

Parental Involvement and Support for Children's School Readiness

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Abstract

Many children in neighbourhoods within a mid Vancouver Island community are at risk for acquiring skills necessary for school readiness. In the neighbourhood that was examined by the current study, 47% of children were found to be vulnerable for low school readiness, as identified by the Human Early Learning Partnership (HELP) (2010/2011) through Wave Four of the Early Development Instrument (EDI) (2010/2011). Knowing the degree of support which parents have provided to their children as a foundation for school readiness is critical for educators to be able to address student needs. A quantitative study was conducted by surveying 17 parents of a Kindergarten/Grade 1 classroom to ascertain, within that particular context, how parents supported early school readiness, and the degree of involvement they had in supporting and providing experiences to their children prior to school entry and continuing through their formal education. Lack of parent response prevented answering the research question in this study. The concept of children's school readiness is a larger issue than schools are able to fully address without community support in a child's early years. Past research has indicated factors such as home environment, low-income, and parent past educational experiences contribute to the degree to which parents involve themselves in their child's early development. Further study and community involvement are needed to address the issue of children's school readiness and how to educate parents of their critical role in supporting their children in acquiring school readiness skills and their continued support once in formal education.

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Chapter One: Problem to be Investigated

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify how parents support and involve themselves in their child's development for school readiness prior to entering and continuing through formal education. Two assumptions were made in this study: (1) it was assumed that Grade One students in this researcher's Kindergarten/Grade 1 classroom, from a mid Vancouver Island school, participated in the Early Development Instrument (Human Early Learning Partnership, (HELP), 2011), demonstrated low school readiness, and that these students come from a low socioeconomic neighbourhood as indicated by the results of Wave 4 of the 2010/2011 Early Development Instrument (EDI) (HELP, 2011); and (2) the information from data gathered would assist educators at this specific school in developing goals and objectives to (a) educate parents about supporting their child's development and/or (b) increase parental involvement within the home as well as within the school context. The population studied by this researcher was parents of this researcher's Kindergarten/Grade 1 classroom living in a mid Vancouver Island community of British Columbia. Parents were asked to take part in an anonymous nine statement Likert survey in the 2011 Fall term.

Justification of the study

Children living in the mid Vancouver Island community in British Columbia of interest in this study were at risk for learning readiness as shown by Wave 4 of the 2010/2011 Early Development Instrument (EDI). Using the EDI, the Human Early Learning Partnership (2011) has found that children in the primary grades in many neighbourhoods in British Columbia have demonstrated a lack of essential skills and knowledge for their age range. In background material submitted to parliamentarians, the Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF) (2009) noted

that Canada has had ten years of positive economic growth but that the rate of children living in poverty is almost the same as it was in 1989. The CTF (2009) report also stated that "... Aboriginal families... are at a greater risk of living in poverty.... almost one in two Aboriginal children (49%) under the age of six, (not living in First Nations communities) lives in a low-income family" (para. 5).

Given the high proportion of Aboriginal students (68%) attending the elementary school that was the focus of this study, and that the percentage of students who may live in low-income families is likely high, the risk for low school readiness is concerning. There is reason to be concerned since as children proceed through their elementary years many are unable to catch-up to their peers in later grades (Janus & Offord, 2007). At-risk students are at a disadvantage when they enter Grade 1 since their EDI scores indicated that they received low school readiness scores in one or more of the five developmental areas including physical health and well being, social competence and emotional maturity, language and cognitive development, and communication and general knowledge (Janus & Offord, 2007).

According to recent EDI results, the range of vulnerability (lack of school readiness) in the mid Vancouver Island area varies from 19% to 49%. The neighbourhood examined in this study experienced 47% vulnerability of its Kindergarten aged children on one or more domains of the EDI. Wave 4 of the 2010/2011 EDI measured the percentage of vulnerability for the neighbourhood in this study in five domain areas: (a) Emotional maturity at 24%; (b) physical health and well being at 24%; (c) social knowledge and competence at 23%; (d) language and cognitive development at 21%; and (e) communication and general knowledge had the least vulnerability at 14% (HELP, 2011). Children's early home environment and parent involvement were factors that have been linked to school readiness and research has shown that early

childhood experiences were important for building the foundation for school readiness (Fiorentino & Howe, 2004; Ingram, Wolfe, & Lieberman, 2007; Janus & Duku, 2007, McDermott & Rothenberg, 2000; Razza, Martin, & Brooks-Gunn, 2010; Welsh, Nix, Blair, Bierman, & Nelson, 2010). Thus there is a need to examine parents' involvement in their children's preparation for school in this at-risk community.

Children growing up in poverty and low-income homes are more likely to live in dysfunctional home settings which negatively affects language development (Welsh et al., 2010). Levin (1995) stated the best indicator of a child's success at school is the socio-economic level in which he or she was raised. Levin continued, "...that poverty puts children at a tremendous disadvantage" (p. 212). Payne's (1996) research indicated that children living in poverty were more likely to demonstrate developmental delay as well as more likely to be in a single parent family. Many single parent families had mothers as the primary caregiver who had low levels of education. These single parents were also likely to experience negative aspects of mental health such as stress and depression, which affect healthy interactions between parent and child. The parents were less sensitive or responsive in caregiving, which also contributed to poor developmental outcomes of children (Janus & Duku, 2007; Levin, 1995; Razza et al., 2010; Welsh et al., 2010).

Past research by Carpiano, Lloyd, and Hertzman (2009) and Payne (1996) identified unemployment and social challenges as contributing factors to an unhealthy home and neighbourhood, affecting child development. In low socioeconomic (SES) neighbourhoods, including minority populations such as Aboriginal families, understanding factors delaying child development is crucial. Aboriginal communities have little culture or tradition left for supporting their children's development (Lapointe, Ford, & Zumbo, 2007). Many family

members who experienced residential schools may transmit negative attitudes onto the children of today (Barnes, Josefowitz, & Cole, 2006) affecting development of school readiness. Parents may have a sense of vulnerability because of absence of social similarity, placing them in a subordinate position within formal educational settings (Bryk & Schneider, 2010). Barriers inhibiting healthy development of children's school readiness require further study, especially for vulnerable, minority populations.

Development of language is an important factor for school readiness. Language is developed when children are spoken to and read to by parents. Janus and Duku (2007) found children who were read to at two years of age had advantages in language development over those children who were not involved in meaningful dialogue or read to by parents, and that a lack of frequent reading increases a child's chance to be vulnerable by "1.3 times", compared to children who were read books (p. 397). Receptive vocabulary (ability to understand words and symbols) is associated with focussed attention, thus affecting school readiness (Razza et al., 2010). Welsh et al. (2010) linked working memory and attention control to emergent literacy and numeracy. Welsh et al. (2010) based their research on previous studies that indicated that preschool years were critical in developing mental processes that support effective goal oriented approaches to learning, which may predict future success at school.

To address questions with regards to children entering school ill-prepared and what can be done to mitigate deficits, one might first investigate parental involvement. Schools have little to no control over social and family influences outside of the educational setting; however, educators have the ability to make schools welcoming and to encourage and foster involvement and/or participation in education (Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006). Research by Ingram, Wolfe, and Lieberman (2007) indicated that parent involvement within the school does

not necessarily correlate with academic achievement; however, they suggested that encouraging involvement may increase achievement by means of improved attendance or help with homework.

The concept of parental involvement and how parents of low-income and/or minority status perceive their acceptance in a middle class, predominantly European Canadian educational setting has merit when looking at issues of some of British Columbia's at-risk populations. McDermott and Rothenberg (2000) found that parents value teachers who involve themselves in the community and who were positive, warm, and caring towards their children. Incorporating cultural experiences into school life and communicating with parents were seen as contributing factors to whether or not parents involved themselves in their child's education.

Parenting and learning at home are areas for schools to focus on developing, as Ingram et al. (2007) found through their research. Parents of low-socioeconomic status who have low education levels may not have financial resources and/or time resources to involve themselves in volunteering and participating within the schools, and may not feel that they have the knowledge to participate in decision-making within the school (Ingram et al., 2007). Providing resources for parents in parenting and learning at home are areas for future investigation and attention, at the school level, to improve children's school readiness and to promote learning once formal education begins for children (Cooper, 2010).

Research Question

The research question explored in the current study was: How and to what degree do parents from low socio-economic households support their child's school readiness in providing learning opportunities prior to and continuing through their child's formal education?

Hypothesis

The hypothesis of this study was that because of their socioeconomic status and past experience in the education system, parents from the at-risk community studied may have different perceptions of how to support their children's school readiness from those of the middle class values from which public education was established; therefore, limiting their ability to support their children's school readiness prior to entering school and as they get older. Understanding the history of many of our families and how they support their children's development of school readiness skills will be imperative for the school's ability to foster, encourage, and support parenting skills and involvement in their child's education with the realization that change may take many years.

Definition of Terms

The author of this study defined parents as: parents of students in a particular class from a particular school in a low socioeconomic status (SES) neighbourhood in a mid Vancouver Island community; birth parents, adoptive parents, or guardian (grandparent, aunt, uncle, or foster parent) or the adult role model who the student lives with during the majority of the school year. Poverty was defined as living below the low-income cut-off (LICO) used by Statistics Canada (Levin, 1995) and spending more than seventy percent of income on food, shelter, and clothing (Ross, Scott, & Smith, 2000). The term low SES households are those households that have low income, low employment to un-employment and low levels of education (Human Early Learning Partnership, 2010).

School readiness was defined as acquired skills and/or behaviours, of mid-year Kindergarten aged children, as measured by the Early Development Instrument in five domains: physical health and well-being, social knowledge and competence, emotional maturity, language

and cognitive development, and communication and general knowledge. Physical health and well being encompasses gross and fine motor skills such as holding a pencil, running on the playground, energy levels of the child, and independence. Social knowledge and competence includes curiosity and eagerness to try new things, knowing how to behave in public places, cooperating, following rules, and appropriate interactions with peers. Emotional maturity involves a balance between being withdrawn and impulsive, thinking before acting, the ability to control emotions at an age appropriate level, and demonstrating empathy. Language and cognitive development is the age appropriate awareness of and skills for reading, writing, and numeracy. Communication and general knowledge is the ability of children to communicate needs and wants, storytelling, and age appropriate knowledge of the world around them.

Learning opportunities are opportunities children have for exposure to books (access to and being read to), interactions between parent and child (communication, nurturance, and play), and exploration of the environment within the home, neighbourhood, and local community such as museums, libraries, parks, and beaches. Many parents from low SES households lack the knowledge of the importance of providing stimulating learning opportunities and quality interactions with their children and may leave the development of the child to the school system. Formal education is defined as Kindergarten to Grade 12, public or private school in Canada.

Brief Overview of the Study

The results from Wave 4 (two years of collected data) of the 2010/2011 Early Development Instrument have shown that in some neighbourhoods in British Columbia, children were entering formal education ill-prepared for learning. Low-income and parental involvement are important factors in child development leading to school readiness. The current study explored how parents supported the development of their child's school readiness in a mid

Vancouver Island neighbourhood that has been identified in the EDI mapping package (2010) as low in socio-economic status. Scores from the 2010/2011 Early Development Instrument rated children from this low-income neighbourhood as vulnerable in all five domains for school readiness. The population of this specific school in British Columbia had 68% Aboriginal ancestry, less than 1% ESL, and 31% Caucasian/other. The school provided 67% of students with a daily snack and lunch program that averaged 20% total payment from families and the rest was subsidized by school funds. Some of these students also received a school breakfast. Thirty two percent of students had Ministry of Children and Families involvement and 61% of families were single parent or blended type families. Only four parents were involved in school decision-making and fundraising on a regular basis during the 2010/2011 school year.

A survey method was chosen as a means of collecting data. This researcher anticipated a degree of non-response from some participants. Research on the topic of non-response in survey research has indicated possible reasons for non-response as: (a) disinterest, (b) not understanding the significance of the study, (c) no incentive to participate, (d) lack of time, (e) distrust, and (f) discomfort with the subject matter (Bielick & McPhee, 2009; Diaz de Rada, 2005; Gerrits, van den Oord, & Voogt, 2001; Groves, Presser, & Dipko, 2004; Soloff, Lawrence, Misson, & Johnstone, 2006). Thus, the survey procedures were designed in order to minimize the effects of these issues.

An anonymous Likert survey was administered to 17 parents of a Kindergarten/Grade 1 classroom within an elementary school in a low SES mid Vancouver Island community during the 2011 Fall term. The survey included nine statements addressing domains of school readiness (physical health and well being; social knowledge and competence; emotional maturity; language and cognitive development; and communication and general knowledge) with a five

point rating scale. Respondents were asked to complete the survey over an initial two week period.

A participation reminder letter extending the return of surveys to a total of a four week response time and a redistribution of surveys and consent forms was undertaken after non-response at the two week return period. Information sought from data was to provide pertinent information for educators within a specific school in order to support the implementation of “next practice” (Kaser & Halbert, 2009, p. 117) to increase student achievement through educating parents about supporting their children’s development within the home and the school context, via building trusting relationships with parents.

Chapter Two: Review of Related Literature

The review of related literature explored factors that contribute to and barriers preventing school readiness among children who live in low socioeconomic households and was based on empirical research that used a variety of instrumentation and data analysis techniques. The review of literature provided results of studies exploring the extent to which children have been found to lack school readiness by linking a child's early home environment to school readiness among children from low socioeconomic households. Literature from past research provided the author of this study insight into the importance of early development of receptive language, the presence of sustained attention, lack of impulsivity, and how parental involvement and the home context affect the development of school readiness skills. The literature also examined effective parenting, including involvement in activities that support development of school readiness and provided implications of how parents of low-income, minority status view their role within the school context.

School Readiness

Razza, Martin, and Brooks-Gunn (2010) conducted a longitudinal quantitative study investigating the link between children's early home environment and school readiness among children from low-socioeconomic homes. The authors questioned how, if at all, a child's sustained attention explains their school readiness. Razza et al. (2010) focused on cognition (higher-level functions of the brain that encompass language, imagination, perception, and planning) and behaviour as found to be associated with the family environment. The first goal of their study was to gain insight on children's sustained attention and whether attention was "... influenced by maternal warmth, lack of hostility, maternal stimulation, the physical environment of the home, maternal depression, and maternal parenting stress" (p. 3). The second goal was to

examine the link between focused attention and a lack of impulsivity as both are associated with the home environment and school readiness (cognitive and behavioural measures) (Ensminger & Slusarick, 1992; Feinstein & Bynner, 2004; Moffitt, Caspi, Rutter, & Silva, 2001).

Razza et al. (2010) selected a final analytic sample of 982 children (59% of mothers were the primary caregiver, 63% were African American, 20% were Hispanic, and 14% were European American) from an original, representative sample of 4900 children from the *Fragile Families and Child Wellbeing Study* (Reichman, Teitler, Garfinkel, & McLanahan, 2001). Fifty-four percent of mothers were living within the definition of poverty. All participants were chosen from selected hospitals at birth; mothers were interviewed in the hospital, by trained data collectors, forty eight hours after birth, then again in the home when the child was three years of age and again at five years of age. Assessments measured the home environment when the child was three years of age and the child's attention (lack of impulsivity) and cognitive ability (receptive vocabulary) at five years of age, as well as, interactions between mother and child and the interior of the residence. Participants at the age of three years were split into two groups – poor group (below the poverty line) and near-poor group (300% over the poverty line), which were compared.

The researchers used a variety of instruments such as a Likert survey, behaviour checklist, interviews, observation, and cognitive assessments such as the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test (PPVT). The PPVT was used because of its internal reliability. Behaviour school readiness was based on mothers completing a Child Behaviour Checklist 14-18.

Findings from Razza et al.'s (2010) study, indicated that family environment, sustained attention, and children's school readiness were interrelated and consistent with past research findings. Maternal parenting behaviour and the physical environment of the home were related

to cognitive school readiness; whereas, maternal mental health was strongly associated with behavioural school readiness. The relationship between attention and other variables differed between the two poverty groups. Maternal parenting behaviour predicted children's focused attention in the near-poor group, as maternal hostility may create anxiety limiting a child's ability to focus attention. Lack of maternal hostility was positively associated with focused attention and receptive vocabulary. Maternal stimulation was positively associated with focused attention and receptive vocabulary with the poor group. The poor group was also found to display greater impulsivity. Focused attention was associated with receptive vocabulary (cognitive school readiness) in both poverty groups. The lack of impulsivity was found to predict both cognitive and behavioural school readiness in only the poor group. Children with greater sustained attention displayed a higher receptive vocabulary (Razza et al., 2010).

Razza et al. (2010) recognized that their research failed to replicate other studies of association between family environment and sustained attention, most likely because the measurement instruments they used were not sufficiently sensitive. Direct assessment by data collectors or teacher direct reports of children may have been more accurate than mothers completing questionnaires for home environment and school readiness. Fathers' information and the role fathers play in early childhood development was not included in this study. This may have contributed bias, reducing reliability.

Other factors not accounted for, according to the authors, were exposure to trauma and violence, poor nutrition, homelessness, or changes in family composition, which may have affected the development of sustained attention and cognitive ability in children for school readiness. Razza et al. (2010) focused on sustained attention in their study; however, working memory may be a significant factor affecting school readiness which was not investigated.

Razza et al.'s (2010) research has important implications for further study of the effects of family environment and maternal parenting behaviour on school readiness and for developing instruments to identify children who are at risk in order to provide intervention for those children before they enter school. Razza, Martin, and Brooks-Gunn's (2010) study related to this current research paper in that it helped establish that children enter school with what they have learned from within their home and neighbourhood. They provided evidence of the importance of the quality of the home environment and interactions between caregiver and child, the lack of anxiety and provision of learning opportunities that help to develop sustained attention and lack of impulsivity, which are crucial for learning thus contributing to school readiness. Thus the current study surveyed parents from an at-risk community about the learning opportunities they used to support their child's school readiness.

The School Entry Gap: Socioeconomic Family and Health Factors Associated with Children's School Readiness to Learn by Janus and Duku (2007) attempted to identify risk factors that contribute to children's vulnerability in school readiness. Kindergarten teachers in British Columbia completed the Early Development Instrument (EDI) to identify children who were at risk for readiness skills for the beginning of Grade One. The EDI indicates areas of focus for educators in children's academic and social emotional development for future years. Janus and Duku's (2007) research established that the validity of this instrument to be used in an educational setting was its strength in the inclusion of a wide range of developmental domains. Their study was a longitudinal quantitative Canadian study which suggests that the findings are particularly relevant to the current study as compared to studies in the United States as politics, economy, and other cultural variables differ between the two countries. There were two questions to be investigated:

- (1) What are the most relevant risk factors in five general areas of influence: Socioeconomic status (SES), family status, child health, parent health, [and] parent involvement in literacy support?
- (2) How do the risk factors contribute to the gap in children's school readiness at school entry? (p. 381-382)

The sample was drawn from six large communities across Canada, including a community in British Columbia. This was a representative sample from varying socioeconomic backgrounds. From an original sample of 11,662 potential child participants, a total of 10,663 children participated. The instrumentation used was the EDI, completed by Kindergarten teachers in the spring, which consisted of 103 questions over five domains (physical health and well-being, social knowledge and competence, emotional health and maturity, language and cognitive development, and communication and general knowledge), child demographics, and a question regarding absences from school. Parents also completed a computer-assisted interview indicating their level of education, income, family status (intact family/lone parent), child and parent health, and parent involvement (looking at/reading books with their child).

The results indicated that twenty percent of children scored in the lowest 10th percentile in at least one domain of the EDI. SES, family, and health factors were associated with school readiness and scores were higher for children in higher SES households. Risk factors for school readiness also included being from a family below the Low Income Cut-Off, or being a boy, or having less than perfect health, each doubled the risk of school readiness outcomes. Janus and Duku (2007) found that income was a stronger predictor of school readiness than parental education, that intact families were a strong protective factor against vulnerability, and

that a lack of reading prior to school had the potential of increasing a child's risk to be vulnerable for school readiness.

In Janus and Duku's (2007) study from the representative sample, fewer low income families (43%) were represented than near- low income families. This researcher questions the reliability of the findings because more near-low income children were represented than low income children; therefore, a possibility of a greater number of children lacking school readiness may exist in the general population than their study indicated. Socioeconomic status is identified as being an important variable in school readiness for children. The authors used a variety of data analysis strategies to ensure the reliability of results. Methods of inferential statistics such as the Pearson chi-square, ANOVAS, and MANOVA were used to analyse data and to determine the relationships between the variables. This study contributed to research with regard to socioeconomic and family influences and school readiness as the EDI identified, in a snapshot, the overall student population's developmental strengths and weaknesses. One must be careful when attributing variables associated with only the EDI for child development as there may be many underlying, contributing factors affecting school readiness in children, as well as teacher bias or unreliable parent responses.

The research conducted by Janus and Duku (2007) failed to indicate whether the EDI is culturally sensitive, especially when assessing minority populations such as Aboriginal communities. Home factors, parenting, and communication may be culturally different from that of a non-minority perspective. Therefore, children coming from low SES minority homes may not be accurately assessed using the EDI. The results of the 2010/2011 EDI inspired this author to examine possible influences indicating vulnerability of a particular school and its population

and what action, at the school level, could be taken to address areas in need of attention to foster student success and to increase parental involvement.

In another related study, *Language Competence, Narrative Ability, and School Readiness in Low-Income Preschool Children*, Fiorentino and Howe (2004) investigated the links between low SES, preschool children's receptive language competencies (the ability to understand words and symbols), school readiness, and narrative abilities. Fiorentino and Howe (2004) hypothesised that higher levels of receptive language competence would display greater readiness to learn. Children with poorer receptive vocabulary skills tended to generate narratives that were more chronologically disordered and low on organisation and coherence, including fewer units of information than children who had higher receptive language skills and readiness to learn. Receptive language is extremely important in the development of language and cognitive skills, as well as for coping in an educational setting as children are required to demonstrate an understanding of what is asked of them and to have the ability to express themselves to educators and to their peers.

Twenty-five day care children from low-socioeconomic backgrounds were chosen from three American Head Start programs. Fifty-six percent of the children came from two-parent families. Participants met with the first author and participated in three tasks: (a) rapport building, (b) receptive language testing (Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test), and (c) children completed three narratives that were audio-taped, transcribed, and coded. Daycare educators also completed the Early Development Instrument (EDI). The daycare centers were assessed by two trained data collectors. Parents answered a demographic questionnaire indicating environmental risk factors within the home. Daycare ratings and children's narratives were

coded by the first author and a second person unfamiliar with the study objectives, providing reliable data analysis.

The children, overall, scored in the low performance domain for both receptive vocabulary and narrative ability. For receptive vocabulary, children had a mean mental age lower than their chronological age. The children in the study also scored average-to-low in development for school readiness as shown by the EDI. Gender differences were also observed where female participants generated more information-dense and more organized narratives than male participants.

Fiorentino and Howe's (2004) findings indicated that children who had higher receptive vocabulary skills demonstrated greater readiness to learn, but did not demonstrate information dense narratives. Organized narratives were associated with physical well-being, communication and general knowledge. Children who had lower levels of language competence and readiness to learn, told stories with disorganised story chronology, which was also associated with low levels of physical well-being, social competence, emotional maturity, and communication and general knowledge on EDI scores. Children who had higher levels of language competence tended to have higher scores on the EDI, indicating a positive relationship with school readiness.

The authors could not link the relationship of language competence and readiness to learn with more information-dense narratives as was hypothesised. Those children who demonstrated higher levels of language competence that told narratives that were organized and concise did not have more units of information; whereas children who had lower levels of language competence often had more units of information but had narratives that were repetitive and disorganized.

Fiorentino and Howe's (2004) research may be difficult to generalize as a homogeneous small sample was used and as the authors noted, their sample was not from high-risk households.

The demographic questionnaire did not capture quality of parent and child relationships and interactions, as well as parenting stress and health factors in the family which all contribute to language, cognitive, and social development. Reliability was established by using a variety of assessment tools as well as using an uninformed data collector. The results highlighted that children who come from low-income households were more likely to generate narratives that lacked chronology and organization. Story-telling may be an important way to measure children's readiness to learn, as vocabulary, organization and chronology of events help children understand their own circumstances as well as provide cognitive abilities associated with literacy and numeracy activities in school.

Fiorentino and Howe's (2004) study contributed to this researcher's project as their research provided important implications for knowledge in language development and school readiness, especially when teaching low-income and minority children. The authors' research highlighted the importance of narrative ability and how those children who struggle in school, often experience difficulty with receptive and expressive vocabulary. This study demonstrated the relationship between students' cognitive language development and SES factors. This researcher developed a survey that asked about parents' activities at home regarding reading with their child for developing literacy skills as well as exploring places of learning that develop vocabulary and provide experiences on which children connect with and make sense of their own lives. Continued study will need to be conducted on the factors of the home environment, specifically, quality of attachment, parent-child interactions, and parenting stress and how it relates to children's school readiness. Thus the current study examined the degree of parental support and involvement with their child in reading and in learning opportunities fostering receptive and expressive language development.

Welsh, Nix, Blair, Bierman, and Nelson (2010) conducted an ambitious longitudinal study researching how working memory and attention control were associated with emergent literacy and numeracy skills during preKindergarten; and how these skills contributed to Kindergarten reading and math achievement. The purpose of the study was to extend research on the contributions of different cognitive skills to early academic achievement of low-income children. Welsh et al.'s (2010) research related to the current study by assessing school readiness in children from low-income families. The findings gave insight into the importance of early experiences, parental involvement, and other possible contributing factors, that may account for delay in school readiness and helped in the development of the survey instrument for the current study

The sample for this study was 164 children (44% were of ethnic background and 56% were European American; 57% were girls) living in families of low-income background attending three Head Start classrooms in Pennsylvania. The children were selected based on prior research indicating they were more likely to be at risk for school readiness and to possibly suffer from future learning problems. Welsh et al. (2010) hypothesised that growth in emergent literacy and emergent numeracy skills would be related to working memory and attention control; and that these cognitive functions would contribute to reading and math achievement in Kindergarten.

Trained research assistants pulled out children for assessment at the beginning of pre-Kindergarten, at the end of pre-Kindergarten, and at the end of their Kindergarten year. Three psychometric instruments were selected for the pre-Kindergarten year based on the predictive relations on later reading and math achievement, as well as working memory and attention control. Four psychometric instruments were selected for the Kindergarten year. All scores

were standardized and averaged into composite scores. Welsh et al. (2010) noted that the instruments used and the brief time allotted for each assessment may have lead to limited results; however, the instruments used were typical for the ages studied due to the limited ability of young children to be able to focus on extended testing. They also found that for pre-Kindergarten children, working memory and attention control vary and have not been well differentiated. This may be an area for further research.

Welsh et al. (2010) found that pre-Kindergarten emergent literacy and numeracy skills significantly predicted Kindergarten reading and math achievement. Through the use of path analysis, the researchers found that working memory and attention control assessed at the beginning of the pre-Kindergarten year significantly predicted emergent literacy and numeracy skills. Their research suggested that early development of working memory and attention control provided an important foundation for literacy and numeracy development whereas, pre-Kindergarten math activities made more demands on working memory and attention control than literacy. An interesting finding in Welsh et al.'s (2010) study was that working memory and attention control was a predictor of numeracy skills and vice versa; however, working memory and attention control predicted emergent literacy skills but the reverse was not true.

Welsh et al. (2010) noted that past developmental research has shown that socioeconomic disadvantage was associated with children demonstrating delays because of living in poverty, and were more likely to experience stress, had less sensitive caregiving, low levels of cognitive stimulation, and were more likely to have deficits in attention control. Welsh et al. (2010) recommended in their study that early childhood experiences at home or in daycare and preschool programs need to provide opportunity for socialization and rich literacy and numeracy activities to foster attention control for learning.

The authors stated that causal effects could not be taken into account and that there may be other factors not included in their study's design that influenced changes. A major contribution to research investigating change in working memory and attention control, and literacy and numeracy development is that, to the authors' knowledge, this was the first study to examine preschool children; whereas, other researchers have studied children at school entry. The findings from Welsh et al.'s (2010) research corroborated what other researchers have found about children's developmental delays prior to school entry when coming from a low-income background. The implication from this research was that state/provincial policies needed to be put in place providing at-risk populations the necessary resources to encourage development of school-readiness skills in their pre-Kindergarten children through forms of parenting classes, quality childcare and preschool programs, as well as other services for primary needs.

School readiness is a predictor for school success and students who are at risk and have low school readiness measures require intervention. Thus it is important to study the ways parents from low SES households support (or do not support) their children. The studies reviewed thus far have provided evidence that family environment and maternal parenting (from low SES households) affect outcomes for sustained attention, impulse control, receptive vocabulary development, and working memory: all factors that contribute to pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills. The foundation of these skills contributes to school readiness and later school success.

These studies established a link between low SES and school readiness, and the importance of early learning programs, but did not go as far as to explain what research or interventions have been undertaken in early parenting education. Further research investigating how and when to support parents of preschool children will be of critical value to educators. The

following studies delve into aspects of parental involvement and perceptions held by some low-income, minority parents.

Parental Involvement

McDermott and Rothenberg (2000) conducted a qualitative ethnographic study, *Why Urban Parents Resist Involvement in their Children's Elementary Education*, focusing on low-income minority parents in the north-eastern United States. Even though the participants were culturally different from British Columbia's population, the concept of parent involvement and how parents of minority status perceive their acceptance in a middle class predominantly European American educational setting, has merit when looking at issues of some of British Columbia's at-risk minority populations. The purposes of the study were to find out: (a) what low-income parents say about their own involvement in their child's education and in what ways their views differ from the teachers' views about family involvement in their child's school; and (b) how to train new educators for effective, sensitive communication skills to promote involving parents of minority status in their child's education.

In a previous study conducted by the authors in 1999 (the study was not specified within the article), 25 teachers completed a survey of teaching practices and beliefs using a Likert scale and from those 25 teachers, three of four selected (who the researchers knew well) participated in the current study. Focus groups were conducted for teachers teaching low socioeconomic students; parents of those students who were women of minority status and of low socioeconomic status; and children attending the school in this study. The findings in McDermott and Rothenberg's (2000) study were from parents and teachers. Reasons for exclusion of the children's results were not stated. Focus groups were chosen as a non-threatening, supportive way to interview the seven mothers in the first focus group and five in

the second focus group. The authors did not define how the parents were selected, except that these parents had also been part of a previous study conducted by the authors. The setting for the study was a downtown, low-income housing project where the school district bussed students to a more affluent elementary school.

There were two focus group meetings with the teachers, where both researchers were involved. Teachers were asked about their perceptions of parental involvement and their views about cultural responsiveness, language diversity, and methods of teaching. Parents met in an apartment with one researcher leading the discussion, and the other acted as an outside reader of field notes. After each focus group, the researchers added contextual information to their notes. The parent groups were difficult to organize and the second meeting had to be rescheduled due to only one parent attending. The parents were asked what qualities made good teachers for their children, what should the principal tell teachers to assist them with their teaching, and how can teachers make parents feel more comfortable attending school events.

During the teacher focus groups, difficulties with parents attending functions and transiency were noted as obstacles. Teachers also felt parents thought urban schools were unresponsive to their children's needs. Teachers were aware of and attempted to incorporate cultural experiences into lessons, in addition, one teacher and an assistant principal visited the housing project several times. Parents had genuine concern for their children's education and identified qualities in teachers that they felt were important – respectful, loving, complimentary, and positive. Parents perceived communication from the school as negative or racist. Parents of children in the school had consciously stopped involving themselves in their child's education as they felt unwelcome and uninvolved by the school. Parents felt staff should be more visible within the downtown community.

The results of this study raised an awareness of the importance of teachers, especially of low-income minority students, to be cognisant of cultural values from the community and to, wherever possible, integrate local culture into daily school life. Parents were more comfortable when teachers were warm, positive, and respectful towards their children. Developing effective alternative ways to communicate with parents so they feel respected and involved, and using the language register with which parents are comfortable and familiar were important issues for schools to investigate.

There were limitations in McDermott and Rothenberg's (2000) study. The teachers selected for the focus group were well known to the researchers and the criteria for parental selection were not clear, leading to possible bias and unreliable results. Teachers were not fully represented as one teacher and two assistant principals were the selected members of the teacher focus group. There was no inclusion of school administration as its own focus group. Another limitation to this study was that terms such as "cultural responsiveness" (para. 18) were not clarified.

An area not addressed by the participating educators was, in what ways did the school invite parents to become involved and whether there were provisions for transportation in order for parents to attend functions. McDermott and Rothenberg (2000) stated that schools and teacher preparation programs will need to provide training involving parent and teacher relations, especially for effective and respectful communication encouraging parental involvement. The parents who participated in the study wanted school personnel to be visible in their community; however, this generalization may not be made for other minority communities where the etiquette may be that non-community members need to be formally invited to participate, by elders or council members.

McDermott and Rothenberg's (2000) research was related to the topic of school readiness and parent involvement. The main theme, how parents perceive their children's school and teachers, brought to the forefront the importance for educators to be sensitive to parent needs and parent anxiety with regards to middle class values in education. Educators need to recognize the importance of building knowledge and skills of their parent population in order to heighten their self-efficacy. The issues illuminated by this study were also relevant to consider when designing research studies in vulnerable communities. Developing trusting respectful relationships using effective alternate ways of communicating with parents such as using a less formal language register may develop a climate where parents feel comfortable and were used in the current study as much as possible when recruiting and surveying parents.

Communication, volunteering, collaborating with the school, and decision-making by parents in low-income populations were areas addressed by the next study to be reviewed. Ingram, Wolfe, and Lieberman (2007) conducted a descriptive quantitative study on *The Role of Parents in High-Achieving Schools Serving Low-Income, At-Risk Populations*. The problem investigated was how to involve parents and how to associate parent involvement with student achievement. The purpose of the study was to construct a model of parent involvement that could reliably improve student achievement by studying effective schools.

Ingram et al. (2007) used Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler's (1997) framework to explain why parents get involved. The framework examined parents' perceptions of their role in their child's education, their sense of efficacy, and how they perceived invitations to become involved by their child's school. How parents get involved was explained by Epstein's (1987) six typologies of parent involvement – parenting, communicating, volunteering, learning at home, decision-making, and collaborating.

Only three schools that achieved in the top one third of the Illinois Standards Achievement Test were selected for this study. Of 1,000 surveys sent to 800 (more than 50% low-income) families, 220 surveys among the three schools were completed and included for data analysis. Instrumentation was 42 Likert-type questions, and three open-ended questions pertaining to parent involvement at home and in the school.

The results from Ingram et al.'s (2007) study showed that two of Epstein's (1987) typologies, parenting (53%) and learning at home (40%) were by far the most common parenting typologies. Parents were noted to show interest in helping their children at home, limited some television-watching, provided for the child's basic needs, and provided a place in the home for their child to complete homework. Parents indicated that they sometimes took their child to community learning environments such as libraries, museums, etc., (time and financial resources were contributing obstacles). When it came to school and home communication, parents attended parent-teacher conferences; however, they did not involve themselves in volunteering activities (time and financial resources for fundraising affected their contribution) or in decision-making as they felt they did not have the necessary knowledge to do so. All parents were noted to hold education as important.

While it is worthwhile to understand what parenting typologies were effective, the research failed to address the reasons why or how parenting and learning at home influence academic achievement; and what endeavours the three schools took to involve the other four typologies. The sample selected may not be representative of many low-income families as there was only a 22% response rate and 74% of children came from dual parent families. Intact families were known to be a protective factor for at-risk populations (Janus & Duku, 2007). Sixty-six percent of parents had beyond high school education making knowledge of and access

to resources more probable. Further research is needed to address generalizability of the findings.

Ingram et al.'s (2007) research supported this current study by contributing to the notion of the importance of parental involvement and that effective schools engage parents with their child's education, as well as, forming a foundation for a parent survey conducted by this author. In the survey activities such as visiting places of learning in the community and helping their child at home in literacy and numeracy activities and speaking to their child's teacher were seen as parenting activities undertaken by parents in the previous study that link to school readiness and parent involvement. For parents who lack knowledge in effective parenting and support for their children, the literature reviewed in this current study by this author brought to the forefront the importance of providing opportunities for parents to learn basic tools for helping their children develop school readiness skills. Resources for parents need to be easily accessible from within the community and/or within the school.

Parent involvement literature suggested that parents from low SES households are likely to have negative perceptions of schools and teachers, that they are less likely to be involved in activities at the school but that they valued education. The current study examined ways in which parents from low SES households attempt to support their children's school readiness and learning. Some barriers such as time and resources that have been found in other studies were likely to emerge as issues for parents.

The literature reviewed added insight into why some children are entering school ill-prepared for learning. Findings from the literature indicated that receptive vocabulary, attention control, and a lack of impulsivity are key contributing factors for developing school readiness. The quality of the home environment, including the socioeconomic status (SES), family (single

parent or intact family), and parental involvement with the child, contributed to the development of children's school readiness as measured in the five domains of the Early Development Instrument (HELP, 2010).

Researchers continue to examine school readiness and parent involvement; however, no definitive answer will remedy all situations. Many low-income parents work one or two jobs, limiting time available to participate in their child's education. Other parents may have had negative school experiences in the past, or feel intimidated by school personnel. Given the fact that there are many communities facing challenges with the education of their children, it would be prudent to, at the very least, begin looking at how the education system and the community support parenting to increase children's chances and opportunity for developing school readiness skills.

Thus the goal of the current study was to gather information generated from survey data about how and the degree to which parents involved themselves in their child's school readiness as well as the kinds of activities they partake and routines provided at home once their child enters school. Information regarding the child having a place to keep school materials and books is very important to know when planning for at-home reading or math programs. It was hoped that by indicating the degree that parents spoke to their child's teacher, data would provide information for building stronger trusting relationships with parents and increasing positive parent involvement within the school and the home.

Chapter Three: Procedures and Methods

Research Design

The goal of this research was to investigate how parents support and involve themselves in their child's development for school readiness prior to school entry and continuing through their formal education. The present study utilized a survey with a Likert scale to gather quantitative data from parents. The survey was comprised of nine statements addressing how and the degree to which parents involve themselves in supporting their child's development in all areas encompassed by the EDI (language and cognition, emotional maturity, social knowledge and competence, communication and general knowledge, and physical health and well being) that contribute to school readiness. Seventeen parents of students in this researcher's Kindergarten/Grade 1 classroom were provided with the opportunity to participate in the survey. All participation was voluntary and anonymous. Literature reviewed by this researcher on the topic of school readiness and parental involvement suggested the importance of early childhood experiences and parental involvement in activities for developing children's school readiness.

Sample

This researcher intended to generalize findings to the population within the particular school setting where the study was conducted. The participants were a convenience sample of 17 parents derived from this researcher's 2011/2012 Kindergarten/Grade 1 class register in an inner city elementary school in the mid Vancouver Island area. The sample was not randomly selected; therefore, findings were only generalizable to this researcher's classroom population and not to other populations within the same school district. However the sample of students in the Kindergarten/Grade 1 classroom were a representation of the population of the school. The population in this area was deemed as vulnerable because of; (a) low socioeconomic status as

mapped by the EDI (2010) and (b) low 2010/2011 Early Development Instrument scores.

School records indicated that 68% of the student population was of Aboriginal ancestry, 32% of children had Ministry of Children and Families involvement, and 61% of students lived in single or blended- type families.

The sample was both male and female and was assumed to vary by age (parents and grandparents), and of ethnicity. The school's student population was 172 of which 68% were of Aboriginal ancestry, <1% English as a Second Language, and 31% Caucasian/other. Children lived in single parent, dual parent, or grandparent/guardian-type families. Some students lived in single family dwellings, while others shared a residence with one or more other families. The proportion of students living in single family homes was not known. Twenty-two percent of students were on an Individual Education Plan, 10 % received service from a Speech and Language Pathologist, and 27% of students received English Skills Development.

Sixty-seven percent of the school population were provided with a snack and lunch program, and many were provided with a breakfast by the school throughout the year. Lack of participation in fundraising by families limited the amount of funds generated in a school year. In the 2010/2011 school year there were only four active parents involved in the Parent Advisory Committee who planned and organized school fundraising activities for classroom funds and fieldtrips.

Instrumentation

A survey was designed to obtain information about the degree to which parents involved themselves in their child's preparation for school readiness as well as once in formal education. Literature reviewed in this current study found that pre-numeracy and pre-literacy were important factors in school readiness and those skills correlated with numeracy and literacy

development and attention control. The survey statements were broad descriptors that addressed competency of school readiness skills across the domains of physical health and well being, social knowledge and competence, emotional maturity, language and cognition, and communication and general knowledge. Language, literacy, and numeracy address the cognitive aspects of school readiness as well as behavioural outcomes such as attention control and the physical energy levels needed to sustain children through the school day, as well as the ability of children to deal with their emotions through communication.

The survey consisted of nine close-ended statements that reflected the support and involvement of parents in their child's development in the categories of language, literacy, numeracy, and emotional maturity, as well as statements about routines and communication between home and school that are encompassed within the five domains included in the 2010/2011 Early Development Instrument (EDI) (HELP, 2011) (see Appendix A). The nine survey statements were based on research findings of parental involvement (Fantuzzo, Tighe, & Childs, 2000) incorporating essential activities that contribute to school readiness: pre-literacy and pre-numeracy activities, exploring places of learning, and routine.

Research findings by Janus and Duku (2007); Razza et al. (2010); and Welsh et al. (2010) stated that language competence and parental involvement were associated with acquisition of school readiness skills and knowledge. Thus the survey asked parents about activities that they participated in with their child such as reading and playing math games. The survey also asked about the provision of a place to keep learning materials and books to ascertain whether children would be more likely to participate in home reading programs, numeracy activities, as well as having a safe place to keep things to be returned to the school. There was a statement asking whether their child had a regular bedtime as the domain for physical health and well-being

included a child's sustained energy level for learning. The statement asking about exploring places of learning in the community was to indicate prior experiences that children were provided that would contribute to developing their curiosity and eagerness to try new things, and learning how to control their emotions by acting appropriately in public places and learning how to interact with peers.

Respondents were asked to rate the degree to which they participated in stated activities, such as, "I read with my child". Each of the nine statements was accompanied by a five-point Likert scale. The Numeral 1 represented Never and the Numeral 5 represented Always. The statements were divided by age range: prior to school entry, ages 0 to 4 years; and at school entry, ages 4 to 6 years to establish whether or not parental involvement increased once children entered school. A Participant Consent Form (see Appendix B) attached to the survey gave a full explanation of the purpose and intentions of the study. A statement in the Participant Consent Form made clear that participation was voluntary and completely anonymous.

Although surveys typically have a low return rate, this researcher chose to use a survey instrument for data collection to ensure that there was minimal risk of participant characteristics or participant attitude affecting responses, and so that participants would feel less intimidated through use of an instrument ensuring anonymity. Research has indicated that some participants choose not to respond to surveys for reasons of disinterest, not fully understanding the significance of the subject, no incentive directly benefiting the participant, discomfort with the subject matter, lack of time, and distrust (Bielick & McPhee, 2009; Diaz de Rada, 2005; Gerrits, van den Oord, & Voogt, 2001; Groves, Presser, & Dipko, 2004; Soloff, Lawrence, Misson, & Johnstone, 2006). Choosing an instrument of an anonymous nature that was low risk, easy to understand, and did not ask for personal information was hoped to increase the response rate.

The statements were purposefully general in nature and were written in clear language so participants could easily understand and answer each statement. The choice of statements directly related to the research question and could in no way identify a participant by name or by family. Respondents were asked to identify whether they were male or female. This author purposefully omitted statements identifying socioeconomic status and ethnicity to avoid intrusion of privacy and to maximize objectivity while inferring data results.

Procedures

Over a two week period in September of the 2011 Fall Term, 17 parents of this researcher's Kindergarten/Grade 1 classroom in an inner city school in the mid Vancouver Island area were invited to complete a nine statement survey. Two weeks were allotted in order to give participants time to complete and to return the surveys to the school either in person or by mail. This time frame was hoped to limit the likelihood of no-response by means of misplaced surveys. Distribution of Participant Consent Forms and surveys took place during a Parent-Teacher Meet and Greet during school hours at the school. Pens were provided with each survey envelope to ensure all participants had the necessary tools to record their answers on the survey form. A school addressed and postmarked envelope was also included with the survey envelopes.

This researcher explained the purpose of the survey and the intended use of data collected to each parent in attendance at the Parent-Teacher Meet and Greet. Parents were informed that the purpose of the survey was to provide information regarding activities parents engaged with their children prior to school entry, as well as, during the first years of school. The information provided would help plan for classroom instruction and communication between home and school as well as a basis for school-wide goals to increase parent involvement and increase student achievement. Parents were informed that communication was important for increasing

parents' awareness of their children's learning needs and accomplishments and to develop at home help strategies. Parents were assured that participation in the survey was anonymous and confidential and that no anticipated emotional or physical harm would arise to students or family members from such participation. Participants were also made aware that they may withdraw from the study prior to submitting completed surveys.

Attached to each survey was a Participant Consent Form outlining the purpose and description of the study, including potential harms or benefits. Participation was completely voluntary and confidential. The Participant Consent Form included the phrase: "The return of your completed survey indicates your consent to take part in this study and for the information you provide to be included in the study results." Anonymity was assured as no signatures were required in order to consent to participate in the current study.

Surveys were placed in each student's cubby for parents to take if they so wished to participate in the study. This method of distribution was chosen to ensure that as many parents as possible were informed of the survey, received the survey, and that the intent and the voluntary and anonymous nature of the survey were made clear. This was hoped to increase the number of responses as surveys could not be directly mailed to homes because the school office may not have current or accurate home addresses as many families move without notification. The survey was explained to parents, with an awareness that there were varying degrees of participant literacy levels which may affect whether or not surveys would be completed. Parents were able to view the survey projected by a document camera. This researcher explained the purpose of the survey, reiterating the fact the school nor the families could in any way be identified. This researcher read through the statements to the parents. Any questions were answered and further clarification was given to parents at this time.

For those parents who did not attend the Parent-Teacher Meet and Greet, a Participant Consent Form, survey, and school addressed and postmarked envelope were inserted into a sealed envelope and sent home with their child the following day. All participants were asked to return their completed surveys within fourteen days via mail or hand delivery to the school office where they were kept in a safe and secure drop box to ensure privacy of the data. A reminder letter along with the original Participant Consent Form and survey were sent home to parents after the fourteen day allotted response time since no completed surveys were returned to the school in that time period (see Appendix C). Parents were asked to return surveys by October 28, 2011. All paper collected (survey) along with the discussion and recommendations were securely stored in this researcher's supervisor's office. A five year time period for storage of data was given before disposal of hard copies by means of shredding and permanent deletion of electronic information from an electronic storage device.

Validity

Measures to protect internal validity were taken for location, participant attitudes toward education, and data collector bias. A two week period was given for surveys to be completed with a redistribution of Parent Consent Forms and questionnaires and additional nine days for response to help minimize loss of surveys or non-response. All surveys were to be completed within each family's home increasing the likelihood of participants being more comfortable participating in the study. Instrumentation of a Likert scale survey was chosen as a way of gathering quantitative data that would minimize subjectivity. It was assumed that respondents would be more likely to answer genuinely through an anonymous survey than by being interviewed and that by using close-ended statements subjectivity would be minimized when accounting for attitudes towards education and subject characteristics.

The survey statements were derived and adapted from previous research on the same topic by Fantuzzo, Tighe, and Childs (2000) who studied school readiness and parent involvement which, in this current study, related to the domains of development reflected in the 2010/2011 EDI. This researcher chose to use and adapt statements from Fantuzzo et al. (2000) because statements on the survey were found to be reliable and valid for large populations of 80% low-income and minority ethnicity. Fantuzzo et al. (2000) field tested their survey statements to support cultural validity to ensure parents understood the statements and that the statements represented an accurate reflection of parent-child experiences related to school and learning. While participants in this current study differed in ethnicity, statements reflected activities involving parent-child interaction and experiences expected in a child's preschool years. This researcher believed that the statements on this current survey limited ambiguity by clearly wording each statement and that each statement was reflective of daily events that could be understood by all parents.

Data sought for collection in the current study's survey directly corresponded to the research question and was based on the research literature reviewed indicating the importance of meaningful interactions and involvement for development of language and attention control and the degree to which parents support their child's school readiness and formal education. Although survey statements for this study were derived from a previous study, generalizability of data gathered in this study is limited due to participants being a convenience sample and not randomly selected.

Data Analysis

The results from the study were summarized qualitatively. With the assumption that surveys would be returned, fifty percent of combined respondents who indicated that they never,

rarely, or sometimes participate in supporting their child's school readiness for an individual statement was considered a significant indicator for low school readiness.

Chapter Four: Results

A self-administered parent survey failed to generate meaningful data in order to answer the research question: How and to what degree do parents from low socio-economic households support their child's school readiness in providing learning opportunities prior to and continuing through their child's education? One survey was returned out of 17 surveys, representing 17 children from this researcher's 2011/2012 Kindergarten/Grade 1 classroom. Factors that may have led to the low response rate will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

Chapter Five: Summary and Conclusions

Summary

This current study sought to answer the research question: How and to what degree do parents from low socio-economic households support their child's school readiness by providing learning opportunities prior to and continuing through their child's formal education? An assumption made was that information from data gathered would assist educators in an inner city elementary school, in a mid Vancouver Island community, to develop goals and objectives to a) educate parents about supporting their child's learning development and/or b) to increase parental involvement within the home as well as within the school context.

Many factors, such as parenting, family type, SES, access to resources, and time contribute to school readiness for children. To understand how parent involvement during a child's early years supports school readiness, a literature review of six related studies was undertaken. Findings from the literature supported the fundamental importance placed on pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills, and exploratory experiences for school readiness skill development. Precursors to literacy and numeracy development were receptive vocabulary, attention control, and a lack of impulsivity. The quality of the home environment, family type, socio-economic status, time, and parental involvement in activities with their child were also found to have contributed to developing necessary skills for children's attainment of readiness for school.

To answer the research question, a survey method using a nine statement Likert survey to generate data on the subject of the degree to which parents participated in activities with their children to support their school readiness was conducted. Statements asked about pre-literacy and pre-numeracy activities, exploration of places of learning, and routine as these experiences

are encompassed within the five domains of the EDI for determining the degree of school readiness or vulnerability of children. Reading books and having access to books are known to influence literacy skills (reading and vocabulary) and that numeracy activities develop numeracy skills and sustained attention in children. Exploring places of learning build an experiential base on which children make connections to in their learning, as well as, developing vocabulary and developing the physical and social aspects of development. Exploring places of learning and being read to also develops a child's level of curiosity, sustained attention, and their ability to control their emotions in an age appropriate way. Routines such as getting enough sleep determine the amount of energy a child sustains during the day.

Participants were parents of 17 students in this researcher's 2011/2012 Kindergarten/Grade1 classroom. Approval was granted by the Vancouver Island Research Ethics Board to distribute surveys at a Parent-Teacher Meet and Greet in the Fall of 2011. Fourteen days following the distribution of surveys, a reminder letter, the original Participant Consent Form, and survey were sent home to parents as no surveys had been returned, (Vancouver Island University Research Ethics Board granted approval for an amendment to the research procedure).

The research question could not be answered due to the return of only one survey. It was concluded that due to non-response the hypothesis could, in part, be supported. The hypothesis was that because of low socio-economic status, parents may have a different perception about how to support their child's school readiness, contributing to differing levels of preparedness among children when they enter school. Factors supporting the hypothesis were the educational history of some of our parents or effects of socio-economic factors in household environment,

parenting (interactions with their child, decision making, learning at home, and communication), and lack of time likely contributed to the extremely low response rate.

Discussion

Children living in a mid Vancouver Island community were at risk for school readiness as was illustrated by the 2010/2011 EDI. The school demographics indicated a high percentage of Aboriginal families, thus it was assumed that many students came from generational poverty, as is common for Aboriginal children living off reserve (according to the CTF, 2009). Given that there were a high percentage of children living in low SES households and that 47% of students who live within the neighbourhood boundary as mapped in the 2010/2011 EDI were at risk for school readiness, there was a need to investigate how children in this school community were supported in their school readiness prior to school entry.

To develop an understanding of children's prior experiences contributing to school readiness, an anonymous survey was chosen as the most effective method for gathering accurate, meaningful data. Study procedures were carefully chosen and designed in order to maximize the return rate and to provide valid data. Survey statements were clear in order to limit ambiguity in order to be easily understood by all participants. Parents who were directly approached by this researcher at the Parent-Teacher Meet and Greet were initially interested in participating in the survey. Asking parents to complete surveys within the school may have provided some responses; however, if parents felt uncomfortable or intimidated in the school, chances of inaccurate information being given was probable. The decision to have surveys completed within homes was made to eliminate location threat for parents so that they would be in a familiar and a non-threatening environment. It was assumed that because many families may be living in close quarters with other families, there was a possibility of surveys being lost.

After a two week period, another Participant Consent Form and copy of the original survey was sent home to each family. However, despite measures taken, only one survey was returned. Other methods of data collection were considered by the researcher in the design phase of the study. Phone calls or face to face communication were not undertaken as it was assumed to possibly threaten the anonymous nature of the study and perhaps apply excessive pressure to participate.

An interview method was not chosen as a way to gather information from parents, as participants may have felt pressured to participate in the study. It was also assumed in the particular context of this elementary school, that parents may have felt the need to respond in a way they thought this researcher expected leading to inaccurate responses. Interviewing students was not an option because of their age, considering their ability to fully understand questions asked of them, as well as the reliability of their answers.

Data sought for this study was to be meaningful and specific to this researcher's classroom as a basis to understand the degree to which parents involved themselves in activities with their child. It was hoped that a school-wide initiative would be developed and that goals and objectives to increase student achievement and to increase parent involvement would result from findings in this research. Although there was another full Kindergarten classroom in the school as a source for data, this researcher had not developed a relationship with parents and there was a perceived risk of high non-response from that group.

As data were hoped to give specific information about a particular population at a specific point in time, surveying Kindergarten and Grade 1 classrooms from other schools was not appropriate as findings would not be generalizable to the context of the classroom studied. Family demographics, absence of a trusting relationship with this researcher, and school context

were variables that would have greatly limited the generalizability, reliability and validity of any data gathered from another school.

Research on the topic of survey non-response indicated many reasons for participants to opt out of participating. Bielick and McPhee's (2009) research noted that parents may not fully understand why the survey is important and the implications from data for their child's benefit; therefore not showing interest in the topic. Parents may feel intimidated or vulnerable revealing their involvement with their child because information may reveal home situations. Depending on past experiences, parents may see the survey and the explanation of the design as authoritative. Bielick and McPhee (2009) also noted that parents may feel uncomfortable with being asked to participate by a teacher or a university affiliated project. In the particular context of the elementary school studied, Bielick and McPhee's (2009) findings correspond to the work of Barnes et al. (2006) who found that parents with low levels of education or those who suffered negative cultural experiences, such as residential schools, do not have trust with the formal education system.

Other research on the same topic of response to survey requests notes interest factor of subject matter of a survey as a deciding factor. If participants were not interested in the topic of research and there was no perceived incentive, such as monetary, likelihood of participation was diminished (Groves, Presser, & Dipko, 2004). Soloff, Lawrence, Misson, and Johnstone's study *Growing Up in Australia. The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children: An Australian Government Initiative* (2006) attributed non-participation of parents to many of the same reasons as Bielick et al. (2009) noted. Soloff et al. (2006) found non-response was due to lack of interest in the subject or that potential participants were too busy (other children in the home, working, or lone parent). Time was also stated as a reason for parents not involving themselves in the

development of school readiness skills for their child (Ingram et al., 2007). The literacy level and comprehension of parents may have contributed to parents participating and understanding the benefit to the parent or perceived benefit to the child. Privacy and confidentiality were other issues where parents may not have felt comfortable with an educator being privy to information with regard to home environment and parenting (Soloff et al., 2006). The cultural background of parents may be a deciding factor whether to participate or not. Parents may not see schools as a place to put their trust (Barnes et al., 2006). Gerrits, van den Oord, and Voogt (2001) found non-response could be related to lack of time and commitment.

To increase the likelihood of surveys being completed and returned, Diaz de Rada (2005) noted that making a number of contacts with potential participants is important. In the current study, as mentioned, surveys were sent out twice, with a reminder letter on the second attempt. This researcher was concerned that further attempts would be construed as harassment and the anonymous and voluntary nature of the study would have been threatened.

Reflecting on what research has indicated, factors contributing to non-response may be applicable in this current study. Although non-response prevented answering the research question, it did however highlight, on a systemic and community level that more work needs to be done to address the issue of parent involvement in developing children's school readiness. Although schools have no control over how children are prepared in acquiring skills necessary for school readiness, educators have the capacity to address issues in order to help narrow the gap between children who lack school readiness and those who demonstrate readiness skills.

Educators should be encouraged to put forth an earnest effort towards encouraging parent involvement both in the home and in the school setting. One place to begin encouraging parental involvement is to build trusting relationships, reducing parent vulnerability and establishing

emotional safety (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Educators must be cognisant of cultural values from the community, integrate local culture into school life and to be approachable through demonstrating respect, caring, and warmth towards parents and their children (McDermott & Rothenberg, 2000).

Limitations

There were many limitations to the current research. Data results from one survey and interpretation were not designed for generalizability across other populations as the intent of this study was to gain information about a particular population at one point in time. Limitations of the aforementioned study include a small sample size, subject attitude towards education, and non-response. Although past research from articles reviewed in this current study indicated a relationship between parent support and involvement in developing their children's school readiness, other unintended variables may have contributed to school readiness or lack of school readiness not accounted for in this present study. Validity of the results was questionable as only assumptions could be made due to lack of data from this current study in order to meaningfully understand the degree to which parents were involved with their children and to improve educational practice for a specific student population.

The small size of the convenience sample, although sought for a specific context, was problematic with only one completed and returned survey. However, non-response was not unanticipated with the specific population chosen for participation. Location threat was thought to be minimized as surveys were not completed within the school environment and were sent home to be completed in a non-threatening setting; however, this researcher was unable to hold the location constant as each home environment would have been different (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2009). There was a chance surveys would be lost due to being misplaced within homes as some

families had limited living space or shared a home with another family, contributing to surveys not being completed by participants.

Subject characteristics may have been a large determinant of whether surveys were completed or not. Levels of education, literacy, and SES, as well as past educational experiences may have been contributing factors. The perceived homogeneous group as a convenience sample may have also contributed to non-response.

With the knowledge that generalizability of data sought from a small sample would have been limited it would, however have given information specific to a particular context in a specific time. As no data were generated, the reliability and validity of assumptions and conclusions is questionable. Although this research failed to generate data to help form a direction for educators to develop goals and objectives based on evidence, the results of this study highlighted the importance of continued efforts to increase school readiness in children and to encourage further parent involvement.

Recommendations for Practice

Developing trusting relationships with parents is an integral component for increasing parent involvement with their child's education within the home setting and in the school context. Many of our parents have either experienced residential schools or have had family members who have had negative experiences in residential schools who may then have transmitted negative attitudes to their children (Barnes et al., 2006). Parents may have negative perceptions from past experiences, in general, or of educational institutions, specifically hindering the likelihood of their involvement with schools.

From the research of McDermott and Rothenberg (2000), recognizing cultural values and integrating local culture into schools is important when developing relationships with parents and

students. Parents are more likely to involve themselves in schools when they feel teachers approach them with respect and warmth. McDermott and Rothenberg (2000) also found that school staff being visible within the community showed that they cared.

At the school level, developing trusting relationships with all parents is integral in order to help children who are already behind their peers and to establish a foundation on which to educate parents for developing the readiness skills of their pre-school children. Finding ways to become involved in the community and developing working relationships with the local band office, daycares, and other community agencies that support school readiness are crucial prior to children entering school. Through Professional Learning Communities, exploring research that is specific to similar populations on topics of development of receptive vocabulary, attention control, and factors contributing to impulse control may aid in decision-making for planning school initiatives for increasing student achievement.

Issues of parent involvement need to be addressed not only at the school level, but more so at the community level where issues of poverty, lack of access to resources (child care, preschool/Strong Start, health, and community facilities), and unemployment and low education levels of adults are common. Due to non-participation in this current study, it will be imperative for educators in this community to explore the issue of school readiness and ways to increase parent involvement. Knowledge gained from research can then direct practices to be put in place to address these issues in the form of developing pedagogy, creating opportunities to include parents on an informal level, or by presenting to those who have the power to make decisions and direct initiatives to address issues.

Suggestions for Further Research

School readiness is a complex developmental process that is affected by many variables. Exploration of how to educate parents of the importance of school readiness and that it begins from birth and continues through a child's growing years, finding time for parents and children to have quality experiences together, and helping parents to access programs and resources to aid development of children are all factors integral to the development of children. Outside research on topics of parenting education, building trust among vulnerable populations, and how interagency initiatives may play a role in supporting parents are areas for further exploration and research.

Schools have the ability to address school-level issues; however, educators may promote the notion of school readiness within the community and support students once they begin school. At the school and district level, educators need to find ways to reach out to parents and bring them in to the schools. Setting up a focus group, through a facilitator who is trusted in the community, about getting parents involved in the school and with the Aboriginal community would be a good place to start in order to build trust in schools. Then deeper connections between home and school can be examined. It will be imperative to act on recommendations in order to assist parents with helping their children acquire school readiness and mitigate learning delays and increase student success.

Continued study will need to be conducted on factors of home environment, quality of attachment, parent-child interaction, and parenting stress and how it relates to school readiness. Time was another factor that was found to impact parental involvement. More research addressing the effects of not only low SES parents spending time with their children, but also of

middle class parents, and the role technology plays in diverting time away from parent-child interactions and the implications for developing school readiness in children, is necessary.

Issues not addressed in this study worthwhile of noting for further research are how to support teen parents in parenting and parents who may suffer the effects of fetal alcohol or drug effects and their interactions with and development of school readiness of their children.

Provision of resources for parents in parenting and learning at home are areas for future investigation and attention at all levels of education and other ministries within the provincial government.

Conclusion

Forty seven percent of Kindergarten age children in a specific neighbourhood boundary in a mid Vancouver Island community whose teachers completed the 2010/2011 EDI were found to be at risk for school readiness in more than one domain. Of interest in this current study, was how and the degree to which parents involved themselves in their child's school readiness development and how they continued to involve themselves. As educators, we have the data identifying a population of children as vulnerable for readiness skills; however the factors contributing to children's readiness development are merely assumptions.

This current study failed to successfully acquire information regarding activities parents involved themselves with their children to promote readiness skills for school. Educators have work to do for building trusting relationships with parents in a low SES community to increase parent involvement and to provide parent education highlighting the importance of the role that parents play in their child's development. Outside agencies and levels of government who have the power to make decisions must do more for supporting the most vulnerable in our society.

Any initiatives put forth must be able to sustain government change, and policy-makers must show integrity by providing the necessary funding to implement and sustain initiatives.

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Appendix A



VANCOUVER ISLAND
UNIVERSITY

Parent Involvement Survey

Please circle whether you are: Male or Female

Please circle your choice that best answers how you provide support and how often you participate in the following activities with your child:

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
From ages 0 – 4 years:					
1. I read with my child.	1	2	3	4	5
2. I played number games with my child.	1	2	3	4	5
3. I took my child to places in the community to learn (museum, library, beach).	1	2	3	4	5
From ages 4 – 6 years:					
4. I read with my child.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I play number games with my child.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I take my child to places in the community to learn (museum, library, beach).	1	2	3	4	5
7. My child has a place at home for books and school materials.	1	2	3	4	5
8. My child has a regular bedtime.	1	2	3	4	5

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
9. I talk to my child's teacher about school work to practice at home.	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix B**VANCOUVER ISLAND
UNIVERSITY****Participant Consent Form****Parent Involvement and Support for School Readiness
September, 2011**

Heather Chapman
Vancouver Island University
Masters of Educational Leadership Student

Rachel Moll, Ph. D., Supervisor
Faculty of Education
Vancouver Island University
(250) 753-3245, local 2161

I am taking a Masters of Educational Leadership program at Vancouver Island University. Part of my studies requires me to conduct a research project. The research that I have chosen will explore activities in which you are involved with your child at home that may help in his or her school readiness. Past research suggests that early reading and math activities at home, as well as exploring places of learning contribute to school readiness. Although you, your child, and the school will not be identified, the information you provide will be reported and made public along with the research results in my Master's thesis. It will also help me to plan lessons to support your child's education.

You are being asked to participate in this study by completing a short, nine question survey about how involved you are in activities with your child. The survey should take about five minutes of your time.

There are no anticipated harms associated with your participation in the survey. The information you provide may help me to identify areas requiring attention and further development as a focus for planning lessons in language activities including reading and math, as well as, for communication between home and school.

Your participation will be anonymous and I will not be able to identify any child or family member from your participation in this survey. The study will begin at the Parent-Teacher Meet and Greet and will end in fourteen days. Please return your completed survey within fourteen days to the office, via mail or hand delivered, where it will be stored in a safe and secure drop box. After I have received the information, all surveys will be securely stored in a locked filing cabinet in the office of my supervisor for five years and will be disposed of by shredding.

Participation is completely voluntary and confidential. Whether you participate or not will have no impact on your child's treatment or progress at school. If you do participate, you may skip any question or discontinue your participation entirely at any time, for any reason and without consequence. Because surveys are entirely anonymous, however, once you return your survey, your information cannot be excluded as it will be impossible to distinguish your answers from any others that have been returned.

Please complete the enclosed survey then return it to the school, either by mail or in person, in the pre-addressed envelope provided. The return of your completed survey indicates your consent to take part in this study and for the information you provide to be included in the study results.

If you have any concerns about your treatment as a research participant in this study, please contact the VIU Research Ethics Officer, by telephone at (250) 753-3245 (ext. 2665) or by email at reb@viu.ca.

If you have any questions about this research project, or would like more information please feel free to come to the classroom, or contact me or the school principal at the phone number below or email me at the address below.

Heather Chapman
Masters of Educational Leadership Student,
Vancouver Island University

Appendix C

FACULTY OF EDUCATION
Vancouver Island University
900 Fifth Street, Nanaimo,
British Columbia, Canada V9R 5S5
Tel (250) 740-6221 Fax (250) 740-6463
<http://www.viu.ca/education/>

October 19, 2011

Dear Parents,

This note is just a friendly reminder that for those of you who wish to participate in the parent involvement survey, handed out on September 29, 2011, to please return the anonymous survey to the school either by mail or directly to the school office. I would like to be able to collect all the information by October 28, 2011. For your convenience, I am re-sending the original survey package which includes a description of the research and the questionnaire for you to complete and return.

If you have any questions regarding the survey, please feel free to come to the classroom, call me at the school, or email me.

Thank you for your cooperation and support.

Heather Chapman