Kendra, are you going to kindergarten next year?

Kendra: Uh huh.

Interviewer: You are? Are you excited?

Kendra: We miss my old school.

Interviewer: You miss your old school. Why are you gonna miss your old school?

Kendra: Cuz there's lots of my friends there.

Interviewer: Your friends are there?

Kendra: My old friends

When reminiscing about her pre-k experiences, Pat (a kindergarten participant) said she liked being at Head Start better than kindergarten, and said she preferred Head Start because she had “more friends over there.” Even though children are forming opinions about kindergarten centered on whether their friends will follow them to school, they are also paying attention to the behaviors of their peers in order to identify behaviors they consider mean and/or nice (prosocial), as presented in the following excerpt. Jamie was a pre-kindergarten participant and offered this insight:

Mother: Do you think kindergarten will be fun? Yes.

Interviewer: Why do you think it's gonna be fun?

Jamie: New friends.

Interviewer: New friends. I bet you will meet friends there. Do you think you're going to learn new things? What kind of things?

Jamie: Like being nice.

Interviewer: That'll be a good thing to learn.

Mother: Did they teach you how to be nice at school?

Jamie: Some friends.

Mother: Some friends teach you how? Your friends teach you how to be nice?

Jamie: Some.

Mother: What about your teachers? Did they teach you how to be nice? What did they do?

Jamie: Tell us not to fight or not push.

Mother: That's good.

Interestingly, children did not have much to talk about when asked if their parents were telling them about school. As discussed in Chapter 4, findings suggest that rather than explaining to children about what the kindergarten experience will be like, mothers are working to prepare children for school by engaging them in activities aligned with practicing specific skills related to social and cognitive development. Children expressed their own perceptions of their learning throughout the interviews, and their descriptions of their learning provide a window into the shared practices they engage with throughout the early years. The following excerpt is from the interview with Ana, who stayed at home with

her mother for the majority of her pre-k experience. This conversation illustrates parental involvement, but also brings attention to a binary that emerged in the child interview transcripts that reflect a dichotomy among children who believe they are “starting to learn” or “just know.”

Interviewer: what does your mommy teach you at home? What does she do with you when you're home schooled?

Ana: We do things so I can start learning.

When asked to describe what she is learning at school, Angeles stated, “To start reading and stuff and write.” It is interesting to note Ana and Angeles talk in respect to their beliefs they are just starting to learn as their mother (Florence) echoed similar thoughts. For instance, she talked about reading as though it must happen in a very structured, conventional manner seemingly discounting the emergent quality of the acquisition of literacy skills. She said,

I am really hoping [Angeles] will be reading. I was going to start pushing it on Ana more and I did go through like a phonics book with [Angeles] and I gave her the introduction of reading but she wasn't reading when she hit kindergarten. She was reading at probably a level one or level two.

Right now she can read but she's not reading – she's reading at like a level six right now. It's not sixth grade.

In a different perspective, a pre-k participant, Cole's commentary highlights children's perceptions of “just knowing”.

Interviewer: Did you learn how to write your name at school?

Cole: No, I already know how to write.

Interviewer: Awesome. Did your mom teach you that?

Cole: No.

Mother: He just already knew it. I would never teach anything.

It is important to examine the interactions and direct experiences children are a part of to understand how their beliefs about learning and participation facilitate the process of entering school. Children's conversations about their learning represent ways children are "legitimate peripheral participants" (Lave & Wenger, 1991) within home, school, and community contexts.

Teachers' Roles in the Transition Process

Children did not talk about pre-k teachers or care providers as being the strongest sources of support during the transition. In fact, children had little to say when asked if their teachers or care providers told them anything about kindergarten. Only one pre-kindergarten participant (Cameron) mentioned his teacher explained to him that he and another boy would be the oldest children in their kindergarten classes, because of pre-k retention. Cameron said, "Miss K told me, me and Robert are gonna be the kinders cuz all the kinders are moving to first grade. We're going to be the first grade kinders." Before making this comment, he shared information about the physical layout of his classroom. Specifically he described how the space was divided into a "preschool area" and a "kinder area." While talking about the layout of the school the boy said "I'm in the kinder area but I'm five and I'm not a kinder" alluding to being held back for an additional year in preschool, and going into kindergarten as an older peer. It is

important to note, Cameron was enrolled in a Montessori public school program. His mother, Larissa, explained the structure of a mainstream public school would be ill fitting for her son, and wanted him to participate in an individualized school experience. Moreover, she expressed concern over the heavy “work” load and high expectations for her son. With this in mind, it is hard to deduce the reasons why Cameron was retained in pre-k, nonetheless this ambiguity surrounding this family’s narrative exemplifies the varied ways “readiness” is interpreted and used to inform decisions about school preparedness.

One explanation for why children might not perceive their teachers as being sources for information on kindergarten is that they are more concerned about their daily interactions in the classrooms (e.g. making them happy) and emphasize their “in situ” frames of reference. More to this point, children talked about teachers through a binary of mean and nice. Seemingly, the pre-k children used the phrase nice to describe their teachers more often than the kindergarteners did, and the kindergarteners talked more frequently about their teachers being mean, or stricter.

Interviewer: What about your teachers at preschool - do you like them?

Cole: Yes.

Interviewer: What are their names?

Cole: Mrs. D-- and Mrs. K--.

Interviewer: Yeah.

Cole: Yes.

Interviewer: You said yes so quickly that must mean you really, really like them. How come--what do you like the most about them?

Cole: Because they're nice.

Interviewer: Yeah, how are they nice?

Cole: I don't know.

Mother: What do they do that you like? Do they yell a lot and say?

Cole: No.

Interviewer: What do they do?

Cole: They help.

Children described teachers in a different perspective when they enter kindergarten, but still mention they are helpful and kind. Micha (a kindergarten participant) disliked his teacher because she “gives out red dots and yellow dots.” Skylar (also a kindergarten participant) said, “Yes (I like her), because I tell her.” However, as children discussed their opinions about their teachers they focused on things their teachers tell them to do, or ways they follow their routines to ensure they meet adults’ expectations and follow the rules set in the classroom. After Skylar said he liked his teacher, and explained a scenario that played out in his classroom. He said, “Because K-- wasn’t behaving because she was gonna be the teacher, because she wasn’t behaving. And then I was saying bad words. Because we don’t say bad words at school. Because, before I will lose ‘tell me marks’.” During his interview, Jordan wrote a letter to his teacher. He dictated, Dear, Ms. V., I don’t have to go to school anymore because I get in trouble.” During this exchange, the interviewer asked if he wanted to write more to which

he responded “a little. A lot more because she likes a lot of words.” Seemingly, children form opinions about whether they like their teachers based on the extent to which they follow classroom rules and routines (discussed later in this chapter).

Children’s Perceptions of Learning in Pre-K

The pre-school aged children interviewed prior to their entry into kindergarten talked in detail about the activities they participated while attending a pre-k program. Joseph (a pre-k participant) said, “You get to do science stuff, and you get to play with friends and you get to do art, and you get to do special projects.” Other activities children talked about include play, the acquisition of language and literacy skills, learning about numbers and other math concepts, as well as their participation in specific pre-k classroom routines (e.g. naptime).

Many children would demonstrate their abilities by showing interviewers how they can complete particular tasks (e.g. counting, and recognition of letters, shapes, or colors), and seem to be quite proud of their competencies. This passage exemplifies a pre-k participant, Jaden’s, eagerness to show off his skills.

Interviewer: You already know how to count a little bit, huh?

Jaden: Um-hum. I know how to count a lot; one, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, sixteen, twenty, twenty-one, thirty, thirty-one, and thirty-two.

Interviewer: Wow.

Mother: What else have you learned? Can you tell her how you count in Spanish?

Jaden: Uno, dos, tres, quantro, cinco, seis, deis, ocho.

While children are gaining confidence in their abilities, they also express concerns about not knowing how to complete certain tasks (e.g. reading conventionally, or writing in lower case letters). Children shared their ideas about specific skills or types of knowledge they will need to acquire by the time they enter into kindergarten. For example, the children interviewed talked frequently about learning to write, especially their names, and described the feedback they received from adults about their penmanship. Children also discussed their ideas on other the types of activities they thought they would participate in as they prepared for school. I share children's preconceptions about kindergarten in the following section, highlighting the specific experiences that expose the formation of joint enterprises within readiness communities of practice.

Children's Preconceptions about Kindergarten

Children are developing awareness that kindergarten will be different than their prekindergarten experience. For example, they have heard from other people that there are no naps in kindergarten. They also have a belief that they will not have as many opportunities to play in kindergarten, and are building an expectation that there is more work involved as they move into elementary school. Joseph explained, "I don't really know, but you play--that's all you do, and you do homework, and you go to review centers and you do lots of work. You've got to do your words." The following excerpts illustrate children's ambiguous understandings of kindergarten.

Interviewer: What would you like to do in kindergarten?

Cameron: Do art but I cannot.

Interviewer: Why?

Cameron: Only sometimes.

Jamie (who attended Head Start) discussed her experience getting shots.

Interviewer: Do you know about kindergarten? What's gonna happen at kindergarten?

Jamie: Shots.

Interviewer: Shots. Yeah you probably have to get shots before you go to kindergarten. Do you know what kinds of things you're going to learn there?

Jamie: New things.

Interviewer: New things like what? Do you have any idea? Maybe alphabet or numbers or things like that?

Jamie: I do the alphabet and numbers.

Larita also shared her ideas on what will happen in kindergarten.

Interviewer 2: What do people do in kindergarten?

Larita: They don't have naps and no naps.

Interviewer: No nap?

Interviewer 2: What if you get tired? But in preschool you take naps, right? What do you do instead of napping?

Larita: You just stay up.

Interviewer: Ohhh, you stay up. Okay.

Interviewer 2: Do you learn stuff? What kind of stuff do you learn?

Larita: Write our names.

The children interviewed conveyed different levels of awareness in regards to their knowledge of the kindergarten. This sense of ambiguity is important as it demonstrates how children are making sense of the new experiences they are facing, or will face as they enter into kindergarten. Corsaro (2005) argues children have exposure to many more routines than they can process or understand. Children's vague responses to the question, "What happens in kindergarten"? or "What will happen in kindergarten"? could be caused by the overwhelming amount of information they are taking in during the transition period.

The Significance of Not Knowing

Throughout the interviews, the use of the phrase "I don't know" was widespread when responding to questions about what they knew about kindergarten, or what they thought might happen in their kindergarten classrooms. I could argue that questions related to what to expect in kindergarten are difficult questions for children to fully comprehend or answer. For instance, several developmental theorists (e.g. Rousseau, Piaget, Gessel) assert young children's thinking and processing skills are reflective of concrete aspects of their social worlds. Developmental theories argue it can be difficult for young children to make sense of abstract components, cultural practices and patterns, or ways of knowing. Additionally, a central tenet among these theories is that children's thinking is situated in the "now" and they have limited capabilities to make projections about their futures. Recognizing that this is a valid argument for some children, I believe there is more to the story. One reason could be that they

literally have not heard about what will happen in kindergarten. The following excerpt illustrates one case wherein Cole responded with “I don’t know” to questions related to his expectations about kindergarten because he had not enrolled in a specific school site. In this excerpt Cole’s mother explains that the “I don’t know” is warranted because the family is waiting to hear back from school administrators about the status of their enrollment applications.

Interviewer: So what do you think about going to kindergarten next year?

Cole: I don't know.

Interviewer: Do you know the name of the school you're going to?

Cole: No.

Mother: We're not sure; we're on the border between these schools.

Several parents in this study also mentioned they had not heard from the schools their children would be attending. Although the time parents spend waiting for information about kindergarten placements creates a sense of ambiguity, the mothers interviewed seemingly assumed their child will transition to kindergarten without issue, and would ultimately have a positive entry into school.

The following excerpt from Dominique’s interview also exemplifies children’s lack of awareness of the kindergarten experience. In this instance, it is not clear why Dominique is unsure about what to expect for his new school experience but once again, the reiteration of the phrase “I don’t know” indicates children are unsure about kindergarten.

Interviewer: I heard that you're gonna be going to kindergarten next year. Is that true?

Dominique: Yeah.

Interviewer: Where at? Where is kindergarten?

Dominique: I don't know.

Mother: What is the color of the building that you're going to, to kindergarten? Do you remember?

Dominique: I don't know.

In a different interview, Kendall expressed her limited knowledge on kindergarten. Kendall use of the phrase "I don't know" exhibits her lack of knowledge about what to expect at her new school.

Interviewer: Can you tell me a little bit more about what you think kindergarten will be like next year? You said your sister tells you stuff, right? What does your sister say about kindergarten? Does she like kindergarten? Did she have fun at kindergarten?

Kendall: Yes.

Interviewer: Oh. Are you scared? No? That's good. Are you excited for kindergarten?

Kendall: Huh uh.

Interviewer: Have you been to visit your kindergarten?

Kendall: No.

Interviewer: Are you going to? Do you know about kindergarten?

Kendall: No. [...]

Interviewer: Oh, you don't think so? Well, you never know, maybe kindergarten will be just as fun and they'll have new games. What do you think you'll learn at school?

Kendall: I don't know.

Interviewer: What do you think kindergarten will be like?

Kendall: I don't know.

While the phrase "I don't know" was repeated throughout the interviews with the pre-k cohort, Pat (a kindergartener interviewed) shared her experience transitioning to kindergarten.

Interviewer: Did you do stuff with your mommy before you went to kindergarten?

Pat: Yeah. I did a bunch. Coloring with her, writing with her, talking with her a bunch. Then I had to go get three shots. Not only got two; got three.

The thought of starting school raises a range of emotions for children. The interviewers for FCCS asked child participants if they would be excited or scared. Angeles said she was "brave" at the start of school. The process of becoming a kindergartener is comprised of set routines that influence the formation of children's identities. Wenger (1998) describes the formation of identity as an embedded aspect of participation grounded in learning, membership, and belonging. The following section gives meaning to one aspect of a children's evolving membership during the transition to kindergarten.

Going to "Big Kid" School

The parents interviewed endorse the idea that kindergarten is a place for

“big kids” as exemplified in Kendra’s (Tyler’s mom) description of her son’s opinion about starting school, she mentions, “He was like, “Oh, I’m goin’ to the bigger school with the bigger kids,” and he was really excited.” I argue the repetition of the word “big” in parent interviews affirms the argument that adults perceive children as passive participants rather than legitimate peripheral participants, full participants, or even citizens in their own right, within the context of school readiness. In a different interview, Madison (Gabe’s mom) mentioned:

“I still see Gabe as the preschool little boy. Then there’s days when I’m like, ‘I don’t even know who he is because he’s a completely different kid. His self-esteem is different. He spells better [...] He’s doing addition and subtraction’ Gabe is trying to do things that are bigger kid’s stuff than what he should be doing for kindergarten age.”

Similarly, Catherine (Kendall’s mom) said,

She loves to cut out paper, cut out shapes, different things like that and her cutting skills have improved a ton cuz before she couldn’t even cut a rectangle and now she can, which is big for their age. Her reading skills, she’s able to identify certain numbers, so it was neat to see it.

Children also hold an assumption that the start of school and subsequent participation in kindergarten classrooms will help them reach “big kid” status within their cultural communities. Wenger describes identity through three “modes of belonging” including engagement, imagination, and alignment. I argue children’s beliefs about being “big”, growing up, and gaining status within their

schools is part of identity formation through imagination. Although not explicitly stated, I argue children have an assumption they will have more independence, autonomy, and control once they start kindergarten. For instance, children gaining access to “the big playground” plays into children’s feelings of grandeur when thinking about school. Additionally, “big kid” status aligns with Lave and Wenger’s (1991) notion of “full membership” within communities of practice, along with the concept of belonging through engagement. The children interviewed seemed to have an understanding that their abilities to demonstrate mastery over certain skills will position them as active participants within communities of practice. While children are proud to read “big words,” demonstrate capacities to learn advanced skills, and are continuously building their repertoire of knowledge about important community beliefs, routines, and practices, their aspirations to be “bigger” cements their membership within a community of practice as being peripheral participants. Childhood is a period of evolving membership within many cultural communities, and as children grow older, they take on roles that require active participation. The mothers interviewed for this study commonly regarded pre-k as a time for children to observe and be “exposed” to academic routines (referred to by some parents as “pre-learning” activities), and considered kindergarten a period of “direct interaction” (Rogoff, 2003) with specific school routines (e.g learning to read, write, and complete basic math activities). As I shift focus toward children’s experiences in kindergarten, it is evident children’s participation and learning is changing because of current circumstances in elementary school.

The Move into Kindergarten

In a frank statement (practically bringing attention to the obvious) Dakota (who attended a private kindergarten program) told an interviewer how and why kindergarten was different than preschool, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

Interviewer: Is it different? What you learned [in preschool] and what you learn now in kindergarten?

Dakota: Yes.

Interviewer: Tell me why.

Dakota: Because we do different stuff.

Dakota further described the “different stuff” children learned about in relation to specific curricular aspects and said in kindergarten they did “Christmas carols, reading, math or the playroom (dramatic play) sort of stuff.” Of course, children will point out they “do different stuff” in kindergarten as it is an expectation, (if not a requirement) schools teach people ways to engage in different routines and activities that provide for greater understandings of cultural mores, beliefs, and values. In addition, keeping in mind a purpose of school is to facilitate younger people’s socialization into community and cultural contexts, ideally to promote children’s participation so that they become active and contributing members within their society, adults’ structure activities to ensure children acquire new skills and knowledge with each day. For these reasons, it makes sense children notice the fact they are doing “different stuff,” and in turn use this awareness to produce nuanced understandings on kindergarten. Children’s conversations on the different topics or themes they were learning

about also brought to light the “alternative” ways children perceive their experiences in schools.

Children also discussed ways the structure of the kindergarten classroom was different from their pre-k experience. Where once a “typical” kindergarten classroom was widely recognized as being all about play, a site used to promote discovery and exploration, and described as “open-ended” and “child-centered,” it is now considered to be more “academic” and “structured” (as reflected in the excerpts quoted in Chapter four). According to several of the children interviewed, there is more work in kindergarten as compared to their pre-kindergarten experiences. Jordan thought kindergarten was harder than preschool because in preschool “they didn’t even do any projects.” He went on to say in preschool, “All we did is eat snack and then leave.” Further, Jordan described a typical day for him in kindergarten. He said, “First in the morning, in the a.m. class, I always do work, lots of work, and then we go out for recess.” Michael (attended a charter school for kindergarten) said the difference between Head Start and kindergarten is the increase in the amount of work, but discussed this in the context of “homework” (a new practice brought up by many of the child participants, also discussed later in this chapter). Even Emerson, a child who is home-schooled described a more work-oriented kindergarten. She stated, “When I was in preschool, I didn’t usually do these things, except my sister did read a story and she did read me her bible stories. Now that I’m in kindergarten, I gotta do school with her. It did get harder, but I still get recess.” As George explained why Head Start was easier than kindergarten he offered this insight, “we didn’t

have to work. All we did was play.” He and the interviewer further discussed the perceived change in his school experience.

Interviewer: So you are saying kindergarten is harder than Head Start, a little bit harder? Do you have to do some work?

George: We just sit.

Interviewer: I find that hard to believe.

George: We really do.

Throughout this interview, George is focused on the “work” aspect of school, but also had concerns about his peers and their interactions with him at school. He spent time during the interview showing off his capacity to recognize various “sight words” in the book *Brown Bear, Brown Bear What do you See*, and read much of the story to the QI. He also talked with the interviewer about the skills he was learning, such as snapping his fingers, counting up to the number nine, and writing his name. Even though George focused on the work aspect of school, his mother (Madison) had a different opinion.

Well because he is so into school, he's always coming home and telling me we worked on this project, we did this today, we played with play doh, we painted, we did this, we played this game, we watched a movie, we went to the library, we did stories at the library or we did this puzzle or something. He's always got positive things to say about what he's done in class and he loves going to the computer lab. He loves going to art. He's not real fond of PE but that's just because they make him do the games

that he doesn't want to do and I don't think any kid at any age really is fond of P.E.

The comparison of George and his mother's perspective illustrates how children and adults form alternative viewpoints about their life experiences. The differing perspectives also raise a question in terms of answerability. Is Madison describing her son's school experience in a positive light to reflect what is socially desirable? Is George? Do the two perspectives exemplify the beginning stages of the formation of a joint enterprise (Wenger, 1998), or mutual bridging of meaning (Rogoff, 2003)?

Children's Perceptions of Play in Kindergarten

While children noticed the change in school in becoming more work oriented, children also commented on the structure of their school day. Most notably, children discussed the schedule of their school day and pointed out the times in kindergarten they have opportunities to play. Children explained that there are specific timeframes allotted throughout the school day for play; primarily citing recess and "specials" as these times. According to Micha there are two recesses, he explained: "There is one in the morning, where we just come to school, second one after lunch. In preschool we got 15." Micha's comment about the difference in the number of recesses between kindergarten and preschool indicates the child's awareness of the shift away from a play-based school experience. Pat made the following remark about her kindergarten, "The cool stuff we did is P.E. and two recesses." One reason she likes the playground is that it offers space and time for her to play. She said, "The playground is big. It

has a big huge thing. The coolest thing my friend likes to do is the monkey bars. Me too.” In line with this point, Devon told an interviewer that recess was her favorite part of the school day because “we have monkey bars, and slides, and balls, and swings, and the little house and the little tunnel attached to the house.” Bailey described his favorite things about school as, “going to recess and playing, and our projects.”

As mentioned, children also described “specials” as being their favorite times of the school day. According to the children interviewed specials include art, physical education (P.E.), computers, Spanish, and music. For many children, specials are engaging and fun; parents also mentioned that “specials” allow for more holistic educational experience. The children interviewed described the types of games they enjoyed playing the most outside of their ‘home’ classrooms. Examples of these games include playing with a large ‘parachute’ and pretending to pop popcorn, musical chairs, freeze tag, and hide-and-seek. The field of early childhood has experienced a movement toward guided play or playful learning (Hirsh-Pasek, Golinkoff, Berk, & Singer, 2009). Hirsh-Pasek et al. state “playful learning and guided play actively engages children in pleasurable and seemingly spontaneous activities that encourage academic exploration and learning” (2009, p. 27). Children’s conversations about school fall in line with the trend to structure guided play activities in kindergarten so that children can simultaneously participate in “developmentally-appropriate” (Bredekamp, Copple, 2010; 1997) activities while also meet the demands of accountability. There is also repetition

of the word “projects” in the transcripts, which I believe signifies a reification of playful learning experiences in kindergarten classroom

In line with parent’s beliefs about school, children’s talk about kindergarten experiences is also reflective of “trickle-down” effects brought on by changes in curriculum and education reforms. Only a small number of children interviewed in the kindergarten cohort mentioned using play materials in their classrooms, but on a positive note there are still toys, dramatic play areas, and creative arts activities used to enrich children’s learning experiences in some classrooms. For example, three of the kindergarten-aged children talked about using blocks, Legos, and cars. Children also enjoyed playing Star Wars, sports, a charade game, among others. Dakota said her school (a private program) had a designated playroom. At the time of the interview it was set up like a grocery store. She explained: “Like you fold things, and someone’s the cashier, and like all of that. All that a grocery story...” Dakota did not finish her thought as her attention was diverted to a coloring marker she was looking for and found, but her flippant response is also indicative of a possibility she took the question posed by the interviewer to be a “known answer” inquiry.

Children’s interactions with friends was a common theme as they responded to questions related to play. On one hand, children’s descriptions of their play experiences with friends provided a window into their participation within peer cultures. Children also discussed different roles they take on within their peers groups. Bailey made the comment, that while playing with his best friend he “just has to say the game and [my friend] plays with me” but did not

agree with the interviewer's descriptions of him being a "boss" or a "leader."

Dakota also demonstrated her awareness of the complex nature of friendships in her stories about interactions she's had with friends. In one account Dakota said, "[My friend] said she was never going to play with me, but that wasn't really true." She explained the reason why her friend was going to stop playing with her was because she "did that," implying she did something to make her friend upset. In a different anecdote she talked about a "friend" who no longer likes to play with her, but remembered how they used to be together "a lot." This excerpt also illustrates a challenge that often emerges as in conducting interviews with children in that it showcases a way in which child participants assumed the interviewer had the contextual information needed to understand what "that" was. Tobin (cited in class notes) describes this as an enthymeme, which occurs when a person part of a conversation forms an assumption that the other person involved understands their point of view, or argument.

Additionally, children's conversations about play shed light on their understandings of classroom rules and routines. Children's talk about rules and routines exposed ways they manipulate, or employ tactics (de Certeau, 1984) to evade constraints or limitations imposed upon them while at school. As an example, Tyler talked at length about his "best buddy" and how much he enjoyed playing with him at recess. As he talked about playing with his "best buddy," Tyler also brought up how he likes to play with toys he brought from home while playing on the playground –which he was not allowed to have at school. The

following excerpt illustrates Tyler's knowledge of the rules, and how to evade them:

Interviewer: You are allowed to bring toys from home to school?

Tyler: If I have toys and my teacher sees it, she's gonna take it away and it's hers. And I won't have any more toys.

Interviewer: So you have to hide them? Has your teacher ever taken away your toys?

Tyler: Only once.

Interviewer: How did that make you feel?

Tyler: Happy because she almost give it back to me. When it was time to go home.

Cole, a pre-k interview participant explained the rules in kindergarten. He said, "No not sharing. No yelling. No fighting." When describing one of his favorite things to do at school, swinging on the swings, Cole also mentioned "There's a bench you have to make a line on the bench." It was common for children to talk about their the routines they had to follow in their classrooms when asked to describe what would happen in kindergarten. The dialogue on classroom routines ranged in topic as children provided descriptions of their classroom schedule, explained the types of activities they participate in, and discussed the rules they followed. In addition, the children interviewed often used catch-phrases their teachers would likely use to establish routines within classrooms. Through children's double-voiced utterances, children would reenact their teachers' behaviors, highlighting the the strategies used for classroom management.

Interviewer: So do you have like different centers that you go and visit to play with stuff? How do you know what center you're supposed to go to, or you just get to choose? How does that work?

Jack: Like I'm a bus and everybody else is – Adam is a car and Bob is a fish.

Interviewer: So you are all different things? What does the teacher say? All the fish go here, all the buses go here, all the trucks go here?

Jack: Mhmm. Like the 'buses are coming up to the reading room. The fish are going to the writing paper. The boats are going to trains and soft blocks.' Like that.

Children's Perceptions of Learning in Kindergarten

Wenger points out learning is a complex process influenced by “dual modes of existence’ including participation and reification (p. 86). Further, he writes, “Learning is the engine of practice, and practice is the history of that learning” (p. 96); and argues people’s histories are formed through the processes of remembering and forgetting. Moreover, Lave and Wenger (1991) write learning “concerns the whole person acting in the world” and is best described through relational understandings of person, world, activity and participation. Lave and Wenger’s ideas on social learning delineate individuals’ membership and participation within communities. I highlight children’s conversations about what they learn as kindergartners in that they exemplify the interaction of participation and reification within schools and classrooms.

The children interviewed described what they are learning about in kindergarten offered insight on specific content areas addressed in the kindergarten curriculum, and provided detailed accounts of their participation and

learning of specific concepts within each area. Ana's comment sums up many of the child participants' thoughts on what they learn in school, "we do numbers all the way to 10. We count. We have sight words kind of. This sight word this week is 'half'." More specifically, child participants within the kindergarten cohort overwhelmingly discussed learning about language and literacy, and concepts including alphabet knowledge (letter and/or sound recognition), phonological awareness, word segmentation, fluidity, sight word recognition, along with writing and emergent writing. In many interviews, children proudly told interviewers about "sight words," and would recite or show their knowledge at the points in conversation when children were asked to talk about what they were learning. As he was looking at a book, George let sight words take over the conversation:

George: This is a sight word. 'A'.

Interviewer: It is a sight word. 'A'. Do you know any other sight words in that book? [...]

George: Sight word. Sight word, yeah. Sight Word.

Interviewer: What sight words are those?

George: I don't know these sight words yet.

Interviewer: Oh, you're just learning them, okay.

George: Yeah, I just know they're sight words.

In another interview Cole said, "We do projects. We do sight words" when asked he was asked to describe what happened during "learning time."

Thereafter, he told the interviewer he could demonstrate his skills, as illustrated in the following excerpt:

Cole: I can tell you some of my sight words.

Interviewer: That would be great.

Cole: Big.

Interviewer: Yes. What else?

Cole: Is. In. Where. Here. Play.

Interviewer: Those are big words too. That's awesome.

I bring attention to the use of the word “big” in the interviewer’s response to the child’s recitation of sight words. In this moment, the interviewer gives a sense she is impressed with his knowledge on sight words. Children’s tendencies to display their understandings of sight words provided opportunities teach adults about the curricular changes happening in kindergarten today, and gives way for adults to challenge their beliefs about children’s capabilities in school. This exchange also brings to light the fact children are learning more than just “basic” skills in kindergarten. In addition, the repetition of sight words is a signal that language and literacy instructional practices nested in Scientifically Based Reading Research (SBBR) have infiltrated kindergarten classrooms. Along with talking about sight words, children discuss other concepts they are learning about in school that fall into the paradigm of SBBR. Angeles mentioned she has is “pushing words together” and described her understanding of this process: “The big words, you just break them in half, and like the syllables. Cuz’ we do syllables with our names [...] like I have three syllables, and she has three

syllables (referring to her sister). This quote is interesting in that it exposes nuances of her emergent understanding of the concept, and highlights an inconsistency in her grasp on “pushing words together” considering what she describes is breaking words apart. Her explanation is also significant in that it conveys the interaction between participatory and reified practices used by people to learn within communities of practice. The influence of SBBR, along with performance standards, has shaped classroom instruction, and the skills taught in kindergarten have changed in response to meeting the demands set within the broader context of school.

Interestingly, children’s conversations about learning mathematics align with the discourse on the ‘basics’ as they pertain to mathematics instruction. The children interviewed overwhelmingly talked about learning about numbers and counting, along with shapes. While number sense and counting dominated the conversations about math instruction, some children discussed ways they learned more ‘advanced’ concepts. Dakota was eager to show her abilities to count by two’s, others could count in Spanish, and many of the children interviewed expressed pride in their abilities to count up to 100 (and then some). Children’s strong focus on language and literacy and math instruction leads to an important question. Are kindergarteners learning about science, math, creative arts, or other topics? Children’s conversations about school reflect beliefs put forward by early childhood scholars (e.g. Enz, et al., 2008; Hatch, 2002) that curricular focus has narrowed. The concentration on promoting discreet skills has also impacted teachers’ approaches to guidance and discipline.

Children's Perceptions of Rules and Routines

Cameron explained to an interviewer "When I'm not working [my teacher] tells me to get to work." The rules established in schools have a significant influence over children's agency. In addition, the rules shape children's beliefs about their roles as members within their classroom communities. An interviewer asked Cole (a preschool aged child) if he thought there would be rules in kindergarten, and he responded by saying, "I think every school does." Curious to know more, the interviewer posed more questions:

Interviewer: How come you think they have rules in schools? ... What do you think would happen if we didn't have those rules?

Cole: Everybody would be naughty.

Interviewer: So what does naughty look like at school? Are there kids in preschool that are naughty sometimes?

Cole: Yes.

Interviewer: What do they do that's naughty?

Cole: They don't share and they knock over buildings.

In a different interview, George (a kindergartener) used the term naughty to name an area at his school where children go when they misbehave. More specifically, George explained that a child in his class had to go to the "naughty nose wall" after throwing rocks on the playground (while pretending they were bullets). Other children interviewed talked about the consequences of being naughty. Jordan described how children "go to jail" if there are "no colors" on their behavior chart (which indicates a child is misbehaving). He said, "you go to the principal's when you have no colors and then the principal calls the policeman

and then you go to jail.” Joseph (a pre-k participant) described what happens to children who get in trouble at his school. “They go to the principal and she sends your mom, and then you get a note and then she said, ‘you spit on the person, and you pushed the person, and you hit the person, and you didn’t take a nap, and you did everything bad.’”

While a significant number of kindergartners interviewed initially said they liked “everything” about school, upon further questioning it became clear children are also critical of certain aspects of classroom routines and experiences. In one regard, children’s critiques manifest when they discuss classroom routines, as well as some of the decisions teachers make in the classroom. For instance, a binary embedded in the data pertains to whether children have choices, or do not have choices in kindergarten. The following conversation is reflective of a type of classroom dynamic, one wherein a teacher holds more of an authoritative role in the classroom:

Interviewer: What else do you like to do?

Dakota: Paint, draw and paint. Well painting is mostly something that I mostly don’t do much at school.

Interviewer: Why do you think that is?

Dakota: I don’ know. Well, it’s just what my teachers think.

Children are given the impression they are able to make choices, but in actuality the teacher (or adult-influence) places a number of limitations on the choices younger people are afforded within the classroom context. Canella (2002) describes choices for children as illusions and argues

Although, children can be given choice within the privacy (and control) of their homes or within the pretend environment of the school, through the use of materials and experiences, adults actually control the choices that surround children and the capacity for follow-through when choices are made (p. 120).

Cultural Tools in Kindergarten

Many of the kindergarteners interviewed shared the significance of the use of folders (and “fun packets”), behavior charts, “clips on the wall”, treasure boxes, and stamps as teaching tools. As such, it is apparent many children participate in classrooms that follow regimented discipline and guidance procedures established by teachers. The behavior charts used in kindergartens invoke children’s compliance in school, which in turn serves to encourage pro-social behavior and maximize instructional time. As children recount their understandings of the behavior chart, they describe their thoughts on the differences between being naughty and good in school. Jessie (a kindergartner) explained how the behavior chart worked in her classroom, she said: “if they be in green, that means they listen. If they be in yellow, you have to try. If they be on blue, they can’t get any stamps. If they’re on red, they have to call their mom.”

In the following excerpt Micha described a similar process:

Interviewer: You don’t like your teacher? Why?

Micha: Because she gives red and yellow dots.

Interviewer: What’s a red and yellow dot? What does that mean? Can you explain that for me?

Micha: That means you've been talking – The yellow dot means you've been talking or not following the rules. Red means something like that but even more.

Homework is also an activity mentioned by several children and children think of it as being an integral component of their school experience. For example, Kennedy responded to the question “What do you do in kindergarten?” in word– “Homework”. Jack said he and his classmates “play, read, and do homework” in kindergarten. Children’s descriptions of behavior charts, other classroom management strategies, and doing homework are just another example of the reified practices used in classrooms. Corsaro (2005) discusses childhood material culture in relation to children’s engagement with objects, and argues children use objects to produce material artifacts of their childhood cultures. Children’s engagement with objects such as behavior charts, toys, books, and homework papers in kindergarten also exemplify ways cultural tools for learning (Rogoff, 2003) are being used to structure children’s learning and participation in classrooms

Teachers assign a range of activities for homework (e.g writing and cutting papers out, and children expressed varied opinions about doing homework. For instance, George expressed his dislike for homework, and explained to an interviewer that he had to “cut a lot of stuff out.” Michael said that his homework was included in a “fun packet” which is comprised of math activities. Interestingly, he brought up the “fun packet” when asked if there was anything in kindergarten that was “really hard. Jordan also brought up his homework folder during the interview, and actually walked the interviewer

through his homework calendar, and explained the folder's contents. During his interview, Jordan pulled out his backpack and said that he was working on addition and phonograms. While Jordan described his homework routine, he pointed to different artifacts within the folder (referencing different things as "this and that"). As you will read, the interviewer offered a critique about the amount of work in the folder, but the child offered a different opinion.

Jordan: In as in Bin. And Min. Look that is what I'm doing tomorrow. This, that. On Thursday, that. On Friday, that. On Saturday, that. On Sunday, that. On Monday, that. On Tuesday, that, and then the book is on Tuesday.

Interviewer: You have a lot of work to do. Do you like doing homework?

Jordan: Nu-huh.

Interviewer: Oh, you don't think that is a lot?

Jordan: No.

Interviewer: Okay. Well I do.

Jordan: We do three pages at a time.

Interviewer: Okay. Do you like doing homework?

Jordan: Yes.

Why did the topic of homework come up so frequently in the child interviews, and what is the significance of children engaging in this activity? Homework is a new experience that bears important meaning for kindergarten-aged children. More specifically, homework is a new element of a shared repertoire established in kindergartens that indicates how new practices are currently being adopted in early childhood education to create alignment with the

broader systems of education. Further, the emphasis on homework in the child interviews exemplifies how the “shove down of curriculum” is occurring and illustrates ways children’s school routines are changing as a result. Moreover, children’s conversations about homework provide evidence schools in the U.S. are placing higher value on children’s performance over learning (Hatch, 2002).

Concluding Remarks

Research on the transition activities employed by early childhood educators brings attention to the challenges pre-k and kindergarten teachers face in regards to implementing direct transition practices with families (e.g. Pianta, Taylor, & Cox, 2001). Kindergarten teachers for example commonly cite time constraints and the late receipt of information about incoming families as the most significant challenges (Nelson, 2004; Early, Pianta, Taylor, Cox, 2001). Additionally, interviews with mothers in this study suggest families participated in relatively few transition practices initiated by schools. It is important to note the “background” information provided in this study considering the children interviewed did not have much to say about their participation in transition activities. I argue children’s limited discussions on the transition are a reflection of the fragmented system of early childhood, and the inconsistent approaches toward facilitating the transition. In addition, the child participants’ minimal conversation on the topic also indicates a central issue in that children’s perspectives often considered as adults in their lives structure activities for their participation within the transition process.

A significant finding from the interviews with children is that they seemingly know little about kindergarten before they start school, and they are often unaware they are participating in transition practices. As discussed, children would often respond to questions about school using the phrase “I don’t know” bringing light to a point of ambiguity within readiness communities of practice. Further, I contend the children’s tendencies to respond to questions by saying “I don’t know” reflects a breakdown of the communication and coordination between children and adults, fundamental components of guided participation (Rogoff, 2001). With this said, the nature of ambiguity within communities of practice can provide experiences for children to learn new information about cultural routines, activities, tools, which gives deeper meaning to children’s membership and participation within their social groups (Wenger, 1998). In line with this assertion, Corsaro argues children experience uncertainty or disturbances when making sense of their participation in adult-child routines is a result of their positions as inferior members of society, along with their social and cognitive immaturity. For example, children who referenced transition activities they participated in their future kindergarten classrooms had little to mention about the experience. Also interesting to note, is a majority of children in this sample went to Head Start for pre-k, a program that embeds “priming events” (Corsaro, 2005) into the school curriculum at the end of the year, yet children seemed to not recall these experience.

In addition to the findings that indicate children “don’t know” about kindergarten, this study brought forward an interpretation on how children’s

identity formation changes significantly after they enter kindergarten. Moreover, several of the mothers interviewed for the FCCS project generated an idea that the entrance into kindergarten is representative of a time wherein children obtain “big kid” status. I argue families reproduce assumptions about being “big” that insinuate children will have greater autonomy and agency within their kindergarten classrooms. However, children’s impressions about being big changes after they enter into kindergarten and recognize there are regimented routines and established rules that limit their full participation within the classroom context, and consequently they are stuck in their positions as “legitimate peripheral participants” within the school system.

In most cases, children have minimal opportunity to impart their views and opinions on school and learning are limited due to the inherent power dynamics within classroom contexts that situate children as inferior participants. Many of the children seemed reluctant to talk about things they did not like about school. However, few children expressed their opinions about their dislikes, as illustrated in the following excerpt from Devon’s (a kindergarten participant) interview.

Interviewer: What are the things you don’t like about school?

Devon: Getting in trouble.

Interviewer: Do you get in trouble a lot?

Devon: Sometimes.

Interviewer: Why?

Devon: Because I do bad stuff and you have to make good stuff.

In the following excerpt, Micha discussed what she would do if he could be the boss at school.

Interviewer: If you could be the boss, tell me what you would like to do [...] You're the boss of the teacher.

Micha: Go outside. I like going outside and eating [...] I'm always hungry.

Interviewer: Well here's another question for you. If you were the boss of your classroom [...] What would you like to do better so you could learn more? What would help you learn? What would you tell your teacher?

Micha: The only thing that I like to learn is if we're going to start driving a car or playing with clay.

It is noteworthy that that interviewer thought to ask Micha this question considering he shared negative opinions about going to school throughout the interview. School is undoubtedly an experience that shapes children's sense of belonging within society, and adults bear a responsibility to include the voices and perspectives of children in the decisions made for or about their life experiences.

In closing, the intention of this chapter was to foreground children's perspectives so that adults could recognize the importance of their life experiences. MacNaughton, Hughes, & Smith (2007) write, "Adults interested in ensuring that their society functions as a true democracy by including younger children's voices face two major tasks: to enable young children to express their opinions confidently and to ensure that those opinions are taken seriously" (p.

466). Provided adults take the time to discover the significance of children's viewpoints, there is potential to reconfigure the commonly used approaches to guide young people's participation in routines in during the transition to kindergarten. The final chapter of this dissertation synthesizes the findings of adult and children's understandings on kindergarten. Further, I discuss ways the results of this study can be used to inform early childhood policy, programming, practice in relation to the transition to kindergarten.

Chapter 6

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND IMPLICATIONS

The primary goal of this study was to examine children and parents' thoughts and ideas on the getting ready for and being in kindergarten. Childhood studies scholars describe children as social actors and position children as agents within their social worlds (James, 2009). Children as social actors or agents learn, create meaning, and reproduce understandings about their social worlds from the innumerable interactions that take place across their life experiences. With this in mind, this study sought to analyze how both children and adults make sense of what is going on in kindergarten today, and examine how people's perceptions on kindergarten are used to facilitate the transition to school. In this chapter, I synthesize the reified and participatory practices (Wenger, 1998) children and mothers discussed to explicate salient elements of kindergarten used by children and adults to structure the transition process. Information derived from discourses on the transition to kindergarten and school readiness, in addition to mothers' perspectives on preparing children for school are used to give deeper meaning to younger people's participation in the kindergarten transition process. Moreover, the findings from this dissertation shed insight on the aspects of kindergarten that are used by adults and children to make sense of the transition into "formal" school.

This chapter begins with a brief review of the conceptual and methodological framework used to ground this dissertation, including a restatement of the research problem, a reiteration of the study's purpose and

scholarly significance, along with a discussion of the data analysis procedures. Following, I provide a summary of the major research findings. The results of this study illustrate the multifaceted nature of children's and parents' experiences getting ready for, and being in kindergarten. Considering my motivation to acknowledge children's rights to participation, the conclusion of this chapter explores the potential to create "opportunities" (Shier, 2001) to bring children's perspectives and voices into research to inform early childhood policy, programming, and practice, specifically in relation to kindergarten readiness and the development and improvement of kindergarten transition programs.

Dissertation Review

The beginning chapters of this dissertation described different views on the significance of the transition to kindergarten. The entry into kindergarten is an important milestone for many children and families in the U.S., and adults prepare children for the start of formal school through a number of strategies. As the results from this study suggest, children are enrolled in preschool programs to interact in social settings outside the home, and connect with people other than family members. Adults play games with children to learn the alphabet or numbers, and provide opportunities for children to practice other academic skills. Often times, children will receive new things (e.g. backpacks, school supplies, lunchboxes, clothes) to signify the start of school. Although the start of kindergarten symbolizes an integral milestone in early childhood, recently the sociocultural nuances of this transition leveled in response to education policies and reform. More specifically, the mother's awareness of more rigorous,

standards-based, didactic public school settings have changed how children and adults make sense of what happens (or should happen) during the transition to kindergarten. While adults (e.g. early childhood professionals and parents) recognize kindergarten environments have changed, there continues to be strong debate in the U.S. on how to best prepare children for their first year of formal school. Generally speaking, the crux of the debate centers on whether the children's academic readiness or social readiness (or a combination of the two) has greater impact on later school experiences. Thus, the discourses circulating within early childhood education have caused ambiguity in adults' perspectives on kindergarten and the transition into formal school, ultimately affecting children's perceptions of what to expect when they get to kindergarten.

Wenger's (1998) theory of communities of practice was used to study how children learning and understanding facilitates the transition to kindergarten, and contributes to children's socialization into formal school settings. I studied mothers and children's dialogue to understand the mechanisms used to develop shared practices during the transition to kindergarten. More specifically, I interpreted children's dialogue about getting for and being in kindergarten to give deeper meaning to their participation within home, school, and community contexts. Keeping in mind that the process of learning within a community of practice involves mutual engagement, the development of joint enterprises, and shared repertoire, I turned to parents' perspectives on the transition to examine how adult understandings of kindergarten influenced children's participation in pre-k and kindergarten routines. The viewpoints parents shared about

kindergarten, and the stories told on approaches used to facilitate the transition were used to examine ways adults engage children in transition activities. In addition, Rogoff's (2003) notion of guided participation provided a framework for making sense of children and mothers' mutual meaning making, and mutual participation during the transition period. What's more, Corsaro's (2005) notion of interpretive reproduction was used to give deeper meaning to children's experiences transitioning to kindergarten. Children's conversations were analyzed to explore how their experiences are shaped by their interactions with people, routines, and activities as members of "readiness" communities of practice. In addition, I explored school routines that have influence over children's roles and membership in kindergarten classrooms.

Findings from this study are drawn from data collected from a large-scale qualitative research project conducted in Arizona. Conversational interviews were conducted with 45 preschool and kindergarten aged children in contrasting regions throughout the state. Adult researchers employed a "Mosaic Approach" (Clark & Moss, 2001) to elicit children's perspectives on getting ready for, and going to school. Of the 45 interviews, 34 transcripts were analyzed and interpreted to study children's experiences during the transition process, as well as their participation in kindergarten classrooms. Transcripts from interviews with 13 parents were also used to give deeper meaning to children's talk about the transition process. Interviews were analyzed using an inductive and interpretive approach to make sense of children's lived experiences during the transition to kindergarten.

Summary of Findings

Examining Broader Discourses

The notion of school readiness is a catalyst for early childhood reform, used to inform public policies intended to improve and enrich programs and provisions for children and families during the pre-k years. However, the reliance on readiness as an indicator for school success has created tension within the early childhood community. Graue (1992) described readiness as an “institutionalized concept that serves as a gate to and from kindergarten” (p. 225). In agreement with this assertion, Cannella and Viruru (2002) deconstruct “readiness,” arguing it is an “adult privilege,” a notion that normalizes children and childhoods, and categorizes people in a way that privileges certain skills and abilities over others. However important to consider, these critical interpretations comprise a minority perspective, and policy directives such as the School Readiness Indicators Initiative are steering discourse on readiness toward dominant, normative constructions of the notion, and high value is placed on getting children “ready to learn” for school. The School Readiness Indicators Initiative stems from both a “systems perspective” and “child outcomes perspectives,” yet it is premised on standards and performance-based strategies aimed at restructuring the transition to kindergarten so that all children follow similar trajectories into school.

While experts in early childhood are making strides towards establishing comprehensive definitions on readiness, the on-going discourse is generating new or different perspectives on kindergarten, and school readiness among people working on the ground. Mothers interviewed for the FCCS project brought to

light ways they are preparing children for kindergarten. For instance, mothers would indicate their child's participation in institutionalized early care and education programs (e.g. Head Start or privately-owned preschools) were instrumental in facilitating the transition. The mothers interviewed also described how they structured activities at home so their child could practice kindergarten-like activities before starting school. In addition, the children interviewed shared their perspectives getting ready for and being in school, emphasizing their experiences learning to count and acquire language and literacy skills. As such, this study examined the "trickle-down" effects of policy and broader discourse to provide an inside-out look at the systems of early care and education that have influence over children's transition into kindergarten in the U.S.

Mothers' Constructions of Academic Readiness

The debates on school readiness circulating within the field have seemingly dichotomized mothers' perceptions on how to best prepare their children for kindergarten. For instance, the mothers interviewed put forward beliefs about the pre-k years as being a time to create opportunities for their child to explore and develop a "love for learning," but also recognized the system of schooling had much influence over determining what types of activities would accelerate the development of skills associated with readiness. More specifically, on one side of the argument, the mothers interviewed emphasized a need for children to perform basic or discreet skills, placing high value on those that are measurable, and academically oriented. While on another, parents said they did not have to do much to prepare their child for kindergarten because they

considered teaching and learning to be the purpose of kindergarten. Those who aligned with the latter belief expressed the idea that their child's education throughout the pre-k years was "pre-learning" and children's participation in kindergarten was more academic and more educational, thus they expressed little concern about whether their child would be "ready."

It is interesting to point out the fact several mothers interviewed conveyed little, to no concern when discussing their perceptions of their child's readiness for kindergarten. What factors had influence over their seemingly confident demeanors about their child's readiness? Were mothers' responding to questions in ways considered to be "socially desirable"? Did the mothers interviewed genuinely believe their approaches to facilitating the transition would "pay off" after their child entered kindergarten? While I cannot fully understand the reasons why some mothers believed their child would "just be ready" for school, it would be interesting to further examine the cultural and social factors that contribute to parents perceptions of their child's readiness for school. In line with Graue's (1993, 1992) research on social constructions of readiness, in future studies I intend to analyze the discourses on readiness that shape adults' and children's beliefs about kindergarten to draw comparisons between class, culture, and social backgrounds.

Moreover, I cannot make definitive conclusions about how or why some of the mothers interviewed held the belief that the pre-k experience is a less educational time for children, but this is also a line of inquiry worth exploring in future studies. With this said, I argue the beliefs mothers have about children's

learning (or pre-learning) brings attention to the varying beliefs on how children acquire new skills or knowledge during their early years. Mother's perspectives on children's learning falls in line with forms of guided participation (Rogoff, 2003), moreover mothers' references to the activities their children engaged with illustrate ways adults structure activities for children to participate in while they prepare for school. Given the opportunities provided by adults, the children interviewed had numerous opportunities practice routines embedded within the transition process.

The influences of various philosophies of education also manifest in parents' references to children's play, work, and participation in learning communities during the transition period. For example, parents described their children's experiences throughout the early years as being playful, full of discovery, and driven by inquiry and exposure. A core binary also emerged in the data in relation to children's participation and learning in communities of practice that reflected beliefs about whether children were passive recipients of new skills and knowledge, or were actively interacting with cultural routines to reproduce their own understandings of their social worlds. More specifically, several mothers emphasized readiness-skills, and structured school-like routines at home, whereas others expressed little concern about their child's learning and said, "that is what kindergarten is for."

The majority of the children interviewed for the FCCS project attended a formal (or center-based) care and education program, including Head Start, full or half-day preschool programs, and child care facilities. The mothers interviewed

believed their child benefited from participating in pre-k programs as they were instrumental in helping their child become more familiar with “doing school.” For several mothers this meant the preschool programs were influential in teaching children that kindergarten would be a more controlled learning experience and they would lose autonomy in their future classrooms. Interesting to point out are the ways they discussed the changes in school routines toward more regimented practices. More specifically, mothers referred to “structure” in kindergarten classrooms to convey their opinions on the benefits or costs to children’s learning experiences. Several mothers believed that “structured” environments would support their child’s individual needs, while others believed their child’s participation in structured environments would hinder their child’s education. Those who were leery of the regimented or structured environments enrolled their children in kindergartens programs alternative to mainstream public schools.

The Significance of Social Readiness

Children’s socialization into kindergartens is a multi-faceted process that involves learning through participation in peer cultures, involvement in specific classroom practices, along with reproducing adult conceptualizations of school routines. In addition to discussing children’s academic readiness, the mothers also described children’s abilities demonstrate pro-social skills and the capacity to adapt to new school routines. For example, mothers discussed their desires for children to interact with children “out there,” meaning they valued opportunities for their sons or daughters to play (or interact) with people other than siblings,

cousins, or other family members. The mothers' perspectives fall in line with research emphasizing the social-emotional competence as an indicator of later school success (Ladd, et al., 2006). Children also discussed the significance of their peer cultures, bringing attention to the importance of relational aspects of the transition. A small number of children interviewed in the pre-kindergarten cohort identified siblings or cousins as sources of information while learning about starting school. The children interviewed in the pre-k group also shared their impressions on starting school by describing whether their peers (or friends) would be with them in their kindergarten classrooms. Conversations on this topic ranged from missing their friends to meeting new friends, shedding light on a point of ambiguity children face when thinking about starting school. In a review of research on listening to children, Clark (2005) identifies key themes that emerge in findings that report on children's priorities, interests and concerns, and among them are "the importance of friends." In addition, Corsaro and Molinari (2005) bring attention to the significance of "peer culture." The findings from this dissertation provide evidence children pay close attention to their direct and indirect involvement with people their own age to gain deeper understandings of routines in kindergarten contexts.

Children's Learning throughout the Transition

The circulating discourses on school readiness also shape adults' beliefs about human development, and children's learning during their early years. The majority of mothers interviewed align their beliefs about their child's growth and development through a linear, maturationist perspective. As mentioned, mothers

alluded to the notion that their children learn by absorbing new knowledge, or that they would “just know” or just “be ready” to perform the tasks required to find success in kindergarten. Mothers also described children’s learning through constructivist perspectives, recognizing the significance of their interactions and experiences within the ecologies of their social worlds. Yet, as the mothers discussed their approaches to facilitating the transition it became evident there is a combination of complimentary, competing, and intersecting ideas on how to children gain knowledge of “the basics,” generate, and reproduce their own understandings of their social worlds.

The mothers interviewed looked to resources that offered prescribed definitions of readiness to ensure their child could perform the skills outlined in academic standards and that serve as indicators for school success. It was common for families involved with Head Start or center-based programs to receive information from school personnel regarding developmentally and age-appropriate expectations for children, whereas mothers who stayed at home conducted their own research utilizing the internet as a primary resource (e.g. “I just Googled five-year-olds). Citing Anderson-Levitt (1996), Barbara Rogoff (2003) describes a metaphorical racetrack that parents, teachers, politicians, and other experts studying human development use to talk about children’s progression through childhood milestones. The mothers interviewed for this study paid attention to the types of skills their children learned throughout pre-k and kindergarten, and made judgments about the rate at which their child was acquiring new competencies. Many of the mothers endorsed performance based

pre-k and kindergarten practices as they noticed how it helped “accelerate” their child’s development of academic competencies. The mothers’ constant references to phonics instruction are exemplary of this point. They often remarked on how their child was “advanced” for their age, and used artifacts produced in classroom contexts as a way to substantiate their beliefs about their child’s capabilities. For instance, several mothers interviewed made reference to their children “bringing home papers” (homework) to gauge the degree to which work-oriented practices positioned children “ahead” on the racetrack.

The mothers’ beliefs about their children’s learning also reveal ways constructions of children and childhoods influenced their beliefs about their participation and social learning. Many mothers interviewed alluded to their children as “blank slates” and discussed ways they were absorbing information as young, less experienced participants within their home, school, or community contexts. More specifically, findings from this dissertation make it explicit children’s learning during the pre-k years is often taken for granted as it is not considered to be formal, academic, or educational. With this said, the mother’s interviewed also revealed ways their children challenged their beliefs about the nature of human development, and made them question the convictions they held in regards to their child gaining competence through maturation. Moreover, children’s participation in school gave mothers different understandings of younger people’s capacities to acquire complex forms of experiential knowledge. Even though mothers were impressed and surprised by the skills children could perform through their participation in kindergartens, they did not refer to

children's depth of understanding with respect to children's conceptual knowledge. With this said mothers' opinions about their child's learning illuminated shifts in parents' perceptions on their child's capabilities to gain and understand new information. The mothers' dialogue on kindergarten routines also exposed the negotiation of meaning that transpires as adults themselves are learning about kindergarten. More specifically, parents described a generational encounter they experienced in which they realized the situated nature of their child's school experience. For several mothers interviewed, this meant recognizing their own memories of school were outdated or did not match their child's current experiences.

Facilitating the Transition

With respect to preparing children for kindergarten, it is evident mothers established routines at home intended to expose children to particular activities and situations they consider important to easing children's entry into kindergarten. While mothers discussed how they employed both direct and indirect transition activities to better prepare their child for the start of school, they report minimal engagement in transition activities organized by kindergartens or elementary schools. These findings are consistent with research that indicates kindergarten teachers encounter barriers to organizing school-based transition activities (Early, Pianta, Taylor, Cox, 2001). Furthermore, the mothers' critiques on school-based activities also support findings that family circumstances (e.g. lack of child care) hinder their involvement transition activities (La Paro, et al., 2003). The majority of parents interviewed explained

how they engaged their child in activities at home with the intention of “exposing” them to academically oriented concepts they believed they would need to know for kindergarten. More specifically, the mothers interviewed repeatedly used the term “basics” to describe what their child ought to know before starting school. The “basics” were defined as primarily as children’s understandings of emergent language and literacy and mathematics concepts. Furthermore, parents commonly talked about promoting their child’s alphabet knowledge, and understanding of “basic” math skills such as number and shape recognition.

References to the “basics” provide a window into the different influences within the broader pre-k context that shape the mothers’ understandings of the types of skills and knowledge children should acquire before the start of school. For instance, increases of family literacy programs within communities, along with research on the importance of children’s literacy development has created reified practices within “readiness” communities of practice that have reconfigured family routines the pre-k years to become better prepared for the start of school. For example, several mothers interviewed explained how approaches to shared book reading have changed so that children can practice language and literacy concepts (such as alphabet recognition and phonemic awareness). More to this point, early learning standards have had a similar effect on adult understandings of kindergartens today. One mother explicitly commented on the influence of the No Child Left Behind legislation, whereas others alluded to the environment becoming more “structured” and “academic.”

The variations in the views expressed on kindergartens today indicate the dynamic process of adults' learning regarding the transition to school. The mothers' beliefs about early childhood education also illustrate a type of generational encounter embedded within "readiness" communities of practice. Wenger describes generational encounters "interlocking identities" and a process by which old identities interact with new ones to construct new or different perspectives on elements that facilitate learning and meaning making. As mothers talked about preparing their children for kindergarten, it became evident their memories of being kindergarteners met with their children's current situation preparing for school, and they noticed their old experiences and their child's new experiences were not the same. Noting that old information is not bad information, mothers constructed contemporary ideas on how to prepare their child for kindergarten using a combination of their own memories and the information provided within the situated context of their child's school experience.

Parents' ideas on readiness are often misaligned with those schoolteachers form about preparing children for kindergarten (Piotrkowski, et al, 2000). In order to create continuity between families and teachers' perspectives, early childhood professionals have organized family involvement programs, and disseminate information through literature and web-based resources. For instance, Parlapiano (2003) outlines what parents need to know about teachers' thoughts on readiness skills and unpack the common "myths" circulating about what children need to know when they start school. The mothers interviewed

mentioned they had minimal interaction with their child's kindergarten teacher, both before and after their child had started school. Thus, the mothers interviewed formed ideas about school using a range of resources within "localities of practice." Examples of approaches they used to gain more information on human development or kindergarten include accessing internet resources, or talking with their child's pre-k teacher. A small number of the mothers interviewed mentioned they received information from their child's pre-k teachers or care providers. Further the mothers interviewed give the impression they are accessing resources outside of their child's pre-k program (e.g. other people, internet resources, cultural tools) to facilitate their child's transition to kindergarten. However, due to the parameters I encountered in this study, it is hard to ascertain how underlying social mechanisms such as cultural capital influenced parents' participation and learning during the transition.

Findings from this study about mothers' experiences engaging in school-based transition activities are similar to those reported in previous research (Wildenger & McIntyre, 2010). More specifically, families are participating in generic transition activities (e.g. Meet the Teacher, or Curriculum Nights), and are not offered opportunity to participate in transition practices that are more individualized in nature. Several mothers interviewed voiced complaints about the generalized transition activities at school, stating they could not attend or that they failed to provide them with any direct interactions with teachers. Despite increased efforts to build home-school partnerships, several mothers' interviewed brought up the fact they had little communication with kindergarten teachers both

before and during the school year. The stories several mothers shared about their participation in school-based transition activities are consistent with findings from research on the transition. For example, Early, et al (2001) found that kindergarten teachers utilized generic transition practices because of constraints within the structure of their work routines. More specifically, teachers noted the lack of financial compensation as a disincentive to implementing transition practices during the summer months. Additionally, teachers commonly reported they received information about their future students and families late in the summer, making it difficult for them to form connections with parents or children prior to the start of school. More work on parents' perceptions of the effectiveness of transition practices is needed to determine how children and their families can benefit from participating in direct transition activities. In my future research, I intend to examine parents' and family members' opinions about participating in transition activities. It is also interesting to connect this project with a finding from Corsaro and Molinari's (2005) study in that they had to point out to teachers and parents participating in their project that they were "priming" children for elementary school through the structuring of activities during the transition period. I argue this may be a similar case for families who participated in the FCCS project in that their sense of ambiguity I sensed within the interview transcripts may indicate mothers' limited awareness of their instances they coordinate transition activities for their children. In order to make children and adults more aware of their participation in transition activities it is important to

point out the significance of mutual understandings and structuring of participation.

Children's Participation in Pre-k Programs

Many mothers considered their child's participation in a preschool or child care program to be an integral transition activity. The mothers whose children attended Head Start were complimentary of the teachers' capacities to teach their child new skills and concepts, and appreciated the approaches employed through the program to prime children on the new routines they would experience in kindergarten. However, as discussed, only a small number of mothers said their families participated in transition activities their child's preschool or kindergarten teacher had organized. Of the mothers who shared accounts of participating in school-initiated activities, the majority of families attended Head Start. Moreover, at least three of the 12 parents that participated in activities organized by their child's kindergarten teacher or elementary school personnel. The school-initiated activities parents described were reflective of the strategies recommended by Pianta and Kraft-Sayre (2003). Mothers' opinions about participating in school-based transition activities also support the research finding that parents feel more connected to their child's school experience, and expressed confidence the activities would help their child adjust to the kindergarten environment. With this said, the mothers' references to school-initiated transition activities confirmed my assumptions that "Meet the Teacher" nights, classroom visitations, kindergarten round-ups, and letters sent home are intended to provide adults with information about kindergarten. Accordingly, the structure of transition practices positions

children at the periphery as they participate in transition activities aimed at promoting family involvement. I argue a consequence of children's indirect involvement in transition activities organized by kindergarten teachers, or elementary schools is that younger people start the school year with limited knowledge about what to expect in their new classrooms. Several mothers in this study explained their children had a difficult time adjusting to their kindergarten classroom. Moreover, appeared to be unaware they are participating in routines intended to prepare them for school. Children's tendency to use the phrase "I don't know" in response to questions asked about kindergarten provide evidence

Schools Ready?

Of the 13 mothers included in this study, five had opted to send their child to kindergartens alternative to mainstream or public school programs (instead, children were enrolled in charter school programs, were home-schooled, or attended a public Montessori kindergarten). Families' decisions regarding school choice brought to light a binary between learning and performance important to examine. Hatch (2002) argues that accountability movements in the U.S. have created a "curriculum shovedown" that has placed higher value on performance goals over learning objectives, and as a result, children participate in classroom practices incentivized by external reinforcement rather than their intrinsic motivation or ambitions to want to know more. The mothers interviewed explained their reasons for enrolling their children in kindergarten programs alternative to mainstream public schools was due to the large classroom sizes, the high teacher-to child ratios, and the use of specific instructional practices.

Regardless of the reason, parents were generally concerned about their child being lost in a public school classroom, and were concerned the public schools would diminish the quality of their child's education because of the routines established within the public school classroom. In other words, mothers sought out programs believed to carry the potential for their child to "learn" more. I raise this point to bring attention to the different elements of families' pre-k experiences, but am mindful of the fact several families participating in this study might not have had the cultural capital to seek out kindergarten programs or schools they would have preferred for their children. Further, families may have been constrained by the barriers within social systems in the U.S. that prevent families from accessing or participating in educational programs that offer opportunities to engage in quality, holistic, and enriched experiences. It would behoove early childhood educators to examine who the parents are that have the wherewithal to enroll their children in schools alternative to "mainstream" public school programs, and better understand the reasons behind their motivations to expose their children to particular school experiences.

Children's Perspectives on Kindergarten

Children's conversations about kindergarten are consistent with the findings from studies conducted in cross-national contexts (e.g. Loizou, 2011; Einarsdottir, 2011; Brooker, 2002). More specifically, children interviewed for the FCCS project, similar to children interviewed in other countries, noticed their first year of formal school was much more work-oriented as compared to their pre-k experiences. While many children in countries outside of the United States

enter into formal school at different ages (often the entry to school is later), I argue the similarities between children's experiences in transnational contexts merits discussion on the globalized practices influencing early childhood education. In their book *Preschool in Three Cultures Revisited*, Tobin, Hsueh, Karasawa (2009) describe the shifts present in early childhood educators' beliefs and approaches to educating young children. Their research brings attention to the consistent yet evolving ideas adults communicate about preschool practices. Moreover, whereas globalized practices towards early childhood are promoted within the dominant world (e.g. the Reggio Emilia approach to curriculum and instruction), the political, economic, and cultural contexts within and across various countries mediate the early childhood experiences for young children. In this respect, pre-k programs in the U.S. are evolving to meet the demands of alignment and accountability brought on by higher systems of education. Underlying mothers' beliefs about kindergarten and children's learning is the assumption their child will benefit from participating in more academic school routines, thus illuminating the effects of reification of readiness routines and practices. All the while, children interact with various participatory and reified practices to make sense of what happens in kindergarten. For example, findings from this dissertation suggest mothers are changing the practices they structure at home to meet the heightened expectations of academic readiness brought on by initiatives and policies such as the National Education Goals Panel and No Child Left Behind.

Children shared a range of experiences, and discussed a number of topics as they shared their perceptions on kindergarten. The children interviewed prior to entering kindergarten discussed their preconceptions about a new school environment, expressed concerns about starting school, but also indicated they knew little about what they should expect when starting kindergarten. Children consistently said the phrase “I don’t know” to describe what they thought would happen in kindergarten, or to explain who was talking to them about what to expect. There are several explanations for why “I don’t know” was such a frequent response. For some child participants, the phrase “I don’t know” was a sign of methodological issues that emerged during the interviews. For example, several QIs described in field notes how some child participants seemed uncertain about participating in an interview. QIs also mentioned some child participants preferred discussing topics unrelated to kindergarten (or any topic on the interview protocol). In one such instance, a child participant wanted to discuss her father’s recent departure from the family home as her parents were going through a divorce. Other child participants seemed to enjoy having one-on-one time with the interviewers to discuss their favorite games, television, or told stories about the activities that happened the day of the interview. Yet with the methodological issues in mind, I argue children’s ambivalent feelings about transitioning to a new school are cause for their reluctance to talk about kindergarten during the interviews.

The children interviewed after the start of kindergarten described the new things they encountered in school, explained routines they followed in their

classrooms, and discussed their preferences for particular aspects of kindergarten. Child participants from both groups were eager to demonstrate their skills and would often show interviewers what they knew in terms of language and literacy concepts and mathematics skills. As children showed off their skills, the participatory and reified practices that comprise kindergarten classrooms were brought to light. For example, children revealed the influence of recent changes that have occurred in early childhood, such as the shift away from emergent reading instruction towards Scientifically Based Reading Research (SBBR). SBBR is described as being a skills-based approach to early literacy instruction (Vukelich, Christie, & Enz, 2008, p. 8). Vukelich, et al. argue the SBBR movement has contributed to early childhood by identifying “core” knowledge and skills young children should acquire to become successful readers. The repetition of the phrase “sight words” and the tendency for children to tell adult researchers about the sight words they recognized uncovered ways kindergarten classrooms endorse performance-based activities. Children also offered a range of commentary on their writing abilities saying they were “professionals” at making certain letters (in this case the letter “A”) or mentioned their teacher would tell them they needed more practice. Tyler (one of the kindergarten participants) explained, “I do good work but I do my name wrong.” He also mentioned that in order to improve his skills his teacher has him write “again, again, again, and again.”

The pre-determined routines established by classroom teachers largely facilitate children’s adjustment to kindergarten. The routines children learn to

follow are just one element of school culture younger people become a part of immediately after they begin their transition into kindergarten. Brooker (2002) asserts children learn the cultural routines in school by mastering two modes of learning, regulative discourse and instructional discourse. She explains regulative discourse governs classroom behavior, and instructional discourse provides children access to a classroom curriculum. Moreover, the acquisition of knowledge pertaining to school rules and curriculum forms a ‘system of dispositions’ or habitus (Brooker, 2002 citing Bourdieu, 1990a: 53) by which children follow in order to follow practices that align with becoming students. The children interviewed for this dissertation expressed their views on the school rules, activities, and tools they used to participate in their classrooms. For instance, the child participants’ discussion on behavior charts in particular, illustrates ways adults use concrete objects to symbolize the types of actions considered positive or negative with respect to supporting communities and the learning that happens within group settings.

To give deeper meaning to children’s conversations about the physical objects or materials in their school settings, I turned to Corsaro’s (2005) discussion on the notions of childhood symbolic culture and childhood material culture. Corsaro argues the three primary sources of childhood symbolic culture are media, mythical figures and legends, and literature and fairy tales. Further, he mentions although the information, stories, or rituals embedded within each source is used by adults to mediate cultural routines, “children quickly appropriate, use, and transform symbolic culture as they produce and participate

in peer culture” (p. 116). The child participants’ references to guidance and discipline strategies used within the context of schools exemplifies ways childhood symbolic culture is used to create stories and generate beliefs about authority figures in schools, and the consequences that might incur should a child act out or get a “red light” on a behavior chart. Jordan’s story about the principal’s office is representative of the tales children will share within their peer cultures to make sense of school rules and routines. As he talked about the principal’s office he shared a belief that while there, a police officer comes and the “the policeman says you stay in jail for like a thousand days.” Other examples of stories children told about getting in trouble include standing on the “naughty nose wall,” “moving clips down,” or coloring in a “red” circle on a behavior chart. These accounts shed insight on how children’s imaginations shape their learning and participation within school communities.

Wenger argues imagination is a core element of identification, and is used as a tool to distinguish commonalities and difference between members of a community of practice. He writes, “Imagination can yield a sense of affinity, and thus an identity of participation, but it can also result in a reaction of dissociation and a consequent identity of non-participation” (Wenger, 1998, p. 195). Findings from this study suggest adults capitalize off children’s imagined stories about the consequences they could experience, and instead of interrupting children’s thoughts about discipline (such as going to jail); adults will use these ideas to maintain power and control.

Wenger (1998) delineates different modes of belonging within communities of practice, including engagement, imagination, and alignment. Engagement involves a threefold process: the ongoing negotiation of meaning, the formation of trajectories, and the unfolding of histories of practice (1998, p. 174). Imagination is described as being a practice of perspective taking in which individuals position themselves in particular times and spaces, often transcending reality, and conjure new images of their relations with the world. Wenger writes, “through alignment we become a part of something big because we do what it takes to play our part” (p. 179). The modes of belonging were also used to give meanings to children’s descriptions of classroom rules and routines, providing deeper insight on how engagement, imagination, and alignment are mechanisms used to guide their participation in the classrooms. Children’s explanations about school make it clear adults utilize strategies to control children’s participation in school. More specifically, children’s conversations about school revealed a core binary as they discussed whether they could make choices “on their own” to guide their learning, or had to follow a pre-determined routine established by the classroom teacher. This point is important to examine as it illustrates how younger people are inherently positioned as legitimate peripheral participants the context of school and beyond.

Wenger’s ideas on imagination and identification also fall in line with an argument put forward by Cannella and Viruru (2002) who assert providing children with choices is an illusionary practice. The authors maintain that although children believe they are participating in “child-centered” environments

and are often given opportunities to make choices in the classroom, adults have ultimate power when determining what choices become available within classrooms and other social spaces. More to this point, Hall and Rudkin (2011) assert public institutions, namely schools, have tremendous influence over the formation of children's social understandings and ideas on communal responsibility. For instance, the practice of "classroom helpers" is used to teach children how their contributions as individuals can support the organization and structure school experiences, and is used to promote children's engagement in activities that facilitate community building. Whereas this practice is instrumental in connecting children to classroom communities, also empowering, it is also exemplary of adults' control over the routine. Hall and Rudkin (2011), write, "Adults recognize the importance of preparing children to participate in a democracy as adults, rather than ensuring they are part of democracies as children" (p. 53). Lave and Wenger (1991) point out learning as legitimate peripheral participation is "not merely a condition for membership, but is itself an evolving form of membership" (p. 53). As such, this point implies children should eventually be afforded roles that position them as full members within a community of practice.

Lam and Pollard (2006) assert, "The transition is not only a change of context, but also a process of change and a shift of identity" (p. 129). Several parents interviewed told their children starting kindergarten meant they had earned "big kid" status. Further children expressed ideas that their status as kindergarteners would provide more opportunity to engage in self-determining

activities within the context of their school environments. Moreover, the notion of being “big” manifested conversation with the mothers interviewed in various ways. For instance, they said kindergartens were in “big kid” schools, children would get to play on the “big” playground, and additionally children would do things that were “big” for their age. Several mothers interviewed described their child’s adjustment to kindergarten as difficult; while one mother explained her son experienced “culture shock” after several days being in his new classroom. I argue an explanation for the culture shock children experience is due in part to the realization that they are learning being “big” is not what they imagined it would be. In line with Ladd et al. (2006) stronger attention to the “social relational” factors during the transition may ease children’s experiences adjusting to kindergarten classrooms. Understanding children’s experiences learning new school routines from their point of view provides opportunity to explore the effects of guided participation, and draws out the implications of adults’ approaches to facilitating the transition process.

The Significance of Peer Culture

Children’s participation within their peer cultures helps them generate ideas about communal responsibility, and socially appropriate behavior. The majority of children identified peers in their classrooms they liked to play with or whom they thought of as friends. Through their conversations about friendships, children suggest their relationships with peers help build a sense of security in kindergarten classrooms. Moreover, several children interviewed in the pre-k group formed opinions about whether they would enjoy kindergarten based on

whether they would know people in their future classrooms. In addition, children talked about their siblings, or younger family members as being resources for gaining information about kindergarten. This finding falls in line with Corsaro and Molinari's (2005) discussion on peer culture. Interesting to point out the children interviewed did not provide details about what their siblings shared with them, however it is worth exploring the types of conversations children have about school to examine how beliefs and routines centered on schooling are perpetuated in peer cultures.

While children mainly discussed their friendships, they also shared their perspectives on children in their peer groups they did not understand or disliked, and commented on how these children were perpetually getting into trouble and had been identified as being "bad" or "naughty." During the interviews, several children described their observations of their peers in classrooms. These conversations brought my attention to their understandings of prosocial behaviors in classroom contexts, but also provided insight on the complex processes involved in making meaning of teachers' guidance and discipline strategies. Children said their teachers would laugh at friends, but they would still get "yellows" on their behavior charts (indicating they were misbehaving), or they seemed to call into question the indirect practices used to stop "naughty" children from acting out. Children's interpretations of the behavior charts, and other tools used to as mechanisms to promote guidance and discipline in the classroom are evidence reified practices in schools serve many purposes, one of which involves the maintenance of children's positionality as "legitimate peripheral participants."

Integrating Parent and Children Perspectives

I drew comparisons between children and parents' perspectives to make sense of central issues that emerged from the data. For instance, information from interviews with parents were used to gain more perspective on why children in the pre-k group had the tendency to use the phrase "I don't know" in response to questions about their perceptions on kindergarten. Moreover, several children would not respond to the questions posed about kindergarten, or would change the subject when questions about starting school were posed. Thus, children's inability or reluctance to talk about kindergarten highlights a significant disjuncture within a "readiness" community of practice, especially in relation to the development of shared repertoire. Even though shared repertoires form through interaction of participatory and reified practices, there is also an underlying element of ambiguity contributing to the formation of shared beliefs. Wenger (1998) argues ambiguity is indicative of mismatched interpretations and misunderstandings, and indicates disjuncture in the process of forming negotiated meaning. Further, he contends ambiguity provides opportunity for people to generate new meanings. Therefore, I argue there are noteworthy implications in children's inability to articulate what they expect will happen in kindergarten.

Further, I integrated the perspectives of parents and children to make sense of what is going on within "localities of practice" (Lave and Wenger, 1991) as families prepare for the start of kindergarten. Dockett and Perry (2009) state, "Children do not live in isolation – they are members of many different groups and interact in many different contexts. Experiences and interactions within these

contexts, including those occurring within and between families, prior-to-school settings, contribute to perceptions of readiness” (p. 25). As such, I situated children’s perspectives in the context of readiness to understand what goes on during the transition process. For example, the “culture shock” parents described may occur because of the emphasis on academic readiness. The transition to kindergarten is an exciting time during early childhood, but is also becoming a stressful experience as concerns rise on whether children will have acquired the basic skills needed to meet the expectations of kindergarten teachers, as evidenced in the interviews conducted with both mothers and children. Moreover, children and adults’ conversations about practices embedded in the content areas of language and literacy and mathematics demonstrates the narrowing of the early childhood curriculum. How are children learning about science, social studies, or engaging with the creative arts? Future research will examine instructional discourses in kindergarten classrooms across cultural and community contexts to unpack children’s participation in school communities.

Discussion of Findings/Implications

This study contributes to an international body of child’s rights based research. Whereas research conducted with younger people is often conducted with children and youth eight to 18 years of age, an increasing number of early childhood experts and professionals are working to highlight the potential for children 0-7 years of age to contribute to the scholarship conducted about their life experiences (e.g. Blanchet-Cohen & Elliot, 2011; Harcourt, 2011; Lundy, McEvoy, & Byrne, 2011, MacNaughton, Smith, & Lawrence, 2000).

MacNaughton, Hughes and Smith (2007) assert that early childhood experts and policy makers generate policies and practices that reflect three models of children and childhoods used in the ‘dominant’ world to define children’s roles in society, including children as possessions of adults, children as subjects to adults, and children as participants in decisions about their lives. The studies reviewed in this dissertation on that relate to school readiness and the transition to kindergarten, are primarily conducted with the intent of making decisions *for* and *about* children and emphasize performance, or outcomes-based evaluations of the transition experience. Moreover, a primary intention of research on the transition to kindergarten in the U.S. is seemingly conducted to draw out adults’ concerns and expectations for starting school. As a means to acknowledge and include the perspectives of children, researchers, practitioners, and early childhood community members are increasingly incorporating children’s voices into research across various disciplines including sociology, anthropology, and education (e.g. Swadener & Polakow, 2011; Una, 2010; Habashi, 2008; Lundy, 2007; Clark, 2005; MacNaughton, Smith, & Lawrence, 2000). Many positive outcomes have resulted from children’s participation in research and ways to more authentically include children in the planning and enactment of various projects, including working with children as co-researchers and consultants (Blanchet-Cohen & Elliot, 2011; Clark, 2011; Berson, 2009; Gunn, 2008; MacNaughton, Hughes, & Smith, 2007; Lundy, 2007; Lundy, 2006; Soto & Swadener, 2005). Undertakings such as these bring needed attention to the inclusion of children in decision-making processes that are directly affecting

aspects of their lives, and the need for strategies that encourage children's unmediated voices is increasingly evident – particularly for children who are members of marginalized groups in their societies.

Despite the growing interest in acknowledging the participatory capacities of younger people in trans-national contexts, there is reluctance in the U.S. (and countries beyond) to bring young children into the conversations taking place about the decisions made about their life experiences. Walker, Brooks, and Wrightsman (1999) argue the lack of focus on children's rights in the U.S. is caused by dominant beliefs among adults that consider children as being immature, incapable of developing well-informed opinions, or demonstrating self-determination. Walker, et al. further explain there is a prevailing assumption in U.S. society adults will act in the best interest of children, and implicit in this assumption is the connotation adults "know better" than younger people. Not unusual to report, the interviews with the mothers in the FCCS project suggest adults make decisions about their child's school experiences by situating their kin within the context of what lies ahead. The mothers' perceptions are reflective of the dominant readiness discourse, wherein the expressed understanding that their child's kindergarten experiences would set a tone for academic success defined by their first school experiences. With this in mind, mothers overwhelming established routines that would yield the support needed to ensure their children acquired readiness skills, and encountered positive situations during their first year of school. In this regard, the majority of mother's interviewed placed higher value on preparing their children for school (and meeting the heightened demands

of kindergarten) rather than considering whether schools would be the ready (or the best fit) for their children – thus children became “othered” in the context of decision making as families prepared for kindergarten.

This dissertation takes an important step forward in promoting the voices of young children within the context of the U.S. I provided evidence children have meaningful things to say about their life (and school) experiences, and I continue to explore different ways children’s perspectives can be given due weight to inform the decisions adults tend to make *for* and *about* matters affecting their lives.

Recommendations for Programming and Practice

This dissertation brings attention to the perspectives of children and parents as they participate in transition activities and school routines, bringing attention to the ways in which these two key constituents structure and engage in school routines. The close examination of children’s and parent’s experiences preparing for school provide a window into the processes embedded within communities of practice established to ease the transition into kindergarten. Findings from this study can be used as a catalyst to restructure family-based programming initiatives that are more closely aligned to the day-to-day situations children and families encounter throughout the pre-k period.

Parents interviewed for this study described situations whereby their child had a difficult time adjusting to the kindergarten environment and the routines established by classroom teachers. One mother in particular, (Madison) used the phrase “culture shock” to describe what her son experienced after he started

kindergarten. Other parents echoed this sentiment using words like “rough” or “difficult” to describe their child’s transition. What is it about the kindergarten classroom that makes it difficult for children to get off on a good start? Is it the strangeness associated with the new environment? Does it have something to do with the change in routine, and learning new rules? Perhaps it is due to the process of getting to know new people. Whatever the reason, providing children with more information about “formal” school may reduce the “culture shock” many young people experience the first days, weeks, and months being in kindergarten. Whereas adults tend to react to children’s adjustment to kindergarten, there are proactive or preventative measures early childhood educators, teachers and families can take to facilitate children’s transition to school. As Dockett and Perry (2009) argue, readiness is a relational construct “conceptualized as a complex set of interactions between individuals and their families, schools, and communities” (p. 25). Children who have a more nuanced understanding of what to expect in kindergarten will enter into classrooms feeling more “ready,” comfortable, confident, and empowered. Moreover, adults will have stronger awareness on how to talk with children about kindergarten, taking into consideration the alternative viewpoints younger people have about the processes involved in becoming and being kindergartners.

Further, I pose the question: Will conversations about the transition change, so that more research examines ways schools can become better prepared for kindergarten? While not a new argument, Ritchie, Clifford, Malloy, Cob, and Crawford (2010) assert a systemic overhaul in education is needed before schools

can become better prepared to meet the needs of all children. Ritchie and her colleagues write:

Altering the institution of school to become a place that ensures smooth transition in its largest sense requires an alignment between beliefs and actions, between data and professional development, and between research and practice (p. 173).

Ritchie et al. point out extensive work is carried out within the field to unify the fragmented systems of care and education. However, as the authors discuss the importance of connecting research with practice, it is critical to understand how considerations are made for qualitative research to contribute to systems and capacity building in early childhood. The stories and life experiences brought forward through qualitative research offer profound insight on complex social realities (House, 2005). Moreover, Elliot (2010) discusses the impact of story-telling and dialogue as critical elements a part of the development of early childhood policies and curricula. She writes, “We must encourage dialogue at all levels that impact early childhood – within government, within the university, within professional organizations, within the field – and avoid the monologism that results from unitary voices in official documents” (p. 17). Not only should dialogue generated on the critical issues in early childhood encompass all levels of the field, but discourse must also include the voices of all its members.

In closing, it is important to note the topic of the transition to kindergarten is not new to research in early childhood; however, children’s perspectives are not often studied within the context of the U.S. This study addresses this shortcoming

in that it brings younger people's perspectives into consideration, and younger people are considered a key constituent in the transition process. Children's abilities to demonstrate their understandings of the rules and routines associated with kindergarten and going to school bring to life adult conceptualizations on readiness. Furthermore, adults are offered a glimpse into the influence they have over children's understandings of school through younger people's conversations about school during both the pre-k and kindergarten period.

Researcher Reflection

I chose to study the transition to kindergarten for multiple reasons, one being that the entry into formal school is important to young children and families, but also because I noticed a significant level of ambiguity surrounding the process of getting children ready for school in my role as a preschool teacher. Most importantly, I realized the voices and perspectives of children are missing in research conducted on school readiness, the transition to kindergarten in the United States.

When I first conceptualized this dissertation, I intended to engage in "authentic social research with children" (Grover, 2004), and assumed I could impart children's unmediated perspectives (Swadener & Polakow, 2011) as a means to foreground their thoughts and opinions about their life experiences. I did not expect to bring the perspectives of parents into this dissertation either; however, upon reading the child interview transcripts it became evident I needed more information to understand children's experiences from a holistic perspective. More specifically, the child interview transcripts used in this study

varied in quality and length, and it became difficult to understand all that the younger participants had to say. The inclusion of mothers' perspectives provided important background information on children's experiences getting ready for school. Further, the information the mothers interviewed shared gave me the opportunity to examine ways adults structure children's participation in the transition process. Findings from this study build a heightened awareness on ways children are situated as peripheral participants in learning communities, however as move forward in my work in early childhood I will strive to challenge the assumptions adults often have about children and their capabilities to participate and contribute to culture and society.

On a different note, I set out to conduct a study that acknowledged children's rights to participation. Even though this study meets criteria for being child's rights based, it is important to point out the limitations of this work in truly adhering to Articles 12 and 13 of the UNCRC. Shier's (2001, 2010) Pathways to Participation model was used to examine the extent to which child participants served as full participants in this project. Shier defines three levels of participation: openings, opportunities, and obligations. Openings are described as commitments, or statement of intent to working with younger people, opportunities occur when individuals are able to fulfill commitments to working with children through action, and obligations occur when those actions become embedded as a social practice or routine (Shier, 2001). Researchers working on the FCCS project created openings for children's participation by inviting them to be interviewed for the study. Further, the young children who participated in this

study were afforded opportunities to share their views on school, and were encouraged to express themselves through a variety of mediums. As discussed in previous chapters, children's participation terminated after the data collection phase of this study, and subsequently I used my adult lenses to make sense of children's conversations about kindergarten and offered my own interpretations of their experiences getting ready for school. Dockett, Einarsdottir, and Perry (2009) argue,

Engaging children in research and seeking their perspectives is a complex process. To do this effectively we must be wary of approaches that position listening to children voices and promoting children's participation as tokenistic processes that do little to enhance children's experiences. (p. 295)

Ultimately, my study became a project about children rather than being a project conducted with children. Yet, I cannot discount the significance of the lessons learned throughout the planning, implementation, and analysis stages of the project. This dissertation makes it clear children have a lot to say about their school experiences, and with their thoughts in the foreground, it is important adults move beyond the phase of listening to children's voices and explore ways to use children's perspectives to inform early childhood research, policy, and practice. As I move forward in my career I will continue to seek out "openings and opportunities" (Shier, 2001, 2010) to collaborate with younger people. I would like to carry out projects in the future that involve children as my research partners and collaborators throughout all stages of the research process, but

especially during the phases of data analysis and dissemination. It is my intention to stimulate interest among early childhood researchers and scholars, and children alike to continue studying the life experience of younger people.

REFERENCES

- Ackerman, D. J. & Barnett, S. (2005). Prepared for kindergarten: What does “readiness” mean? New Brunswick, NJ: National Institute for Early Education Research.
- Ackerman, L., Feeny, T., Hart, J. & Newman, J. (2003). *Understanding and Evaluating Children’s Participation. A review of Contemporary Literature*. London: Plan International, U.K.
- Adair, J.K. (2011). Advocating for Ethnographic Work in Early Childhood Federal Policy: Problems and Possibilities. *Anthropology and Education Quarterly*, 42(4), 422-433.
- Alderson, P., & Morrow, V. (2011). *The ethics of research with children and young people* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.
- Alderson, P. (2000). Children and researchers: Participation rights and research methods. In P. Christensen & A. James (Eds.), *Research with children: perspectives and practices* (pp. 240-259). London and New York: Falmer Press.
- Arizona University Consortium (2012). Final Report: Family and Community Case Study. Tempe, AZ: Technical Report of the First Things First External Evaluation, University Consortium.
- Berson, I. R. (2009). Here’s what we have to say! Podcasting in the early childhood classroom. *Social Studies and the Young Learner*, 21(4), 8-11.
- Blanchet-Cohen, N. & Elliot, E. (2011). Children and educators engagement and learning outdoors: A basis for rights-based programming. *Early Education and Development*, 22(5), 757-777.
- Blanchet-Cohen, N. & Rainbow, B. (2006). Partnership between children and adults? The experience of the international children’s conference on the environment. *Childhood: A Global Journal of Research*, 13(1), 113-126.
- Boocock, S. S. & Scott, K. A. (2005). *Kids in context: The sociological study of children and childhoods*. Lanham MA: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Bracken, S. S., & Fischel, J. (2007). Relationships between social skills, behavioral problems, and school readiness for head start children. *NHSA Dialog*, 10(2), 109-126.
<http://login.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/doc>

view/61910148?accountid=4485;
<http://www.informaworld.com/openurl?genre=article&id=doi:10.1080/15240750701487868>

- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The Ecology of Human Development: Experiments by Nature and Design*. Cambridge MA: the Presidents and Fellows of Harvard College.
- Brooker, L. (2002) *Starting school: Young children learning cultures*. Buckingham UK: Open University Press.
- Brooker, L. (2001). Interviewing children. in M. Keynes (ed.), *Doing early childhood education research theory and practice* (pp. 162-177). Buckingham UK: Open University Press.
- Brown, C. (2010). Balancing the readiness equation in early childhood education reform. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 8(2), 134-158.
- Brown, C. & Mowry B. (2009). Preparing for change: A case study of successful alignment between a pre-k program and K-12 education. *Childhood Education*, 85(3), 173-178.
- Burchinal, M., Howes, C., Pianta, R., Bryant, D., Early, D., Clifford, R., & Barbarin, O. (2008). Predicting Child Outcomes at the End of Kindergarten from the Quality of Pre-Kindergarten Teacher-Child Interactions and Instruction. *Applied Developmental Science*, 12(3), 140-153. doi:10.1080/10888690802199418
- Cannella, G. S. (2002). *Deconstructing Early Childhood Education Social Justice and Revolution*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Chien, N. C., Howes, C., Burchinal, M., Pianta, R. C., Ritchie, S., Bryant, D. M., Barbarin, O. A. (2010). Children's classroom engagement and school readiness gains in pre-kindergarten. *Child Development*, 81(5), 1534-1549.
- City of Port Phillip (2005) *Creating a child-friendly Port Phillip: Implementation plan 2005–2009*. retrieved from:
http://www.portphillip.vic.gov.au/default/Implementation_Plan.pdf. Accessed 18 March 2011.
- Clark, C. D. (2011). *In a younger voice: Doing child-centered qualitative research*. New York NY: Oxford University Press.
- Clark, A. (2005). Listening to and involving young children: a review of research

- and practice. *Early Childhood Development and Care*, 175(6), 489-505.
- Clark, A. & Moss, P. (2001). *Listening to young children: Mosaic approach*. London: National Children's Bureau.
- Corsaro, W. A. (2005). *The sociology of childhood* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks CA: Sage Publishing.
- Corsaro, W. & Molinari, L. (2005). *I Compagni: Understanding children's transition from preschool to elementary school*. New York NY: Teachers College Press.
- Corsaro, W. & Molinari, L. (2000). Primary events and Italian children's transition from preschool to elementary school: Representations and action. *Social Psychology Quarterly*, 63(1), 16-33.
- Dahlberg, G. Moss, P. & Pence, A. (2007). Beyond the discourse of quality to the discourse of meaning making. In G. Dahlberg, P. Moss, & A. Pence (authors), *Beyond quality in early childhood education and care: Languages of evaluation* (2nd ed.). 87-120. New York NY: Routledge.
- Danby, S. & Farrell, A. (2004). Accounting for young children's competence in educational research: New perspectives on research ethics. *The Australian Educational Researcher*, 31(3), 35-49.
- Davis, M. D. (1998) Understanding the meanings of Children: A reflexive process. *Children and Society*, 12(5), 325-335.
- de Certeau, M. (1984). *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Berkeley: The University of California Press.
- Dockett, S. & Perry, B. (2009). Readiness for school: A relational construct. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, 34(1), 20-26.
- Dockett, S. & Perry, B. (2005). 'You need to know how to play safe': children's experiences of starting school. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 6(1), 4-18.
- Dockett, S. & Perry, B. (2002). Who's ready for what? Young children starting school. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 3(1), 67-89.
- Dockett, S. Einarsdottir, J. & Perry, B. (2011). Balancing methodologies and methods in research with young children. In D. Harcourt, B. Perry, & T. Waller (Eds.), *Researching Young Children's Perspectives: Debating the*

ethics and dilemmas of educational research with children, (pp. 68-81).
New York: Routledge.

- Dockett, S. Einarsdottir, J., & Perry, B. (2009). Researching with young children: Ethical tensions. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 7(3), 283-298.
- Early, D.M, Pianta, R. C., & Cox, M. J. (2001). Transition practices: Findings from a national survey. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 28(3), 199-206.
- Edwards, C.P., Gandini, L., Forman, G. E. (1998). *The hundred languages of children: The Reggio Emilia approach – advanced reflections*. Greenwich CT: Ablex Publishing Company.
- Eide, B. J. & Winger, N. (2005). From the children's point of view: methodological and ethical challenges. In A. Clark, T. Kjørholt, & P. Moss (Eds.) *Beyond listening children's perspectives on early childhood services*. Bristol: The Policy Press.
- Einarsdottir, J. (2011). Icelandic children's early education transition experiences. *Early Education and Development*, 22(5), 739-756.
- Elliot, E. (2010). Thinking beyond a framework: Entering into dialogues in V. Pacini-Ketchabaw (ed.) *Flows, rhythms, and intensities of early childhood education curriculum*. New York NY: Peter Lang Publishing.
- Enz, B. Rhodes, M., LaCount, M. (2008). Easing the transition: Family support and programs and early school success. In Cornish, M. (Ed.), *Promising practices for partnering with families in the early years*, (pp. 59-78). Charlotte NC: Information Age Publishing.
- Fram, M. S., Kim, J., & Sinha, S. (2012). Early care and prekindergarten care as influences on school readiness. *Journal of Family Issues*, 33(4), 478-505.
- Freeman, M. (2000), 'The future of children's rights', *Children and Society*, 14, 277-293.
- Geertz, C. (1973). *The interpretation of cultures*. New York NY: Basic Books.
- Gill, S., Winters, D., & Friedman, D. S. (2006). Educators' views of pre-kindergarten and kindergarten transition practices. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 7(3), 213-227.

- Graue, E. (2006). The answer is readiness – now what is the question? *Early Education and Development*, 17(1), 43-56.
- Graue, E. (1993). *Ready for What? Constructing meaning of readiness for kindergarten*. Albany NY: State University of New York Press.
- Graue, E. (1992). Social interpretations of readiness for kindergarten. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 7, 225-243.
- Griebel, W. & Niesel, R. (2002). Co-constructing transition into kindergarten and school by children, parents, and teachers. In H. Fabian, A. W. Dunlop, & H. Dunlop, (Eds.) *Transitions in the early years: Debating continuity and progression for young children in early education*. London UK: Routledge Falmer.
- Grover, S. (2004). Why won't they listen to us? on giving power and voice to children participating in social research. *Childhood: A Global Journal of Child Research*, 11(1), 81-93.
<http://login.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/62126603?accountid=4485>;
<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/0907568204040186>
- Gulino, J. (2008). Kindergarten readiness: A challenge. *Principal* (Reston, Va.), 87(5), 30-35.
- Habashi, J. (2008). Palestinian children crafting national identity. *Childhood*, 15(1), 12-29.
- Hall, E. L. & Rudkin, J. K. (2011). *Seen & heard children's rights in early childhood education*. New York NY: Teachers College Press.
- Hart, R. (1992) *Children's participation: From tokenism to citizenship*. Florence, Italy: UNICEF International Child Development Centre.
- Harcourt, D. (2011). A phased approach to researching with young children: Lessons from Singapore and beyond. *Early Education and Development*, 22(5). 818-837.
- Hatch, J. A. (2002). Accountability shovedown: Resisting the standards movement in early childhood in early childhood education. *Phi Delta Kappan*, February, 457-462.
- Head Start Approach to School Readiness. *Office of Head Start*. retrieved from <http://eclkc.ohs.acf.hhs.gov/hslc/sr/approach>.

- Hirsh-Pasek, K., Golinkoff, R. M., Berk, L. E., & Singer, D. G. (2009). *A mandate for playful learning in preschool presenting the evidence*. New York NY: Oxford University Press.
- Howes, C., Burchinal, M., Pianta, R., Bryant, D., Early, D., Clifford, R., Barbarin, O., (2008). Ready to learn? Children's pre-academic achievement in pre-kindergarten programs. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 23, 27-50.
- Hughes, P., Smith, K., & MacNaughton, G. (2006). *Listening to children: new insights, challenges, and possibilities*. City of Melbourne, Victoria.
- Irwin, L. G. & Johnson, J. (2005). Interviewing young children: Explicating our practices and dilemmas. *Qualitative Health Research* 15(6), 821-831.
- Lara-Cinisomo, S., Fuligni, A., Ritchie, S., Howes, C., & Karoly, L. (2008). Getting ready for school: An examination of early childhood educators' belief systems. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 35(4), 343-349. doi:10.1007/s10643-007-0215-2
- Kagan, S. L. & Tarrant, K., eds. (2010). *Transitions for young children: Creating connections across early childhood systems*. Baltimore MD: Brookes Publishing.
- Kagan, S.L. & Neuman, M. J. (1998). Lessons learned from three decades of research. *The Elementary School Journal*, 98(4), 365-379.
- Kagan, S. (1989) The structural approach to cooperative learning. *Educational Leadership*, 47(4), 12-15.
- Knowles-Yáñez, K. L. (2005). Children's participation in planning processes. *Journal of Planning Literature*, 20(1), 3-14.
- Kupner, H. (2011). Children's voices in early childhood settings' everyday concerts. In D. Harcourt, B. Perry, & T. Waller (Eds.), *Researching young children's perspectives: Debating the ethics and dilemmas of educational research with children*, (pp. 100-111). New York NY: Routledge.
- Ladd, G. W., Herald, S. L., & Kochel, K. P. (2006). School readiness: Are there social prerequisites? *Early Education and Development*, 17(1), 115-150. <http://login.ezproxy1.lib.asu.edu/login?url=http://search.proquest.com/docview/62015481?accountid=4485>; http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s15566935eed1701_6
- Lahman, L. (2008). Always othered. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 6(3),

281-300.

- Lam, M. S. & Pollard, A. (2006). A conceptual framework for understanding children as agents in the transition from home to kindergarten. *Early Years*, (26)2, 123-141.
- Lara-Cinisomo, S., Fuligni, A. S., Ritchie, S., Howes, C., & Karoly, L. (2008). Getting ready for school: An examination of early childhood educators belief systems. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 35(4), 343-349.
- Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: Legitimate peripheral participation*. New York NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Lewis, A. (2010). Silence in the context of 'child voice'. *Children & Society*, 24(1), 14-23. doi:10.1111/j.1099-0860.2008.00200.x
- LoCosale-Crouch, J., Mashburn, A. J., Downer, J. T., & Pianta, R. C. (2008). Pre-kindergarten teachers' use of transition practices and children's adjustment to kindergarten. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 23(1), 124-139.
- Loizou, E. (2011). Empowering aspects of transition from kindergarten to first grade through children's voices. *Early Years*, 31(1), 43-55.
- Lundy, L., McEvoy, L., & Byrne, B. (2011). Working with young children as co-researchers: An approach informed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. *Early Education and Development*, 22(5), 714-736.
- Lundy, L. (2007). 'Voice' is not enough: conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Conventions on the Rights of the Child. *British Educational Research Journal*, 33(6), 927-942.
- Logue, M. (2007). Early childhood learning standards: tools for promoting social and academic success in kindergarten. *Children & Schools*, 29(1), 35-43.
- MacNaughton, G. & Smith, K. (2008). Engaging ethically with young children: principles and practices for listening and responding with care. In G. MacNaughton, P. Hughes, & K. Smith (Eds.) *Young children as active citizens: principles, policies and pedagogies*. London: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- MacNaughton, G., Hughes, P., Smith, K. (2007). Young children's rights and public policy: Practices and possibilities for citizenship in the early years. *Children & Society*, 21, 458-469.

- MacNaughton, G. M., Smith, K. & Davis, K. (2007). Researching with children: The challenges and possibilities for building 'child friendly' research. In J. A. Hatch (Ed.) *Early Childhood Qualitative Research*. New York: Routledge. pp. 167-205.
- McNaughton, G., Smith, K. and Lawrence, H. (2000) *Hearing young children's voices*. Melbourne: Centre for Equity and innovation in Early Childhood. (<http://www.children.act.gov.au/pdf/under5report.pdf>)
- Mantzicopoulos, P. (2004). The effects of participation in a head start-public school transition program on kindergarten children's social competence. *Perspectives in Education*, 22(2), 51-66.
- Mauthner, M. (1997). Methodological aspects of collecting data from children: lessons from three research projects. *Children & Society*, 11, 16-28.
- Maxwell, K. L. & Clifford, R. M. (2004). School readiness assessments. *Beyond the Journal Young children on the Web, January*, 1-10. Retrieved from <http://journal.naeyc.org/btj/200401/Maxwell.pdf>.
- McIntyre, L. L., Eckert, T. L., Fiese, B. H., DiGennaro Reed, F. D., & Wildenger, L. K. (2010). Family concerns surrounding kindergarten transition: A comparison of students in special and general education. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 38, 259-263,
- McIntyre, L. L., Eckert, T. L., Fiese, B. H., DiGennaro Reed, F. D., Wildenger, L. K. (2007). Transition to kindergarten: Family experiences and involvement. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 35(1), 83-88.
- Mirkhil, M. (2010). 'I want to play when I go to school': Children's views on the transition to school from kindergarten. *Australasian Journal of Early Childhood*, (35)3, 134-139.
- Moll, L. C., Amanti, C., Neff, D., & Gonzalez, N. (1992). Funds of Knowledge for Teaching: Using a Qualitative Approach to Connect Homes and Classrooms. *Theory Into Practice*, 31(2), 132
- Morrow, V. (1999). We are people too: children's and young people's perspectives on children's rights and decision making in England. *The International Journal of Children's Rights*, 7(2), 149-170.
- Nelson, R. F. (2004). The transition to kindergarten. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 32(3), 187-189.

- Parlapiano, E. H. (2003). Ready for kindergarten? Five teachers tell what preschoolers really need for next year. *Scholastic Parent & Child*, April/May, 55-58.
- Pascal, C. & Bertram, T. (2009). Listening to young citizens: the struggle to make real a participatory paradigm in research with young children. *European Early Childhood Research Journal*, 17(2), 249-262.
- Peisner-Feinberg, E.S., Burchinal, M.R., Clifford, R.M., Culkin, M. L., Howes, C., Kagan, S. L., Yazejian, N. (2001). The Relation of Preschool Child-Care Quality to Children's Cognitive and Social Developmental Trajectories through Second Grade. *Child Development*, 72(5), 1534-1553.
- Peters, S. (2003). "I didn't expect that I would get tons of friends ... more each day" Children's experiences of friendship during the transition to school. *Early Years* (23)1, 45-53.
- Pinata, R. & Kraft-Sayre, M. (2003). *Successful kindergarten transition: Your guide to connecting children, families, & schools*. Baltimore MD: Paul Brooks Publishing.
- Pianta, R., La Paro, K. M., Cox, M. J., & Bradley, R. (2002). The relation of kindergarten classroom environment to teacher, family, and school characteristics and child outcomes. *The Elementary School Journal*, 102(3), 225-238.
- Pianta, R. C., Cox, M. J., Taylor, L., & Early, D. (1999). Kindergarten teachers' practices related to the transition to school: Results of a national survey. *The Elementary School Journal*, 100(1), 71-86.
- Pianta, R., Kraft-Sayre, M. (1999). Parents' observations about their children's transitions to kindergarten. *Young Children*, 54(3), 47-52.
- Pigott, T. D. & Isreal, M. S. (2005). Head Start children's transition to kindergarten: Evidence from the early childhood longitudinal study. *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, (3)1, 77-104.
- Piotrkowski, C. S., Botsko, M., Matthews, E. (2000). Parents' and teachers' beliefs about children's school readiness in a high-need community. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 15(4), 537-558.
- Powell, M. & Smith, A. B. (2009). Children's participation rights in research. *Childhood*, 16(1), 124-142.

- Ramey, C. T. & Ramey, S. L. (2010). The transition to school: Concepts, practices and needed research. In S. L. Kagan & K. Tarrant (Eds.), *Transitions for young children: Creating connections across early childhood systems* (pp. 19-32). Baltimore: Paul Brookes Publishing Co.
- Ray, K. & Smith, M.C. (2010). The kindergarten child: What teachers and administrators need to know to promote academic success in all children. *Early Childhood Education, 38*, 5-18.
- Rimm-Kaufman, S. E. & Pianta, R. C. (2000). An ecological perspective on the transition to kindergarten: A theoretical framework to guide empirical research. *Journal of Developmental Psychology, 21*(5), 491-511.
- Rimm-Kaufman, S.E., Pianta, R.C., Taylor, L. C.Cox, M. J. (2000). Teachers' judgments of problems in the transition to kindergarten. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 15*(2), 147-166.
- Ritchie, S., Clifford, R. M., Malloy, W. W., Cob, C. T., Crawford, G. M. (2010). Ready or not? Schools readiness for young children. In S. L. Kagan & K. Tarrant (eds.) *Transitions for young children: Creating connections across early childhood systems* (pp. 161-173). Baltimore: Paul Brooks Publishing.
- Rogoff, B. (2003). *The Cultural Nature of Human Development*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Rogoff, B., Turkanis, C. G., & Bartlett, L. (Eds.) (2001). *Learning Together: Children and Adults in a School Community*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Rosen, R. (2010). 'We got our heads together and came up with a plan': young children's perceptions of curriculum development in one Canadian preschool. *Journal of Early Childhood Research, 8*(1), 89-108.
- Rous, B., Hallam, R., McCormick, K., Cox, M. (2010). Practices that support the transition to public preschool programs: Results from a national survey. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 25*, 17-32.
- Scott-Little, C. & Reid, J. L. (2010). Aligning the content of early care and education. In S. L. Kagan & K. Tarrant (Eds.) *Transitions for Young Children: Creating connections across early childhood systems*. Baltimore: Paul Brooks Publishing.

- Scott-Litte, C., Kagan, S. L., & Stebbins Frelow, V. (2006). Conceptualizations of readiness and the content of early learning standards: The intersection of policy and research? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 21, 153-173.
- Schulting, A. B., Malone, P. S., & Dodge, K. A. (2005). The effect of school-based kindergarten transition policies and practices on child academic outcomes. *Developmental Psychology*, 41(6), 860-871.
- Seefeldt, C., Galper, A, Denton, K. (1997). Head start children's conceptions of and expectations for their future schooling. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, (12), 387-406.
- Shier, H. (2010). 'Pathways to participation' revisited: learning from Nicaragua's child coffee workers. In B. Percy-Smith & N. Thomas (Eds.) *A handbook of children's and young people's participation*. (pp. 215-229). New York NY: Routledge.
- Shier, H. (2001) Pathways to participation: Opening, opportunities, and obligations. *Children and Society*, 15, pp. 107-117.
- Skelton, T. (2007). Children, young people, UNICEF and participation. *Children's Geographies*, 5, 174-192.
- Smith, A. (2011). Respecting children's rights and agency: Theoretical insights into ethical research procedures. In D. Harcourt, B. Perry, T. Waller (Eds.) *Researching young children's perspectives: Debating the ethics and dilemmas of educational research with children* (p. 12-25). New York: Routledge.
- Soto, L.D., & Swadener, B.B. (Eds.), 2005. *Power and voice in research with children*. New York: Peter Lang.
- Swadener, B.B., Peters, L., & Gaches, S. (2012, in press). Taking children's rights and participation seriously: Cross-national perspectives and possibilities. In V. Pacini-Ketchabaw & L. Prochner (Eds.). *Resituating Canadian Early Childhood Education*. New York NY: Peter Lang.
- Swadener, B.B. & Polakow, V. eds (2011). Special Issue: children's rights and voices in research: Cross-national perspectives. *Early Education and Development*.
- Swadener, B.B. (2008). Children's rights, voices and allies: Stories from Kenya and the USA. *International Journal of Equity and Innovation in Early Childhood*.

- Swadener, B.B., & Lubeck, S. (1995). *Children and families at promise: Deconstructing the discourse of risk*. Albany NY: State University of New York Press.
- Tobin, J., Hsueh, Y., & Karasawa, M. (2009). *Preschool in three cultures revisited: China, Japan, and the United States*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.
- Tobin, J. (2000). "Good guys don't wear hats" *Children talk about the media*. New York NY: Teachers College Press.
- Tudge, J. R. H., Freitas, L. B. L., & Doucet, F. (2009). The transition to school: Reflections from a contextualist perspective. In H. Daniels, J. Porter, & H. Lauder (Eds.), *Educational theories, cultures and learning: Critical perspectives* (pp. 117-133). London: Routledge/Falmer.
- Una Children's Rights Learning Group (2010) *Children's Rights in Una and Beyond: Transnational Perspectives*, Una Working Paper 7, Belfast: Una <<http://www.unaglobal.org>>
- United Nations (1989) Adoption of a Convention on the Rights of the Child (U.N. Document No. A/44/7366). New York. Author.
- Walker, N. E., Brooks, C. M., & Wrightsman, L. S. (1999). *Children's rights in the United States in search of a national policy*. Thousand Oaks CA: Sage Publications.
- Welsh, J. A., Nix, R. L., Blair, C., Bierman, K. L., & Nelson, K. E. (2010). The development of cognitive skills and gains in academic school readiness for children from low-income families. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 102(1), 43-53.
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of Practice; Learning, meaning, and identity*. New York NY: Cambridge University Press.
- Wesley, P. B. & Buysse, V. (2003). Making meaning of school readiness in schools and communities. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 18, 351-375.
- Wildenger, L.K. & McIntyre, L. L. (2010). Family concerns and involvement during kindergarten transitions. *Journal of Child and Family Studies*, 20(4), 387-396.
- Vukelich, C., Christie, J., & Enz, B., (2008). *Helping young children learn*

language and literacy birth through kindergarten. Boston MA: Pearson Education, Inc.

- Vygotsky, L. (1978). *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*, ed. M. Cole, V. John-Steiner, S. Scribner, E. Souberman. Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press.
- Yeo, L.S. & Clarke, C. (2005). Starting school – A Singapore story. *Australian Journal of Early Childhood*, 30(3), 1-8.
- Young, R. M., Chandler, L. K., Shields, L., Laubenstein, P., Butts, J., & Black, K. (2008). Project ELI: Improving early literacy outcomes. *Principal*, 87(5), 14-20.

APPENDIX A

FTFEE PUBLIC-USE DATA APPLICATION

FIRST THINGS FIRST EXTERNAL EVALUATION (FTFEE)
APPLICATION FOR REQUESTING PUBLIC-USE DATA

Name of Investigator: **Lacey Peters** _____

Date of Application: **September 19, 2011** _____

FTFEE Study from which requesting data: **Family and Community Case Studies** ____

Title of Investigator: **Doctoral Candidate** _____

Title of Research Project: **Children's Perspectives on Kindergarten: Understanding How Children Think and Talk about "Going to School"** _____

Street Address: **PO Box 871108** _____

City/State/Zip Code: **Tempe, AZ 85287** _____

Telephone Number: **602-315-1662** _____

Email Address: **lacey.peters@asu.edu** _____

Date Data to be destroyed: **January, 2013** _ (3 years maximum from date of receipt)

Pledge of Confidentiality Signed and Included: **Yes** _____ (Indicate YES/NO)

University Human Subjects Protection Application **Yes** _____ (Indicate YES/NO)

FOR FTFEE INTERNAL USE ONLY

Date of receipt of application: _____

Date forwarded to FTFEE Leadership for review/approval: _____

Expected date of FTFEE Leadership approval: _____

FIRST THINGS FIRST EXTERNAL EVALUATION (FTFEE)

PLEDGE OF CONFIDENTIALITY

I hereby certify that I am requesting data from FTFEE (indicate the name of the study from which requesting data) Family and Community Case Study on *September 19, 2011* for the following purpose: *The Child Interview data from FCCS will inform my dissertation research. I intend to analyze the child interviews to draw out children's perspectives on the transition from preschool to kindergarten. I will also interpret children's perspectives on the kindergarten experience.*

I understand that the data I will be receiving is coded and does not contain any identifying information. I pledge and agree to not attempt to identify the respondents or sampling units in the study, not share the data with other researchers or individuals, destroy the data files if requested to do so prior to the due date indicated above, and report disclosure of any errors or violations to the FTFEE staff.

I have been informed that I may direct any questions that I may have about my obligations under this Pledge of Confidentiality to FTFEE's Principal Investigator, Dean Ronald W. Marx, College of Education, The University of Arizona, either by phone on 520-621-1081 or email on ronmarx@email.arizona.edu.

I have read the above pledge and agree to be bound by it.

Lacey Peters
Name of Investigator

Tim Rowlands T. Rowlands
Name of Witness

[Signature]
Investigator Signature

9-21-11
Date

Elizabeth Swadener
Name of Advisor (if investigator is a student)

[Signature]
Advisor Signature

9-21-11
Date