The transition to kindergarten: factors associated with a positive adjustment

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The transition to kindergarten: Factors associated with a positive adjustment

by

Abby M. Copeman Petig

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Human Development and Family Studies

Program of Study Committee:
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  Gayle J. Luze, Co-Major Professor
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Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2015

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DEDICATION

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The transition to kindergarten represents a significant milestone in the lives of young children and their families. This period may be both exciting and challenging for families, and there are efforts that parents and educators can make to help ease difficulties that arise during the transition. Working within the framework of Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model and the concept of academic socialization, the current study used the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Kindergarten Class of 1998-99 (ECLS-K) to explore the associations among transition activities, beliefs about school readiness skills, parental involvement in school-based activities, and children’s adjustment to kindergarten. Children in families with higher incomes and those speaking English at home experienced more transition activities than did their peers. Children whose families were offered a greater number of transition activities experienced a more positive adjustment to kindergarten. Additionally, families receiving more transition support were more engaged in school-based parent involvement activities during the kindergarten year. The study concludes with recommendations for additional research to understand more about how transition activities can support diverse families, and how schools and other organizations might make investments in supporting the transition between early education and kindergarten.
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Introduction

This study explored factors associated with a positive transition and adjustment to kindergarten, and how this often challenging period of transition may be eased by the supportive efforts of school personnel, parents, and others. I investigated parents’ and teachers’ perceptions of the importance of school readiness skills for children entering kindergarten, the activities that families experience during the transition period, the interactions between parents and schools, and the ease with which children adjusted to kindergarten. Ensuring that children transition smoothly to school and experience a positive, supportive entry into the formal educational system may be an important factor in narrowing the achievement gap in the United States (Belsky & MacKinnon, 1994; Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000). Helping parents feel comfortable communicating and engaging with the educational system could also help to remove barriers for parental involvement, which is a strong predictor of school success (Dearing, Krieger, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006; Rimm-Kaufmann, Pianta, Cox, & Bradley, 2003). The knowledge generated from this study will help to inform policies and practices related to school entry, home-school relationships, and the transition experience.

Background and Context

School readiness has garnered increased attention in the research literature, the media, and in the policy arena over the past several decades (e.g., Daily, Burkhauser, & Halle, 2010; Meisels, 1999; National Conference of State Legislatures, 2013, Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, 2005). A child considered “school ready” is one who possesses “the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for success in school and for later learning and life” (Office of Head Start, 2014, p. 1). Crucial elements for success are typically categorized into five domains: language and literacy, cognition and general knowledge, physical well-being and development, social-
emotional development, and approaches to learning (Office of Head Start, 2014; United States Department of Education, n.d.). The increased focus on early education and school readiness has occurred in part due to the inception of the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. This law was enacted to address the pervasive achievement gap that exists in the United States between economically and socially disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers, and includes a focus on accountability at all levels of K-12 education (No Child Left Behind Act of 2001). In addition to this law, in the early 1990s, the National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) was instituted to monitor national progress on six educational goals, the first being: *By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn.* This effort brought the issue of school readiness to the forefront of discussion within the K-12 educational field (Kagan & Rigby, 2003).

As more attention is directed toward academic achievement in the early elementary years, more is expected of young children—even kindergarten children in their first year of formal education (Fuller, 2007). Children who face social or economic disadvantages have been found to enter kindergarten with school readiness skills that are less well developed than their more advantaged peers; these gaps in readiness typically maintain or even widen as children move through school (Burkham & Lee, 2002; Flanagan, McPhee, & Mulligan, 2009; Magnuson, Meyers, Ruhm, & Waldfogel, 2004; Mulligan, Hastedt, & McCarroll, 2012; Ramey & Ramey, 2004). Participation in early education programs, particularly those of high quality, has been found to increase children’s school readiness skills (Magnuson et al., 2004; Yoshikawa et al., 2013). As the benefits of high quality preschool are increasingly evident, national and state groups have advocated for more funding and more support of preschool across the nation (Fuller, 2007). The result has been that increasing numbers of young children in the U.S. are attending
preschool programs; two-thirds of 4-year-old children attended some form of prekindergarten program in 2012, compared to only 16% in 1965 (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2013).

The transition experiences that children and families have prior to kindergarten have an impact on their later experiences during the early elementary years. The transition into kindergarten represents, for many families, the first contact with the formal educational system, and so the experience may set the stage for future interactions with this system (Malsch, Green, & Kothari, 2011). Sending a child off to school for the first time may evoke myriad reactions from parents: sadness that their child is growing up, uncertainty about what will be expected of the child and of them, and/or excitement for the new opportunities that a full school-day brings (National Center on Parent, Family, and Community Engagement [NCPFCE], 2013). There is often a large contrast between the environment, activities, and expectations of a child in their pre-kindergarten arrangements as compared with those in kindergarten. In preschools, child care centers, or home-based care arrangements, different rates of developmental progress among children are acceptable and even expected. With the greater expectations placed upon young children as a result of a focus on school accountability, flexibility around developmental progress is not as prevalent in the early elementary years and children are expected to meet certain milestones within a specific timeframe (Schulting, Malone, & Dodge, 2005).

In response to a societal emphasis on school readiness and disparities in children’s and families’ pre-kindergarten experiences, researchers have explored the ways that institutions and individuals help to ease the transition from home or early childhood settings into the kindergarten setting (e.g., Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000; Early, Pianta, Taylor, & Cox, 2001; La Paro, Kraft-Sayre, & Pianta, 2003). In general, transition activities are events, actions, or
programs that help to connect the child and family with the new school setting, including the kindergarten teacher. Transition activities may take many forms; teachers may communicate with families in writing or in person, schools may host “back to school nights” so that families can explore the building and classrooms, and preschool teachers may reach out to kindergarten teachers to share information about specific children. There are promising transition practices that have been developed in the field of early education, but little is known about how transition activities impact important elements of a child’s kindergarten experience. This study addresses this gap by employing multilevel modeling to explore the connections between transition activities, beliefs about school readiness, kindergarten adjustment, and the home-school connection during the kindergarten year.

**Research Questions**

In examining families’ experiences with the transition to kindergarten and subsequent experiences during kindergarten, the study uses the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study – Kindergarten Class of 1998-99 (ECLS-K) dataset to address the following research questions:

1. What skills and abilities do parents and teachers report as important for children as they enter kindergarten? To what extent is there agreement between parents and teachers about the importance of these school readiness skills?

2. What transition activities do parents and teachers report taking place before kindergarten? Is there a significant correlation among the experiences that parents and teachers report?

3. To what extent are the number of school-based parent involvement activities reported by parents associated with parents’ and teachers’ ratings of the importance of school readiness skills, and the number of transition activities reported (by parents and teachers)?
4. To what extent is a child’s adjustment to kindergarten associated with parents’ and teachers’ ratings of the importance of school readiness skills, and the number of transition activities reported (by parents and teachers)? Is this association mediated by the number of school-based parent involvement activities that parents report?

The current study employs descriptive and correlational analyses to answer the first two research questions, and multilevel regression to answer the final two questions.

**Organization of the Dissertation**

This dissertation is organized using the traditional dissertation format. Chapter 2 describes the theoretical framework guiding the study and a review of relevant literature. The sample, procedure, measures, and analyses are discussed in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 describes the results of the study, and Chapter 5 includes a discussion of the findings. The final chapter includes future directions and suggestions for additional research.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

In the current study, I utilized the bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) and the concept of academic socialization (Hill, 2001; Taylor, Clayton, & Rowley, 2004) as theoretical frameworks for exploration of the transition to kindergarten. Research indicates that the transition to kindergarten can be a difficult time of adjustment for children, families, and schools (Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, & Cox, 2000). Parents and kindergarten teachers can have similar or divergent beliefs about the importance of particular school readiness skills, which may play a role in how smoothly children move from prekindergarten programs to kindergarten (Wesley & Buysse, 2003). Researchers and practitioners have developed and studied a variety of promising practices to help facilitate a positive transition experience (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2000). Positive interactions between parents and teachers help to support a child’s entry into kindergarten, setting the stage for future success (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012).

Bioecological Model and Academic Socialization

The bioecological model of human development, as proposed by Bronfenbrenner and his colleagues (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998), posits that developmental outcomes are the result of bidirectional interactions between individuals and the elements of their environments or contexts. Academic socialization builds upon the tenets of bioecological theory and consists of the parental beliefs and behaviors that influence children’s academic or school-related development (Hill, 2001; Taylor et al., 2004). This framework supports the assertion that when parents hold certain beliefs or expectations for their children’s academic development, parents will engage in certain behaviors to support or encourage that development (Kim, Murdock, & Choi, 2005).
The bioecological model delineates four levels of influence upon development—the microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. The current study focuses on the microsystem and mesosystem. The microsystem involves the most immediate and direct influences upon a child, which typically includes family, peers, and teachers. In this study, one of the microsystem influences consists of the beliefs that parents have about the importance of particular school readiness skills for a child’s entrance into kindergarten. Based on the concept of academic socialization, I assert that those beliefs have influenced the ways in which the parent(s) prepared the child for kindergarten (Taylor et al., 2004). In addition, I assume that beliefs about the importance of school readiness skills held by teachers influence the expectations that teachers have for children when they enter kindergarten. Further, I believe that teachers’ school readiness beliefs indirectly impact the experiences and interactions that teachers and children have during kindergarten, specifically, whether or not children are able to meet teachers’ expectations for their skills and behavior. Microsystem interactions are also reflected in the number and type of transition activities that a child directly experiences in both the home and school settings. Parents’ participation in transition activities can be conceptualized as another aspect of academic socialization, as their beliefs about children’s readiness for school may impact their actions in preparing their children for kindergarten (Puccioni, 2015).

The mesosystem consists of the connections and interactions among children’s microsystems, such as the relationship and coordination between and among their parents, any child care providers, and the elementary school staff. Mesosystem influences explored in this study include certain transition activities that involve both the child and the parent engaging with the teacher or school (e.g., visiting the classroom as a family, home visits conducted by the
teacher), and the number of school-based parent involvement activities that parents report engaging in during the school year.

Within these systems, reciprocal interactions between a person and the people, materials, and symbols in the environment drive a person’s development (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). These interactions are known as proximal processes, and have been deemed the “engines of development” (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, p. 996). In order to have a meaningful effect on development, these bidirectional interactions must occur repeatedly over a significant length of time, and must increase in complexity, building upon themselves to shape developmental progression (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). In this study, I am assuming that a parent who indicated on study questionnaires that it is important to strengthen early language and literacy skills before a child enters kindergarten is likely to engage in activities with their child to strengthen those skills. These activities might include reading books with their child to help develop familiarity with stories and vocabulary, or pointing out letters in signs or other print materials in order to practice and develop these skills before the child began school (Kim et al., 2005; Puccioni, 2015). Research indicates that behaviors such as these constitute the proximal processes driving the child’s development of early literacy and language skills (Barbarin et al., 2008; Rafoth et al., 2004), as these repeated, interactive activities work to build the child’s understanding of letters, sounds, and words.

The current study focused on the process of the transition to kindergarten within the above theoretical framework (Figure 1). The transition process includes the interrelationships among children, families, and schools, with an emphasis on the important interactions and coordination among parents and teachers, and the impact of those interactions on children’s adjustment to a new educational experience. Specifically, I examined whether parents’ and
teachers’ beliefs about children’s school readiness skills had an impact on the number of school-based activities parents engage in, as well as children’s adjustment to kindergarten. In addition, I tested whether a greater number of transition activities was associated with more school-based parent involvement. It also examined whether a greater number of transition activities was associated with a more positive adjustment to kindergarten. Finally, I explored whether more parent involvement was related to an easier adjustment as children begin kindergarten.

Figure 1. Proposed theoretical model for the relationships among beliefs about school readiness, transition activities, school-based parent involvement, and quality of children’s adjustment to kindergarten.

Home-School Connection

As two of the most salient microsystems in a young child’s development, the family and the classroom provide an opportunity for great impact on developmental outcomes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The interactions, communication, and coordination across these systems (mesosystem factors) can have both short- and long-term influences on a child’s
experience with school, in both beneficial and harmful ways. Focusing on the relationship and partnership between parents and educators is important in understanding a child’s adjustment to kindergarten, setting the stage for later educational outcomes. The home-school connection can be characterized by the levels and types of parental involvement in a child’s educational career, and the frequency and quality of communication among parents and teachers. This includes both parent-directed communication and engagement with the school and efforts by the school to reach out and engage with parents (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012).

Although parent involvement was once conceptualized solely as parents attending school events, this definition has been broadened (e.g., Epstein, 1995; Grolick & Slowiaczek, 1994; Hill & Tyson, 2009; McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen, & Sekin, 2004; Dikkers, 2013). Most current theories of parent involvement categorize different types or methods of involvement in a number of ways, generally (1) parent involvement in school-based activities, (2) parent engagement in home-based activities or providing environments conducive to learning, and (3) parent engagement in academic socialization (Grolnick & Raftery-Helmer, 2015). Parent involvement in school-based activities might take the form of participating in parent-teacher conferences, attending back to school nights, or volunteering for an event. Providing a home environment conducive to learning could include ensuring there are books and other reading materials in the home for the child to read, setting guidelines around TV usage on school nights, or taking field trips as a family. Academic socialization can include the ways in which parents share with children their expectations for educational attainment, or other aspirations for academic success. Parents who believe it is important for their children to be ready to learn in kindergarten might help prepare their children for school in a variety of ways, including working with them on skills at home and engaging with their future schools when
possible. The current study explored two aspects of the home-school connection: academic socialization, measured by parental beliefs about school readiness skills and parent report of transition activities, and school-based parent involvement. School-based parent involvement was examined as both a possible outcome related to parents’ and teachers’ beliefs about school readiness and participation in transition activities, and a possible predictor of children’s adjustment to kindergarten.

A large body of research has consistently concluded that family involvement in children’s educational experiences has a positive, long-lasting effect on children’s academic and social outcomes (e.g., Fan & Chen, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Jeynes, 2005). Children whose parents are actively involved in their education are more likely to attend school consistently (Henderson & Mapp, 2002), earn better grades (Fan & Chen, 2001), remain in school, and complete additional years of education (Barnard, 2004; Henderson & Mapp, 2002). Parents reported greater involvement in their child’s educational experiences both at school and at home when they perceived that their child’s teacher valued the parents’ contributions, kept the parents informed about the child’s progress, and provided the parents with specific suggestions to assist the child (Patrikakou & Weissburg, 2000).

Despite this significant evidence for the beneficial impacts of parent involvement, many schools and families still struggle to connect in ways that are meaningful for both parties. The most common barriers for family involvement with schools include language concerns and difficulties in attending events due to work or child care constraints (Malsch et al., 2011). Parents who are immigrants and families whose home language is not English may have difficulty participating in school events unless translation or interpreters are available (Finders & Lewis, 1994; Turney & Kao, 2009). Some parents may also find that school is not a comfortable or
welcoming institution (Dunlap & Alva, 1999; Finders & Lewis, 1994; Yoder & Lopez, 2013), and these feelings likely influence those parents’ desire or ability to engage with the school. The current study did not examine barriers to participation with the school; however, the findings may provide implications for more effectively engaging parents in school-based events and activities.

**School Readiness**

One important element related to the transition to kindergarten is the notion of school readiness and how the concept of school readiness impacts children, families, and educational institutions. The issue of school readiness has garnered a lot of attention over the past several decades and is inextricably linked to increased attention to the prekindergarten period and the importance of providing quality preschool experiences to more young children (Pianta, Cox, & Snow, 2007). As more is expected of children in the early elementary period compared to years past, expectations for school readiness have increased in recent times as well (Brown & Lan, 2015). Also, as discussed above, parental notions of school readiness likely influence parenting behaviors that support children’s preparation for kindergarten. As a result, it is important to understand how different stakeholders define being “ready for school.”

**Definitions of School Readiness**

The construct of school readiness is commonly defined as the possession of the social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral skills that are necessary for children to be successful in an educational setting (Office of Head Start, 2014; Rafoth, Buchenauer, Kolb Crissman, & Halko, 2004). Readiness for school is often assessed across the following domains: language and literacy, early math and numeracy, early science and problem-solving, social-emotional development, and physical well-being, health and motor development (Daily et al., 2010).
Beliefs about School Readiness Skills

Of interest to this study are the expectations for children’s school readiness skills held by parents and teachers. Parents, teachers, and school administrators may have similar notions of what children need to know or be able to do when they arrive at kindergarten (Wesley & Buysse, 2003). However, they may also hold vastly different beliefs about school readiness (Belfield & Garcia, 2014). Those beliefs likely influence both the activities that parents engage in with their children prior to school entry, and also the expectations that teachers have for children when they come to school. If parents and teachers have similar beliefs about the knowledge and skills that are necessary for children to begin kindergarten, the children may transition more seamlessly into the routines and activities of the classroom. However, if parents are focused on helping their children develop a particular skill set in preparation for kindergarten, but those skills are not the ones most valued by kindergarten teachers, this may negatively affect how smoothly children adjust to the kindergarten classroom and the teacher’s expectations.

In 1993, the National Household Education Survey (NHES) included questions about school readiness beliefs held by parents. A similar survey was sent to kindergarten teachers that same year, and asked many of the same questions with some additional items around classroom behaviors (Lewit & Schuurmann Baker, 1995). In general, parents and teachers all reported that effective communication skills, enthusiasm, and curiosity were important for kindergarten children to display. However, parents were more focused on academic skills (e.g., knowing the alphabet, counting to 20) than were teachers. The most important aspect of school readiness for the teachers in this study was that children were physically healthy, rested, and well-nourished—96% of teachers reported that this was “essential” or “very important” for children to be ready to start school (Lewit & Schuurmann Baker, 1995). Belfield and Garcia (2014) examined a more
recent version of the NHES conducted in 2007 and found a similar focus on academic skills, with an even greater proportion of parents endorsing the importance of these skills for school readiness.

In another study of parental understanding of school readiness, Barbarin and colleagues (2008) found similar results. Parents reported they believed that the knowledge and skills most necessary for school entry were knowing the alphabet, counting, identifying shapes, and language and literacy skills. Social competence was also mentioned, although less frequently, along with general knowledge (e.g., knowing important names, emergency information, concepts of time, and skills related to self-regulation). Presumably, these parents likely focused on academic skills with their children prior to beginning kindergarten (Taylor et al., 2004). A study by Lin, Lawrence, and Gorrell (2003) found that kindergarten teachers were more concerned with social skills than academic skills. Eighty-four percent of teachers said it was “essential” or “very important” that children be able to communicate their needs/thoughts, and the majority gave these ratings for the ability to not be disruptive (79%) and following directions (78%). Teachers also felt it was necessary that children be able to take turns and share (74% said “essential” or “very important”), and for children to be sensitive to others (62%), be able to sit still and be alert (61%), and to finish tasks (54%). Teachers may be hoping or expecting that children will enter the classroom having developed those social-emotional skills.

A qualitative study by Wesley and Buysse (2003) also explored elements of school readiness with focus groups of parents, preschool and kindergarten teachers, and elementary principals. The consensus across the participant groups was that children were ready for school if they could follow simple rules, interact with peers and adults in the classroom positively, and also be able to work independently in the classroom (Wesley & Buysse, 2003). In addition, many
of the focus group participants stressed the importance of social-emotional development and
language and communication, and were less concerned with academic skills (e.g., knowing the
alphabet). The respondents were confident that if children entered the kindergarten classroom
with these social-emotional, self-regulation, and communication skills, the kindergarten teacher
would be able to teach them the necessary academic skills. The kindergarten teachers reported
some tension between what they felt was developmentally appropriate for 5-year-olds to know
and do, and what the children would be expected to demonstrate during the year because of
increasing expectations since the inception of No Child Left Behind. The authors also found that
all stakeholders shared similar views on how children learn best (e.g., through play, active
exploration, and within positive and supportive social interactions), but noted that the
opportunities for this type of learning are being limited by greater state requirements around
testing and curriculum standards (Wesley & Buysse, 2003).

These studies reveal that there may be some alignment of beliefs and expectations about
school readiness among parents and teachers. However; there is also the possibility that some
parents may be focused on different aspects of readiness than the professionals who will be
teaching their children in kindergarten. This is an example of the importance of mesosystem
interactions in bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). A potential mismatch in
beliefs across could result in a more difficult adjustment to kindergarten for the child if the child
is expected to know or do things that the parent(s) did not anticipate and therefore, did not work
on with the child prior to kindergarten. A lack of shared understanding about what children
should be able to know and do when they enter school may create a situation in which parents
are nervous sending their children to kindergarten. Parents may also be uncertain about their
ability to best support their children during this adjustment. Finally, it is noteworthy that there is
a dearth of empirical studies examining the explicit connections among parents’ school readiness beliefs and their actions to help prepare their children for kindergarten. While it may be logical to assume that when parents possess certain beliefs about the importance of school readiness skills, they will engage in matching behaviors or activities, more research is needed to test that assumption.

Transition to Kindergarten

Pianta and colleagues characterized the transition to kindergarten as “a process in which child, family, school, and community interrelate across time” (Pianta, Rimm-Kaufman, & Cox, 1998, p. 4). As such, the transition to kindergarten can be defined as both a period of time around kindergarten entry and the process by which children and families enter into and engage with the formal educational setting. The period of time varies across schools and communities. In some areas, the transition period may mean the few weeks before kindergarten begins through the first few weeks of the kindergarten year (a total of one or two months) (Kagan & Neuman, 1998). In other communities, preschools and community groups may begin the transition process in the fall of the 4-year-old preschool year and continue through the fall of the kindergarten year for a full year of transition planning and follow-up activities (Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000).

Much like the transition period, the transition process differs across schools, neighborhoods, and communities, and may involve a range of elementary school-initiated activities, activities sponsored or directed by early childhood education (ECE) programs, community-organized events, and activities undertaken by parents and families (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2002; Pianta & Cox, 1999). The transition to kindergarten can be both an exciting and a challenging process for children and families. In addition to the anticipation and excitement around a new experience, the start of kindergarten may include the uncertainty of navigating a
new facility, encountering unfamiliar faces, and confronting a lack of understanding about policies, activities, and expectations that exist in the classroom and the school (Pianta & Cox, 1999; Shore, 1998). This uncertainty may exist for the kindergarten student, their parent(s), or both.

**Children’s Adjustment to Kindergarten**

Children beginning their first formal year of elementary education may experience some challenges in the new environment. In 1996, the National Center for Early Development and Learning (NCEDL) conducted a Transitions Practices Survey to survey teachers about the challenges that children were having upon kindergarten entry. Within this nationally representative survey of kindergarten teachers, it was noted that 52% of children experienced a successful entry into kindergarten, while 32% of children displayed a moderately successful entry (characterized by some minor problems) and 16% of children experienced difficult entry with multiple problems (Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, & Cox, 2000). At least thirty percent of teachers in the study reported the majority of their class experiencing problem in at least one area of adjustment, including difficulty following directions, a lack of academic skills, difficulty working independently, and difficulty working as part of a group. A smaller percentage of teachers reported that a majority of their students entered kindergarten lacking appropriate social skills (20%), displaying immature behaviors (20%), and showing difficulty communicating (13.5%) (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2000).

A study by Ladd and colleagues (2000) found that children who experienced a positive transition to kindergarten (e.g., reported liking school, looked forward to attending) participated more actively in classroom activities and performed better on achievement tests. The implication here is that a positive transition and smooth adjustment to kindergarten can have an impact on
children’s experiences through the kindergarten year, setting the stage for later participation and achievement.

Parents’ Experiences

In addition to the different experiences that children may have adjusting to kindergarten, families may also experience this transition period in a variety of ways. Many parents report having difficulty leaving their young child in a new school, and having concerns about behavior problems, academic difficulties, or their child’s ability to get along with peers (McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGennaro, & Wildenger, 2007). If the kindergarten student is a family’s oldest or only child, the parent(s) may not have had much contact with the school system since their own educational experiences. Presumably, many aspects of the educational system may have changed greatly over that span of time, and parents may not be familiar with school policies, expectations of the children, and classroom routines that their children will encounter.

One study found that 81% of parents desired more information about the academic expectations the school had for their children, and 61% of parents wanted more information about behavioral expectations. Only 12% of parents said they had all the information or assistance they needed (about expectations, logistics, and so forth) during this time of transition (McIntyre et al., 2007). A lack of information in preparation for the school year could be stressful for parents, particularly if they have questions about how best to prepare their child (in terms of school readiness skills), or what to expect when the child enters kindergarten.

Parents also report difficulties in the transition to kindergarten related to their expectations around communication and collaboration with the teaching staff. Parents whose children were enrolled in a child care, preschool, or Head Start program may find that the level of communication, outreach and involvement of parents, or classroom routines and expectations
differ significantly between those early education settings and elementary school (McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGennaro Reed, & Wildenger, 2010; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 1999). Families who have participated in high-quality early education programs typically experience frequent communication from their children’s preschool teachers, including updates about the classroom activities, opportunities for parents to volunteer, and ongoing conversation about children’s progress. In contrast, families often experience less frequent contact with the school once their children begin kindergarten (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2005). This decrease in communication with the child’s care and education providers when moving from early education to elementary school may be frustrating or disappointing for some parents.

**Transition Process**

Researchers have explored the actions that institutions and individuals take to help to ease the transition between home or early childhood settings into the kindergarten setting (e.g., Early, Pianta, Taylor, & Cox, 2001; La Paro, Kraft-Sayre, & Pianta, 2003; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). There are some guiding principles and promising practices that have been developed around the supports that can be offered to families and programs during this time. There is a range of activities considered to help during the transition process; however, many families only experience a limited number of transition activities. In addition, these activities are often ineffective in terms of providing the information and support families desire (Pianta et al., 1999).

**Guiding Principles**

Building on the work of empirical research and practitioner feedback, experts in the field of early education have developed a set of guiding principles regarding effective transition activities. Pianta, Rimm-Kaufman, and Cox (1999) assert that schools, in particular, should take
into consideration three principles when creating their transition plans: (1) reach out, (2), reach backward in time, and (3) reach with appropriate intensity. Reaching out involves engaging with both families and ECE programs to create and maintain relationships and facilitate communication across these settings and groups. Schools are encouraged to invite parents and children to visit the school building, meet the school staff, and learn about the routines that children will experience once kindergarten begins (Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000; NCQTL, 2014). Early education programs and elementary schools are encouraged to collaborate on transition planning, share information about routines and expectations, and communicate throughout the transition process (Kielty, Sancho Passe, & Mayle, 2013; NCQTL, 2014). The connections across ECE programs and elementary schools are intended to provide a seamless support system for families in general, and also for individual children and families with particular needs.

The principle of reaching backward reflects the importance of beginning the transition process early (Pianta, Rimm-Kaufman, & Cox, 1999). Many schools wait until the first days and weeks of school to begin communicating with families. However, Pianta and others recommend that schools and communities begin the transition process as early as the fall of the four-year-old preschool year in order to build trust and forge relationships.

Finally, Pianta and colleagues emphasize the value of developing a set of transition activities that vary in frequency and personalization. They suggest combining efforts such as sending general registration information in the mail to each elementary parent with personal home visits made by the kindergarten teacher. Schools might set up neighborhood gatherings during the summer in order to foster peer relationships among children and families who will be in the same kindergarten class. Kindergarten teachers might also discuss with parents the results of the screenings they administered at the orientation night (Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000). Many
of the transition planning resources urge communities and school personnel to think of these activities as a menu of options, from which they can determine what supports and events will be most useful for the families they serve (Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000; NCQTL, 2014).

**Typical Transition Activities**

There are a variety of activities and strategies that school districts, ECE providers, and families engage in with the goal of helping children transition smoothly into kindergarten. These activities fall into one of three categories: contact between ECE programs and families, contact between kindergarten programs and families, and contact between ECE programs and kindergarten programs. The Office of Head Start’s National Center for Quality Teaching and Learning (2014) suggests transition activities and events that can be initiated by elementary schools, ECE programs, and community organizations (see also: Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003). These typically occur in the spring or summer before kindergarten entry and include (but are not limited to) the following:

- A visit to the kindergarten classroom by the future kindergarten students and/or their families
- A visit by the kindergarten teacher to ECE programs whose students will be attending the kindergarten
- Phone call(s) or home visit to the family from the kindergarten teacher
- Letter, email, or other written communication to the family from the kindergarten teacher
- Transmission of the student’s records or other relevant information by ECE providers to kindergarten teachers
- An orientation or open house event to provide families with information about school or district policies, procedures, etc.
In addition to these school-initiated efforts, parents may also take action to prepare themselves and their children for the transition. Parents may look to school personnel, friends, or relatives to share information and provide support during this time (La Paro, Kraft-Sayre, & Pianta, 2000). In a study of parent perspectives on the transition to kindergarten, Malsch, Green, and Kothari (2011) found that informal sources of support such as talking with other elementary parents, as well as the formal supports listed above, were associated with parents feeling more informed about the transition period. These supports also facilitated parents’ ability to ask questions, clarify procedures, and take necessary action in preparing their children for the kindergarten experience.

Research in the fields of special education and child adoption indicates that families often find these informal supports helpful in navigating new experiences (Bailey, Nelson, Hebbeler, & Spiker, 2007; Houston & Kramer, 2008). Families experiencing special education services or adoption may encounter similar challenges and opportunities as those present during transition to kindergarten, including working collaboratively with multiple sets of providers, transmitting important information across systems, and so forth. Considering this, families with a child transitioning to kindergarten may benefit from the positive impact of informal support systems that have been found to be effective for families experiencing other types of educational or social support services. Additional quantitative research on these informal supports in kindergarten transition would contribute to the literature that exists in other fields.

**Prevalence of Activities**

Much of the work on the transition to kindergarten has found that the transition activities experienced by children and families differ widely across program type (e.g., Head Start vs. other types of preschools; LoCasale-Crouch, Mashburn, Downer, & Pianta, 2008), family
demographics (McIntyre et al., 2007; Schulting et al., 2005), and teacher characteristics (Early et al., 2001). Families whose children attended preschools within an elementary school were more likely to experience transition activities that involved direct contact between the preschool and the kindergarten than their peers in other types of preschool programs (including Head Start; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008). However, families participating in Head Start were more likely than their peers to be offered a spring orientation meeting and to have individual meetings with the preschool personnel. In terms of family demographics, families with lower incomes tend to participate in fewer school-directed transition activities overall than families with higher incomes (Schulting et al., 2005). McIntyre and colleagues (2007) found that there was also a difference in the number of parent-directed transition activities across parents of different income levels. These included attending preschool meetings throughout the year, visiting the kindergarten classroom, and obtaining information about kindergarten from books, magazines, or websites. Teachers with an early childhood or primary education certification used more individualized outreach strategies with families than did their peers with other types of certification (Early et al., 2001). In addition, teachers who reported receiving specialized training or instruction on transition used more transition activities overall (including both individual outreach and group outreach).

We do not fully understand which activities are universally effective in promoting positive outcomes for children and families entering the school system, nor do we have consensus about the best ways to identify which families would benefit the most from certain strategies (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2002; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008). Whereas one family may find it sufficient to visit the school building once and meet their child’s kindergarten teacher, another family might need more support in the form of informal gatherings with other parents to
discuss questions and concerns about the child starting kindergarten. Families’ needs for support during the transition process may vary across and within different factors—neighborhood, family SES, language background, prior experience with the school system, and so forth (Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000; NCPFCE, 2013). Additional research is needed to illuminate the types and frequencies of transition activities that best meet the diversity of needs of families.

Research indicates that schools often have a standard protocol of transition activities that they offer to incoming families, and that these activities and supports are often not related to individual families’ needs (Pianta, Cox, Taylor, & Early, 1999; Schulting et al., 2005). Schulting and colleagues (2005) used the ECLS-K to investigate kindergarten teacher use of transition practices and found that on average, teachers report engaging in 3.35 (out of seven common) activities. The most common practice teachers utilized was contacting parents by telephone or mailing information (86% reported this activity), followed by the parents visiting the school or attending an orientation meeting at school (both 76%). Less common practices included preschool children visiting their kindergarten classroom (39%), shortening the school day at the beginning of the year (18%), and conducting home visits with families (4%). Children at-risk of entering school at a disadvantage due to social or economic factors generally receive less transition support than their more affluent peers (Pianta, Cox et al., 1999; Schulting et al., 2005). In the ECLS-K study, children in the lowest socioeconomic quintile (mean household income of $11,368) experienced an average of 2.83 transition activities, whereas children in the highest quintile (mean household income of $110,523) experienced 3.77 transition supports (Schulting et al., 2005). In addition, although activities involving direct contact with children and families (e.g., home visits, visits to the classroom, and other face-to-face communication) are more effective in smoothing the transition and more valued by families (McIntyre et al., 2007), all
families are more likely to experience “indirect” activities such as written communication or brochures. Further, children in lower income families are less likely than their more affluent peers to receive these more direct types of supports (Pianta, Cox et al., 1999). In general, children who are more at-risk for difficulty during this transition period are receiving less support than children who are less at-risk for challenges (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008).

**Impact of Activities**

In the first study published that examined the impact of kindergarten transition practices upon child outcomes, Schulting and colleagues (2005) found positive effects of school-initiated transition practices upon both children’s academic achievement and levels of parent involvement in school. Children whose teachers engaged in more transition practices demonstrated higher scores on a composite measure of achievement (combining reading, math, and general knowledge assessments). Overall, families who experienced more transition activities were found to participate in more parent-initiated school involvement activities (e.g., attending class or school events, participating in the parent-teacher association, volunteering at the school), although the effects of transition activities on parent involvement differed by SES. The impacts of the transition activities were greatest for children from the middle three SES quintiles (i.e., families from middle-class backgrounds), and not as powerful for children in the lowest SES groups or those from higher SES families (i.e., the very poor and the very rich). The researchers predicted this outcome, asserting that the types of transition activities being offered likely did not meet the needs of families from the lowest SES groups, and that affluent parents already demonstrate high levels of involvement in school activities, such that transition activities are not correlated with increases their involvement.
Children from more disadvantaged backgrounds often have lower academic achievement and less parent involvement in their school experiences than their more advantaged peers (Burkham & Lee, 2002; Noel, Stark, & Redford, 2015), and increased transition support was hypothesized to help close those gaps. In another study of preschool teachers’ use of transition activities, kindergarten children displayed more positive social skills and fewer problem behaviors when they attended pre-kindergarten classrooms in which more transition activities had been implemented. The link between transition activities and ratings of children’s positive social behavior was stronger for children who experienced social or economic risk factors (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008).

Outside of these few published studies, the literature is lacking peer-reviewed studies on this important topic. In addition, both of the studies mentioned above use teacher- or school-reported transition activities as a predictor of child outcomes. The current study used both teacher-report and parent-report of transition activities in order to clarify the associations between transition activities and positive school outcomes.

**The Current Study**

This chapter provides the rationale for the current study, which examined the associations among beliefs about school readiness, transition activities, school-based parent involvement, and children’s adjustment to kindergarten. Research on beliefs about school readiness suggests that parent and teachers may not always be on the same page about what skills are necessary for children to have when they enter kindergarten. This study contributes to the knowledge base around parents’ and teachers’ beliefs about school readiness skills and how those beliefs align. The current study examined the associations between transition activities and the ease with which children adjust to kindergarten. Building on work that emphasizes the importance of
supporting families as well as children during this crucial time, this study investigated associations between transition activities and parent involvement in school-based activities. Finally, prior research on the importance of home-school connections supports the notion that children have more success in school when their parents are involved, so this study examined the specific connection between parent involvement and children’s adjustment to school. The following chapter describes the methodology used to answer the research questions derived from this review of the literature.
CHAPTER 3. METHOD

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of children and families as the children transition into kindergarten. I examined the connection among beliefs about school readiness skills, transition activities aimed at helping smooth the transition to kindergarten, participation in school-based parent involvement activities during the kindergarten year, and kindergarten adjustment. In examining the transition experience, the study addressed the following research questions:

1. What skills and abilities do parents and teachers report as important for children as they enter kindergarten? To what extent is there agreement between parents and teachers about the importance of these school readiness skills?

2. What transition activities do parents and teachers report taking place before kindergarten? Is there a significant correlation among the experiences that parents and teachers report?

3. To what extent is the number of school-based parent involvement activities associated with parent and teacher ratings of the importance of school readiness skills, and the number of transition activities reported?

4. To what extent is a child’s adjustment to kindergarten associated with parent and teacher ratings of the importance of school readiness skills, and the number of transition activities reported by parents and teachers? Is this association mediated by the number of school-based parent involvement activities that parents report?


The ECLS-K is a longitudinal study of a nationally representative cohort of children who began kindergarten during the fall of 1998. The study was coordinated by the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and is the first in a series of longitudinal studies focused on the early childhood years (see also ECLS-B, and ECLS-K: 2011;
National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], n.d.). Data were collected at seven points in time: the fall and spring of the kindergarten and first grade years, and the spring of the third, fifth, and eighth grade years. The ECLS-K consists of data derived from direct assessments of children and classroom observations, as well as information collected from parents, teachers, and school administrators. Study participants were identified and included through a multistage sampling process in which researchers identified participants at various levels and then sampled within each level. First, researchers started with counties (or groups of counties) and selected counties to participate, they then sampled schools within those areas and invited them to participate, and finally sampled children within those schools. The full study includes data from 21,409 children and 3,132 teachers across 1,018 schools. The ECLS-K dataset is publicly available and all identifying information has been removed, thus, the current study was exempt from review by the Institutional Review Board (see Appendix A).

**Sampling Weights**

The ECLS-K dataset includes several weights to account for the unequal probability that participants with different demographic characteristics would be selected and agree to participate at each stage of the sampling process. The weights also allow for adjustment based on nonresponse of participants during one or more wave of data collection. Use of sampling weights allows for more accurate estimates that are representative of the population of U. S. kindergarten children in 1998-99 so that findings from this study can be generalized beyond the participants included in the ECLS-K study. When sampling weights are applied to an analysis, individual participants represent the proportion of the larger population that is similar to them in terms of demographic characteristics and so forth. As such, the resulting findings can be considered to
reflect the outcomes of an analysis in which the entire population was studied, by using weights to recreate the appropriate proportions in the dataset.

The sampling weight used in the current study (BYCPTW0) is a longitudinal child-level weight computed for use in analysis of fall and spring waves of data from parents and teachers (NCES, 2001). This sampling weight required children to have valid information for both rounds of kindergarten data collection from multiple sources: direct cognitive assessments, parent data on certain items, and teacher data on certain items. If a particular child was missing information on any of these required items, they were assigned a sampling weight of zero and were excluded from analyses. This typically occurred when a family did not participate in an entire wave of data collection; for example, the fall 1998 interview which included questions about demographic characteristics used to create the weights (n = 5, 989).

**Current Study Participants**

The current study analyzed the first two waves of ECLS-K data collected from parents and teachers during the fall (1998) and spring (1999) of the kindergarten year. In particular, the study examined parents’ and teachers’ experiences of the transition activities designed to help smooth the children’s entry into kindergarten; parent and teacher ratings of the importance of certain school readiness skills for children entering kindergarten; parents’ report of their children’s adjustment to kindergarten; and the number of school-based involvement activities reported by parents.

The participants included in analyses for the current study were 15,319 children across 2,901 teachers and 929 schools. From the original sample of 21,409 children, participants with a sampling weight of zero (n = 5,772) and those missing a sampling weight altogether (n = 217) were eliminated from analyses, as a lack of a positive sampling weight meant that they would be
excluded in analyses by Mplus (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2012). Children typically were missing a sampling weight if their parent did not submit pertinent demographic information. Others did not have a sampling weight because either their parent or their teacher did not participate in an entire wave of data (either fall or spring of the kindergarten year). An additional 101 participants were excluded from the study because they were missing the outcome of parent involvement (n = 83) or kindergarten adjustment (n = 18). I chose not to impute data on the dependent variables as the participants excluded on this basis represented a very small percentage of the overall sample (less than half of one percent) and studies indicate that small amounts of missing data do not significantly impact parameter estimates (Allison, 2009; Roth, 1994).

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weighted Demographic Characteristics of Children (n = 15,319) and Families</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Child sex – Male</td>
<td>50.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child race</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>13.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>59.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>5.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>5.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child home language – English</td>
<td>88.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maternal education level</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than HS diploma/GED</td>
<td>12.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earned HS diploma/GED</td>
<td>29.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some college or technical training</td>
<td>33.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Earned BA or higher</td>
<td>25.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual Household Income</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$0 to $20,000</td>
<td>16.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$20,001 to $35,000</td>
<td>18.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$35,001 to $50,000</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$50,001 to $80,000</td>
<td>21.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$80,001 or higher</td>
<td>23.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-parental care</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended center-based care setting</td>
<td>46.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended in-home care setting</td>
<td>25.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended Head Start</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No non-parental care setting</td>
<td>18.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 1 provides weighted demographic information about the sample included in analyses. Individual teachers provided data for an average of 5.5 children, and there were an average of 16.5 children in each school participating in the study.

**Measures**

**Parent Interview – Fall 1998 and Spring 1999**

During the fall semester (1998) and the spring semester (1999) of the kindergarten year, parents of kindergarten children were contacted for a telephone interview. If the parents did not have a telephone, the interview was conducted in person. These interview protocols were extensive (see Appendix B), and included questions about family structure and relationships, demographic, education, and employment information, discipline, and so forth (NCES, 2001). The sections of interest in this study were child and family demographic information, parental beliefs about school readiness, parental involvement and communication with the school, and parental rating of children’s adjustment to kindergarten. During the fall, parents were asked to note the highest level of education they had completed, their annual household income, the language they spoke most at home with their child, and whether their child had an Individualized Education Program (IEP) prior to starting kindergarten. They were also asked about the types of information they received from the teacher or the school before their child entered kindergarten, and were asked to share their opinions about statements related to the importance of specific school readiness skills (Table 2). The spring interview included questions about the family’s experiences with the school throughout the year, including their communication with the school and involvement in any school activities.

**Teacher Questionnaire – Fall 1998**
In the fall and spring of the kindergarten year, participating teachers filled out paper and pencil questionnaires. The first part of the questionnaire covered topics related to the characteristics of their class (e.g., half-day vs. full-day, transitional vs. typical kindergarten program) and the characteristics of the students (e.g., ages of students, racial and ethnic backgrounds, languages spoken by students). The fall questionnaire also included questions about transition activities that teachers (or their schools) offered to children and families. The second part of the questionnaire included questions about classroom organization and typical activities, the teacher’s beliefs about kindergarten readiness, and their thoughts on school climate and environment. It also asked teachers about their educational and professional background, as well as demographic information (e.g., age, racial/ethnic background, languages spoken). The last section of the questionnaire was specific to the children participating in the study, and teachers were asked to complete items related to those children in particular. These items included evaluations of the children’s skills and abilities in the areas of language and literacy, general knowledge, and mathematical thinking. The items of interest for this study included the teachers’ beliefs about school readiness skills, and the transition activities that occur in their schools (see Table 2), which were assessed using the fall questionnaire.

**Control Variables**

Several characteristics of children and families were included as control variables to allow for an examination of the unique influence of school readiness beliefs, transition activities, and parental involvement upon children’s adjustment to kindergarten. Included in the multilevel models were home language of the family, household income, maternal education level, and participation in out-of-home care before kindergarten. In early analyses, I included several additional variables (gender and racial/ethnic background of the student, as well as whether or
not the child had an IEP when entering kindergarten), but these variables were eliminated as initial analyses indicated they were not significantly related to the outcome variables in the multilevel models.

Family Home Language

When the language spoken at home differs from the language spoken at school, parents may find it difficult to engage with teachers and school personnel in school-based activities (Turney & Kao, 2009). In order to understand the impact of home language on the outcomes studied here, a variable of home language was included in the multilevel analyses. The language most frequently used in the home was assessed during the fall 1998 parent interview. For purposes of this study, this was categorized as English or a language other than English and included in the models as a dichotomous variable (see Table 1 for percent of children in each category).

Household Income

Household income has been linked to child well-being and educational outcomes in previous research (Entwisle & Alexander, 1993; Sirin, 2005). Household income was assessed within parent interviews conducted in the spring of 1999 (NCES, 2001). The original income variable was a continuous measure of annual household income ranging from $0 to $1,000,000. Initial multilevel analyses using the continuous variable were problematic, due to the large range and distribution (standard deviation) of this variable. In response, the income variable used in my analyses was divided into five categories, each containing approximately 20% of the sample. As these categories are progressively ordered, this variable was treated as a continuous variable in the multilevel analyses. Table 1 displays the distribution of household income.
**Maternal Education Level**

Many studies have found significant associations among maternal education level and child outcomes (Burkham & Lee, 2002; Magnuson, 2007). In the ECLS-K, maternal education level was assessed during the fall 1998 parent interview. Mothers were asked to note the highest grade or year of school they had completed. Responses were organized into one of 22 categories ranging from first grade to a professional degree after a Bachelor’s degree (e.g., MD, JD). As other researchers utilizing the ECLS-K have done (Hair, Halle, Terry-Humen, Lavelle, & Calkins, 2006), I recoded the maternal education level into four categories: (0) less than a high school diploma or general education diploma (GED), (1) earned high school diploma or GED, (2) some college or technical school completed, and (3) earned Bachelor’s degree or higher (see Table 1 for distribution). These categories were chosen as they represent significant milestones or levels of achievement in educational attainment, and attainment of these milestones is associated with benefits to child and family well-being (Davis-Kean, 2005). As these categories reflect progressive levels of educational attainment, this variable was treated as continuous in the multilevel analyses.

**Participation in Out-of-Home Care Before Kindergarten**

The amount and types of non-parental care that children experience before entering school have been found to influence school readiness and academic success. Children who spend many hours in low-quality non-parental care may experience adverse effects of that care (Belsky, Burchinal, McCartney, Vandell, Clarke-Stewart, & Owen, 2007); however, the experience of high-quality, developmentally appropriate care can have a positive impact (Entwisle & Alexander, 1993; Magnuson et al., 2004; Yoshikawa et al., 2013).
Parents responded to questions about their child’s prekindergarten experiences during the fall 1998 interview. One of the questions asked about the number of hours that the child spent in non-parental care during a typical week. Those responses were included as a continuous control variable in the multilevel analyses. On average, children spent 25.5 hours in care (SD = 21.75) per week. Another question asked about the child’s primary care setting and provider if they experienced non-parental care during the year before starting kindergarten. For the purposes of this study, parents’ responses were broken into three categories – non-parental care provided in a home (the child’s or another’s), non-parental care provided in a center, and non-parental care provided in a Head Start program (Table 1). These categories were included as dummy variables in the multilevel analyses with “no” reflected by a zero score and “yes” reflected by a one for each of these variables. It was possible that a child could receive all zeroes, if the parent reported that the child did not experience any non-parental care during the year before kindergarten (18.8% of the sample). More than half of children in the current study had experienced some center-based care (including Head Start) before entering kindergarten, and another quarter had received care from someone other than a parent in a home-based setting. While participation in each type of non-parental care was included in analyses, there were not data available on the quality of these non-parental care settings.
Table 2

Variables, Measures, and Items Used in Analyses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Items</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent beliefs about school</td>
<td>Fall Parent Interview</td>
<td>Now I'm going to ask you how important you think it is for children to know or do certain things to be ready for kindergarten. How important do you think it is that a child…</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>readiness skills</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Can count to 20 or more?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Takes turns and shares?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Is able to use pencils and paint brushes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Sits still and pays attention?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Knows most of the letters of the alphabet?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Communicates needs, wants, and thoughts verbally in {his/her} primary language?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher beliefs about school</td>
<td>Fall Teacher Questionnaire</td>
<td>How important do you believe the following characteristics are for a child to be ready for kindergarten?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>readiness skills</td>
<td></td>
<td>- Can count to 20 or more?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Takes turns and shares?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Is able to use pencils and paint brushes?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Sits still and pays attention?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Knows most of the letters of the alphabet?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Communicates needs, wants, and thoughts verbally in {his/her} primary language?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent-reported transition</td>
<td>Fall Parent Interview</td>
<td>Did {CHILD}’s school or teacher send home information about any of the following when {CHILD} started kindergarten?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>activities</td>
<td></td>
<td>- How to prepare {CHILD} for kindergarten?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- Topics or skills that are part of the kindergarten program?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- What to do if {CHILD} will be late or absent from school?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>- How to get in touch with a teacher or school staff to discuss any concerns or questions about {CHILD}?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variable</td>
<td>Measure</td>
<td>Items</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>-------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Teacher-reported transition activities | Fall Teacher Questionnaire | - I (or someone at the school) phone or send home information about the kindergarten program to parents.  
- Preschoolers spend some time in the kindergarten classroom.  
- The school days are shortened at the beginning of the school year.  
- Parents and children visit kindergarten prior to the start of the school year.  
- I (or another teacher) visit the homes of the children at the beginning of the school year.  
- Parents come to the school for orientation prior to the start of the school year. |
| Children’s adjustment to kindergarten | Fall Parent Interview | Children sometimes have problems adjusting to kindergarten. On average, during the first two months of this school year …  
- [Would you say more than once a week, once a week or less, or not at all?]  
- Did {CHILD} complain about school?  
- Was {CHILD} upset or reluctant to go to school?  
- Did {he/she} pretend to be sick to stay home from school?  
- Did {he/she} say good things about school?  
- Did {CHILD} say {he/she} liked {his/her} teacher?  
- Did {he/she} look forward to going to school? |
| School-based parent involvement activities | Spring Parent interview | **ININVOLVEMENT**  
During this school year, have you or another adult in your household taken it upon yourself to contact {CHILD}'s teacher or school for any reason having to do with {CHILD}?
Since the beginning of this school year, have you or the other adults in your household…  
- Attended an open house or a back-to-school night?  
- Attended a meeting of a PTA, PTO, or Parent-Teacher Student Organization?  
- Gone to a meeting of a parent advisory group or policy council?  
- Gone to a regularly-scheduled parent-teacher conference with {CHILD}'s teacher or meeting with {CHILD}'s teacher?  
- Attended a school or class event, such as a play, sports event, or science fair?  
- Acted as a volunteer at the school or served on a committee?  
- Participated in fundraising for (CHILD)'s school? |
Independent Variables

Parent Ratings of Importance of School Readiness Skills

During the fall parent interview, parents were asked to rate how important they felt it was for children to know or do certain things to be ready for kindergarten. They were asked to rate six items using responses of “essential,” “very important,” “somewhat important,” “not very important,” or “not important.” Parents may have refused to answer the item or replied that they did not know. Analysis of the consistency of parental beliefs about school readiness showed good reliability ($\alpha = .77$) across the six item scale. I also conducted an exploratory factor analysis on this scale using SPSS 22 (IBM Corp.), and this analysis revealed one underlying factor. This one factor solution aligned with the findings of others examining this scale (e.g., Morgan & DiPerna, 2007). Taken together, these analyses suggest that parent respond consistently to questions about the skills that are important for children when starting school, and that these questions together measure a singular construct of “school readiness beliefs.”

This scale was used in two ways to answer questions posed in the current study. First, scores on each item was examined to determine which school readiness skills parents (and teachers) felt were most important for children to know when they begin kindergarten (Research Question 1). In addition, the mean score across the six items was computed and used in analyses to examine how parents’ and teachers’ overall expectations for children’s school readiness skills are related to the outcomes of children’s adjustment and parental involvement in school (Research Questions 3 & 4).

About 15% of the parent participants were not included in the study until the spring of the kindergarten year, so they were originally missing these data related to transition activities and school readiness beliefs. These missing data were estimated during analyses I conducted in
Mplus 7.11 using full information maximum likelihood (FIML) estimation (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2012), as it produces accurate standard errors (because it does not change the sample size by creating new dataset) (Schlomer, Bauman, & Card, 2010).

**Teacher Ratings of Importance of School Readiness Skills**

On the fall questionnaire, teachers were asked to rate how important they felt it was for children to know or do certain things to be ready for kindergarten. Teachers were asked about 13 specific skills; however, only the six skills that matched the items asked of parents will be included in analyses. The inclusion of matching items allowed for examination of the alignment (or lack thereof) of parents’ and teachers’ beliefs about the importance of these skills. Teachers rated items using the same scale as parents: “essential,” “very important,” “somewhat important,” “not very important,” or “not important.” As with the parent readiness scale, I conducted reliability analysis on the teacher scale and found that the scale was highly reliable ($\alpha = .79$) indicating that teachers responded consistently across all six items of the scale. The mean score across the six items was computed, and each student associated with a particular teacher received that teacher’s mean score.

**Parent-Reported Transition Activities**

In the fall parent interview, parents were asked about the transition activities they experienced before their child began kindergarten. Parents were asked if they were given information by the school about ways that they could help their child become prepared for kindergarten, or the topics or skills that are part of the kindergarten program. Parents were also asked if the school sent them information about who to contact if their child would be absent or late to school, and who to contact if they had any concerns. Although the method by which parents received information was not known (because they were not asked if this information
was shared in a letter, in person, or at a meeting), receipt of information is considered a “transition activity” for the purposes of this study. Parents were also asked if they had met the child’s teacher; however, this item was not included as a transition activity as the interviews took place several weeks into the school year. Having met the child’s teacher by the time of the interview was not a reliable indicator of whether parents had met the teacher prior to the start of school. The number of transition activities reported by parents was summed for a “parent-reported transition” score (range 0-4).

**Teacher-Reported Transition Activities**

In the fall, teachers were asked to note which activities or events they or their school engaged in with the goal of making the transition to kindergarten less difficult for children. These activities included sending information home to parents before school began, visits to the school by children and/or families, shortening the school day at the beginning of the year, and conducting home visits with families prior to the start of the year. The number of transition activities that teachers reported happening at their school was summed for a “teacher-reported transition” score (range 0-6). Each student associated with a particular teacher received the score associated with that teacher. Although the scale for the parents’ and teachers’ transition activities was different, I computed sum scores instead of mean scores for ease of interpretation of regression coefficients.

**Dependent Variables**

**Children’s Adjustment to Kindergarten**

During the fall interview, parents were asked about their child’s adjustment during the first two months of kindergarten. Parents were asked to note, in an average week, how often their child engaged in school avoidance behaviors (e.g., complaining about school, pretending to be
Figure 2. Distribution of children’s kindergarten adjustment scores (possible range from 0 to 12).

sick to avoid school) and how often their child spoke positively of school or his or her teacher. Similar questions have been included in assessment tools used by teachers to evaluate children’s adjustment to school (e.g., Teacher Rating Scale of School Adjustment, Birch & Ladd, 1997; Short form TRSSA, Betts & Rotenberg, 2007) and have shown good reliability and validity (Betts & Rotenberg, 2007). Before conducting reliability analysis, I recoded the parent responses so that all responses were in the same direction and higher scores reflected a positive or smooth adjustment. Reliability analysis revealed that the six item measure appears to have good internal consistency ($\alpha = .71$). Responses to each of the six recoded items were summed for an adjustment score ranging from 0 (reflecting the most difficult adjustment) to 12 (indicating a wholly positive adjustment). The mean adjustment score was 10.57, with a standard deviation of 2.03. Nearly half of the children (47.6%) were reported to have had no difficulty and to have
spoken positively of their school and/or teacher (score of 12) during their adjustment to kindergarten (Figure 2).

**School-Based Parent Involvement**

Parents were asked questions during the spring data collection about their involvement with their child’s school. Parents were asked if they had participated in a number of different school-based activities (see Table 3). Parents’ affirmative responses were summed to create a parent involvement score with a range of 0 to 8 activities. The mean score for parent involvement was 4.28 with a SD of 1.78.

Table 3

*Weighted Descriptive Statistics for School-Based Parent Involvement*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable/Item</th>
<th>% yes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Attended parent-teacher conference</td>
<td>84.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended open house</td>
<td>73.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended school event (e.g., play, athletic event, science fair)</td>
<td>66.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participated in fundraiser</td>
<td>59.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contacted school</td>
<td>54.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteered or served on a committee</td>
<td>47.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended parent teacher association (PTA) meeting</td>
<td>33.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended parent advisory group meeting</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Analyses**

**Univariate Analyses and Psychometrics**

All preliminary analyses of weighted data were conducted in MPlus 7.11 (Muthén & Muthén, 1998-2012) to investigate distribution of each of the variables, including means, standard deviations, ranges, and any outliers. I examined the reliability of the scaled variables of interest, including parent and teacher beliefs about school readiness skills, and parent assessment
of children’s adjustment to kindergarten using SPSS 22.0 (IBM Corp., 2013). When statistically appropriate, analyses were conducted using weighted data, for the purpose of generalizing study results to the population of children who began kindergarten in 1998.

**Bivariate Analyses**

To examine the associations among the independent variables (including control variables) in order to answer Research Questions 1 and 2, I conducted bivariate analyses in Stata 13 (StataCorp, 2013).

**Multilevel Analyses**

In this dataset, children are nested within classrooms, and classrooms are nested within schools. In order to understand the impacts of the nesting present in the ECLS-K data (specifically children within classrooms), intraclass correlations were computed in SPSS. Intraclass correlations (ICCs) for children nested within classrooms ranged from .02 to .26 across the independent and dependent variables included in analyses, and ICCs for children nested within schools ranged from .03 to .21. Much of the nesting present in the data was significant (as it has been found in other publications using the dataset; e.g., Beets & Foley, 2008; Graves & Frohwerk, 2009; Schulting et al., 2005). This implies that data for children within a classroom are not independent of one another because they share values on certain variables (e.g., teacher-report variables). Multilevel modeling is the appropriate analysis to account for the nonindependence of the data (Hox, 2002). Although researchers often use multilevel modeling to examine whether certain groups are impacted in a meaningful way by their group membership, the current study did not include hypotheses about the direction of impacts upon child and parent outcomes based on their group membership. In this study, multilevel modeling in Mplus 7.11 was used to account for nonindependence and to understand the variability in child and parent
outcomes that could be attributed both to within-group factors (e.g., parent-report variables), and also between-group factors (e.g., teacher-report variables). Figure 1 depicts the theoretical model for the bivariate and multilevel analyses conducted to answer the research questions posed by the study.

**Research question 1: What skills and abilities do parents and teachers report as important for children as they enter kindergarten? To what extent is there agreement between parents and teachers about the importance of these school readiness skills?**

I first explored the descriptive statistics of parent and teacher ratings of the importance of school readiness skills, calculating means in order to determine, on average, how parents and teachers rate the importance of each specific skill. On the left side of the model in Figure 1, the top two gray boxes depict teacher and parent ratings of the importance of school readiness skills. The curved arrow between these boxes indicates the exploration of the possible correlations among teacher and parent beliefs about school readiness. The literature on parent and teacher beliefs and values about school readiness is mixed in terms of how well these beliefs are aligned, so I did not have a specific hypothesis about the possible relationship among these variables. To investigate the alignment or disconnect between parents’ and teachers’ beliefs about the importance of school readiness skills, pairwise correlations across those items were calculated.

I also calculated a “match” score to further investigate the alignment between individual parent’s and teacher’s scores. I calculated the absolute value of the difference between each parent’s and teacher’s rating on each school readiness item, and then averaged those scores within the parent-teacher dyad. The resulting score indicates the extent to which parents’ and teachers’ beliefs were in alignment, such that lower scores indicate greater alignment with zero indicating perfect agreement.
Research question 2: What transition activities do parents and teachers report taking place before kindergarten? Is there a significant correlation among the experiences that parents and teachers report?

I calculated the sum and mean for each group’s report of transition activities in order to understand how frequently, on average, parents and teachers report engaging in these practices. In Figure 1, the bottom two gray boxes on the left depict the number of teacher-reported and parent-reported transition activities and the curved arrow represents the potential correlation between these values. The literature on the types and frequency of transition activities that families experience before kindergarten indicates that there may be an association between the number of parent-reported and teacher-reported transition activities. Conversely, teachers may report engaging in a number of transition activities that are not experienced by every family in their classroom, or may believe that there are activities happening within the school, but these may not reach each family, so again, there may not be a significant correlation between these variables. With these mixed findings in previous work, I did not have a specific hypothesis about the presence of a correlation between parent-reported and teacher-reported transition activities. As in research question 1, I examined the correlations among the parents’ and teachers’ transition sums in order to determine whether there was alignment about what each stakeholder reports.
Research question 3: To what extent is the number of school-based parent involvement activities reported by parents associated with parent and teacher ratings of the importance of school readiness skills, and the number of transition activities reported (by parents and teachers)?

The green box in the lower right of Figure 1 represents the number of school-based involvement activities that parents reported during the kindergarten year. The arrows from the gray boxes depict the predicted relationships among beliefs about school readiness, transition activities, and the reported number of parent involvement activities. I hypothesized that higher expectations (i.e., believing that the skills are essential or very important for kindergarten entry) for children’s school readiness skills would be associated with greater involvement by parents in school-based activities. Parents holding higher expectations for their child’s skills upon school entry may have engaged in supportive activities before the child entered school (Bingham, 2007; Diamond, Reagan, & Bandyk, 2000), and this engagement may continue as the child moves through the educational system. Similarly, I hypothesized that participating in a greater number of transition activities is associated with a larger number of school-based parent involvement activities. If parents feel welcomed into the school and receive information and communication from school personnel, they may be empowered to be engaged in school activities.

I employed multilevel modeling (MLM) to test my hypothesis that the number of school-based parent involvement activities can be predicted by both individual level variables (e.g., parent beliefs about school readiness and parent-reported transition activities) as well as group level variables (e.g., teacher beliefs about school readiness and teacher-reported transition activities). MLM allows researchers to differentiate between the variance in outcomes that can be attributed to factors at the individual level (Level 1; e.g., the number of transition activities a
parent reported experiencing) as well as factors impacting groups of individuals (Level 2; e.g., a teacher’s belief about how important it is for children to be able to count to 20 before starting kindergarten).

**Research question 4:** To what extent is a child’s adjustment to kindergarten associated with parent and teacher ratings of the importance of school readiness skills, and the number of transition activities reported (by parents and teachers)? Is this association mediated by the number of school-based parent involvement activities that parents report?

In Figure 1, the blue box in the upper right represents how well children adjusted to kindergarten, as reported by their parents. The arrows from the gray boxes denote the predicted relationships among beliefs about school readiness, transition activities, and adjustment to kindergarten. I hypothesized that higher parent expectations for children’s school readiness skills would be associated with a more positive adjustment to kindergarten, because parents who believe their children should possess greater skills when entering kindergarten may engage in more school readiness activities. Conversely, I predicted that higher expectations on the part of teachers may be related to a less positive adjustment for children. If teachers expect a greater level of ability with certain school readiness skills than do the parents of the children in their classes, the children may not be as “school ready” as the teachers would expect, and this could result in a more difficult adjustment for the children. I hypothesized that experiencing a greater number of transition activities is associated with more positive adjustment to kindergarten, as the receipt of additional supports should help children and families feel more comfortable in the classroom and school, and more informed about what to expect and how to prepare for kindergarten. To test my hypotheses for question 4, I explored a multilevel model of child’s
adjustment to kindergarten related to beliefs about school readiness and the number of transition activities reported by parents and teachers.

Finally, I predicted that the number of involvement activities reported by parents might mediate the relationship between transition activities and beliefs about school readiness, and how well a child adjusted to kindergarten, depicted by the arrow from the green box to the blue box in Figure 1. I hypothesized that parents who participated in many transition activities might be encouraged to become engaged and involved with the school, so the impact of the transition activities to the outcome of a positive adjustment was influenced by greater parent involvement. I tested for mediation using Baron and Kenny’s (1986) method of examining indirect and direct effects.

When building my hypothesized models predicting school-based parent involvement and children’s adjustment to kindergarten, I included the control variables described earlier in the chapter. I hypothesized that children whose home language was English would have a more positive adjustment to kindergarten, and would have parents who engaged in more school-based activities. I predicted similar findings for children with higher household SES and children whose mothers had attained higher levels of education. I did not have a prediction about the impact of hours of non-parental care on the outcomes of interest, as the literature suggests that there may be an interaction effect between hours in care and the quality of care experienced. Similarly, I did not have a specific hypothesis regarding the participation in center-based care that children experienced prior to kindergarten. On one hand, children who have been in center-based settings (including Head Start) settings have experienced a formal educational experience, which may ease the transition into an elementary building. However, parents of these children may be accustomed to being engaged and involved with their child’s educational experiences,
and may find the elementary setting not as amenable to the kind of parent involvement they have come to expect in preschool. Finally, I expect that experiencing only in-home care prior to kindergarten might be associated with a more difficult adjustment, as kindergarten entry presents the first time that those children may be experiencing a formal educational setting and the rules, expectations, and environment that accompany it.
CHAPTER 4. RESULTS

In the current study, I explored four research questions related to hypothesized predictors of children’s adjustment to kindergarten. Univariate analyses, bivariate analyses, and multilevel modeling were employed to investigate these questions. Due to the large sample size involved in this study, only results significant at the \( p < .001 \) level will be interpreted and discussed. Extremely large samples sizes, such as that included in the current study, may result in the observation of many statistically significant findings due to very small differences in means, or small correlation or regression coefficients (Ferguson, 2009). However, the effect sizes of these findings may not be meaningful, and the interpretation of these results may not have useful practical application (Sullivan & Feinn, 2012).

Research question 1: What skills and abilities do parents and teachers report as most important for children as they are entering kindergarten? To what extent is there agreement among parents and teachers about the importance of these school readiness skills?

Table 4 provides descriptive statistics for parents’ and teachers’ responses to questions about school readiness skills for children beginning kindergarten. The skill that both parents and teachers rated as the most important was that children were able to verbally communicate their needs, wants, and thoughts, followed by taking turns and sharing, and sitting still and paying attention. On average, parents gave these skills ratings between “essential” and “very important.” Teachers’ average ratings of these skills were between “very important” and “somewhat important.” Parents and teachers rated the following skills as less important: correctly use pencils and paint brushes, knowing most of the letters of the alphabet, and the ability to count to 20 or more. Parents gave these skills ratings of “very important” to “somewhat important,” whereas teachers indicated that these skills were “somewhat important” to “not very important.” Both
groups of respondents rated the skills in the same order; however, parents rated each of the skills as more important than did the teachers.

Table 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale/Measure</th>
<th>Variable/Item</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parent beliefs about school readiness skills</td>
<td>Communicates needs, wants, and thoughts</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Takes turns and shares</td>
<td>4.27</td>
<td>.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sits still and pays attention</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is able to use pencils and paint brushes</td>
<td>3.93</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knows most of the letters of the alphabet</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is able to count to 20 or more</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>.88</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scale</td>
<td>4.01</td>
<td>.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher beliefs about school readiness skills</td>
<td>Communicates needs, wants, and thoughts</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Takes turns and shares</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sits still and pays attention</td>
<td>3.69</td>
<td>.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is able to use pencils and paint brushes</td>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Knows most of the letters of the alphabet</td>
<td>2.75</td>
<td>.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is able to count to 20 or more</td>
<td>2.51</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Scale</td>
<td>3.37</td>
<td>.57</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: Rating scale is 1 = not important, 2 = not very important, 3 = somewhat important, 4 = very important, and 5 = essential.

Pairwise correlations across the parent-teacher dyad on each item were conducted to investigate the alignment between parents’ and teachers’ beliefs about school readiness. Small but significant correlations were identified for three of the six items: *the ability to count to 20 or more, sitting still and paying attention, and knowing most of the letters of the alphabet*. These significant correlations indicate that a parent’s responses to the items about school readiness skills were associated with their child’s teacher’s responses; however, these correlations were small in magnitude ($r = .04$ to $.06$), suggesting that the relationship between the respondents’ scores was weak. These effect sizes are very small (Cohen, 1992), indicating that there is not a strong or meaningful connection between the beliefs held by parents of kindergarten children and those held by kindergarten teachers.
As another way to assess whether parents and their corresponding teachers agreed on the importance of school readiness skills, a “match” score was computed by determining the difference between the parents’ and teachers’ responses on each school readiness item (Table 5). This score ranged from 0 (identical) to 4 (divergent). The mean match score was .98 ($SD = .49$) indicating that, on average, parents and teachers rated school readiness skills within one point of each other. The item with the closest alignment across parent-teacher dyads was the child’s ability to communicate their needs, wants, and thoughts, with a mean of .65 ($SD = .64$), and the most divergent scores occurred with the item regarding the child’s ability to count to 20 or more ($M = 1.39$, $SD = .98$).

Table 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>$M$</th>
<th>Range</th>
<th>$SD$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communicates needs, wants, and thoughts</td>
<td>.65</td>
<td>0 – 4</td>
<td>.64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Takes turns and shares</td>
<td>.68</td>
<td>0 – 4</td>
<td>.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sits still and pays attention</td>
<td>.78</td>
<td>0 – 4</td>
<td>.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is able to use pencils and paint brushes</td>
<td>1.05</td>
<td>0 – 4</td>
<td>.87</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knows most of the letters of the alphabet</td>
<td>1.31</td>
<td>0 – 4</td>
<td>.96</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Is able to count to 20 or more</td>
<td>1.39</td>
<td>0 – 4</td>
<td>.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mean</td>
<td>.98</td>
<td>0 – 4</td>
<td>.49</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Research question 2: What transition activities do parents and teachers report taking place before kindergarten? Is there a significant correlation among the experiences that parents and teachers report?

On average, parents reported experiencing 3.12 activities (range 0-4; $SD = 1.15$), and teachers reported that they or the school provided 3.09 activities (range 0-6; $SD = 1.18$). The most common activity that parents reported was receiving information about who to contact when parents had a concern (90%), followed by receiving information about who to contact.
when their child would be absent or late (84.2%). Less frequently, parents reported receiving information about the kindergarten curriculum (76.2%), and information about how to help prepare their child for kindergarten (66.8%). The most common activities that teachers reported were sharing of information about the kindergarten program (88.2%), meeting families before the start of school (81.1%), and holding an orientation meeting for families (78.4%). Less often, teachers said that preschool children visited the kindergarten classroom (43.4%), that the kindergarten day was shortened at the beginning of the year (15.9%), and that they or someone in the school conducted a home visit with the incoming kindergarten families (4.6%).

The number of activities that parents and teachers reported were significantly correlated such that when parents reported a greater number of transition activities, so did teachers ($r = .16$, $p = .000$). Similar to the correlation among school readiness beliefs, this significant correlation among reported transition activities indicates that there is a relationship between what parents report experiencing and what teachers report happens, but it is a relatively weak relationship. A correlation of .16 denotes a small effect size (Cohen, 1992).

Many of the control variables were also significantly associated with the independent variables studied here. Table 6 shows the correlations among transition activities, beliefs about school readiness, and control variables of interest. As expected, there were significant associations between many of the control variables and the experiences of families regarding transition activities. Children in families with greater income experienced more transition activities than their peers in households with less income, and when mothers had obtained higher levels of formal education, families received more transition activities. This was the case for both parent-reported and teacher-reported activities.
Table 6

Weighted Correlations Among Reported Transition Activities, Beliefs about School Readiness, and Control Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Household income</th>
<th>Maternal education</th>
<th>Hours of non-parental care</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of parent-reported</td>
<td>.15*</td>
<td>.14*</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transition activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number of teacher-reported</td>
<td>.18*</td>
<td>.16*</td>
<td>-.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transition activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent beliefs about school</td>
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<td>-.03*</td>
<td>.07*</td>
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<td>readiness</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher beliefs about school</td>
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<td>-.02</td>
<td>.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>readiness</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: * = p < .001.

There were also several significant group differences that existed related to transition activities and school readiness beliefs. Families who were primarily English-speaking reported receiving more transition activities ($M = 3.18$) than did families speaking another language [$M = 2.69$; $F(1, 15,352) = 284.08, p = .000$. When children had participated in a center-based setting prior to kindergarten, their parents reported a greater number of transition activities. Parents of children attending a center reported an average of 3.23 activities compared to an average of 3.06 for their peers who did not attend a center-based setting [$F(1, 14,339) = 76.42, p = .000$. However, parents of children who had attended Head Start programs reported receiving an average of 2.98 transition activities compared to the 3.15 activities experienced by their non-Head Start peers [$F(1, 14,339) = 29.12, p = .000$.]

Similar findings occurred for teacher-reported transition activities as well, with English-speaking families receiving an average of 3.16 activities and non-English speaking families receiving an average of 2.51 [$F(1, 15,313) = 491.19, p = .000$. Teachers of children who had attended center-based care prior to kindergarten reported offering an average of 3.19 transition activities, compared with 3.01 for children who did not experience center-based care [$F(1, 14,295) = 87.37, p = .000$. As was the case with parent-reported transition activities, teachers
reported that children in Head Start were offered an average of 2.88 activities and non-Head Start attendees were offered an average of 3.12 \( F(1, 14,295) = 60.17, p = .000 \).

There were also significant associations among some of the control variables and beliefs about school readiness. Families with lower incomes and mothers with less education reported higher expectations for what children should be able to do when starting kindergarten than their more affluent and more educated peers. This is consistent with previous studies which have found that parents who are more affluent and more educated often report lower expectations for children’s academic skills at school entry (Kim et al., 2005). Parents whose children spent more time in non-parental care also held higher expectations. Additionally, teachers of families with lower income reported higher expectations for children’s school readiness skills.

**Research question 3: To what extent is the number of school-based parent involvement activities reported by parents associated with parent and teacher ratings of the importance of school readiness skills, and the number of transition activities reported (by parents and teachers)?**

To examine the relationship between ratings of school readiness skills, the number of transition activities experienced, and the number of school-based parent involvement activities, multilevel modeling was conducted. Table 7 shows the results from this analysis. Parent-reported transition activities and teacher-reported transition activities were significantly associated with the number of school-based involvement activities that parents reported. These associations were positive, such that a greater number of transition activities was associated with a greater number of involvement activities. Specifically, an increase of one standard deviation in the number of transition activities reported by parents was associated with a .10 standard deviation increase in parent-reported school-based involvement. A one standard deviation increase in the number of
transition activities reported by teachers is associated with a .13 standard deviation increase in involvement activities.

Table 7

Multilevel Regression Predicting School-Based Parent Involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual Level Variables</th>
<th>Unstandardized</th>
<th>Standardized</th>
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<tr>
<td>Parent beliefs about school readiness</td>
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<tr>
<td>Parent reported transition activities</td>
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<td>.095*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Income</td>
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<td>.189*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maternal education</td>
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<td>.227*</td>
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<tr>
<td>Home language (English)</td>
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<td>Hours of non-parental care per week</td>
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<td>Preschool – Head Start</td>
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<td>Preschool – in-home care</td>
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<td>.039</td>
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<tr>
<td>Preschool – center-based care</td>
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<td>.068*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Level Variables</th>
<th>Unstandardized</th>
<th>Standardized</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
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<td>Teacher beliefs about school readiness</td>
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<td>.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher reported transition activities</td>
<td>.070*</td>
<td>.134*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Cross-Level Interaction

| Parent beliefs * Teacher beliefs | .074 | .046 | --- | --- |

Note: * = p < .001.

When examining the connection between teacher-reported transition activities and parent involvement, it should be noted that the number of teacher-reported activities predicts the average experience of parents within that teacher’s classroom, because it is a group level variable. So, a teacher having reported engaging in a larger number of transition activities is predictive of a greater number of parent involvement activities for the average parent in that teacher’s classroom, and not for individual parents.

Many of the control variables included in the analysis were also significantly related to the outcome of parent involvement. More parent involvement was associated with English-
speaking homes, greater household income, and higher levels of maternal education. In addition, parent involvement activities were greater for parents whose children spent less time in non-parental care, and those children attending center-based or in-home settings prior to preschool.

In order to examine any effect of the match or mismatch between parents’ and teacher’s beliefs about school readiness, a cross-level interaction term was created and included in the multilevel model. The “match” score described above in Research Question 2 could not be included in the model because it represents a cross-level term. This cross-level term consists of the difference between a variable measured at the individual level (parents’ beliefs) representing each individual’s unique score, and a variable measured at the group level (teachers’ beliefs), which is shared across each individual who is paired with a certain teacher. Instead, specifying a term that represents the correlation between parents’ beliefs and parent involvement allowed me to explore whether there was an influence of teachers’ beliefs on the relationship (slope of the correlation line) between parent beliefs and parent involvement. Testing of the cross-level interaction revealed no significant effect ($B = .074, p = .105$); that is, the strength of the relationship between parent beliefs and parent involvement was not affected by differing levels of teacher beliefs about school readiness. There was no evidence that a “match” or “mismatch” between parent and teacher beliefs had an impact on how involved parents became in school-based activities.
Research question 4: To what extent is a child’s adjustment to kindergarten associated with parents’ and teachers’ ratings of the importance of school readiness skills, and the number of transition activities reported? Is this association mediated by the number of school-based parent involvement activities that parents report?

Table 8 contains the coefficients, standard error terms, and p-values for the multilevel model predicting children’s adjustment to kindergarten. In this analysis, only individual-level variables were significantly related to adjustment. Neither of the group-level variables were significant. A greater number of parent-reported transition activities was associated with a more positive adjustment to kindergarten; similarly, higher parental ratings on the importance of school readiness skills were predictive of a more positive adjustment.

Table 8

| Multilevel Regression Predicting Children’s Adjustment to Kindergarten | Unstandardized | Standardized |
|---|---|---|---|
| | B | SE | β | SE |
| Individual Level Variables | | | | |
| Parent beliefs about school readiness | .239* | .034 | .060* | .008 |
| Parent reported transition activities | .153* | .017 | .089* | .010 |
| Income | .004 | .015 | .003 | .011 |
| Maternal education | .036 | .021 | .018 | .011 |
| Home language (English) | -.010 | .059 | -.002 | .009 |
| Hours of non-parental care per week | -.003 | .001 | -.031 | .012 |
| Preschool – Head Start | -.165 | .079 | -.025 | .012 |
| Preschool – in-home care | .120 | .065 | .027 | .015 |
| Preschool – center-based care | .023 | .054 | .006 | .014 |
| School-based parent involvement | .021 | .010 | .019 | .009 |
| Group Level Variables | | | | |
| Teacher beliefs about school readiness | -.007 | .033 | -.011 | .049 |
| Teacher reported transition activities | -.007 | .017 | -.021 | .053 |
| Cross-Level Interaction | | | | |
| Parent beliefs * Teacher beliefs | .001 | .009 | --- | --- |

Note: * = p < .001.
Specifically, an increase of one standard deviation in parental belief ratings of school readiness skills is associated with an increase of .06 standard deviations in children’s adjustment scores. A one standard deviation increase in parent-reported transition activities was associated with a .09 standard deviation increase in adjustment scores.

It is interesting to note that none of the control variables included in the analysis were significantly related to children’s adjustment, including household income, maternal education, home language, or participation in non-parental care. As in Research Question 3, I explored the potential impacts of a cross-level interaction among parent and teacher beliefs upon children’s adjustment to kindergarten and found no evidence of such an impact.

Finally, a test of indirect effects was conducted in Mplus to examine any possible mediation, as hypothesized in the second part of Research Question 4. Given that parent involvement did not predict kindergarten adjustment, the relationship between transition activities, ratings of school readiness skills, and adjustment to kindergarten was not mediated by school-based parental involvement. The number of parent involvement activities reported did not mediate the relationship between parent-reported transition activities and children’s adjustment, nor was there mediation in the relationship between parent beliefs about school readiness and adjustment.

The overall model tested to answer Research Question 3 explained 21.5% of the variance in parent involvement scores, all attributable to individual-level variables. Taking into consideration the amount of nesting present in the data for parent-reported school-based involvement activities (ICC = .27), the individual level variables in the model (including control variables) account for 29% of the individual-level variance in these involvement activities. This $r^2$ constitutes a medium effect size, indicating that the individual level variables included in this
model had a reasonable effect upon school-based parent involvement. The group level variables in this model did not account for a statistically significant proportion of the variance in parent involvement.

The overall model tested in Research Question 4 explained 1.6% of the variance in children’s adjustment scores. When accounting for the nesting present for the kindergarten adjustment score (teacher ICC = .04), the individual level variables in the model accounted for 1.7% of the variance in adjustment scores. This $r^2$ value constitutes a very small effect size, suggesting that there were factors not included in the model that had a greater influence on children’s adjustment than those examined here. Once again the group level variables in the model did not contribute to the variance explained.
CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

Guided by Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model of human development, specifically the impact of mesosystem influences upon children’s developmental outcomes (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998), the current study explored the experiences of children and families during the transition to kindergarten. The study also drew upon the concept of academic socialization (Taylor et al., 2004) to construct a theoretical model to explore the interactions among the important microsystems in children’s lives (family and school) as they enter kindergarten. The study explored data about parents’ and teachers’ beliefs about school readiness skills, and what supports and information families receive during the transition period. This study also assessed connections among beliefs about school readiness skills, transition activities to support children and families entering kindergarten, parent involvement, and children’s adjustment to kindergarten. This chapter includes a discussion of the study findings within the context of prior research, followed by limitations of the study, and the implications for practice and policy.

Academic Socialization

The concept of academic socialization includes parental beliefs and behaviors that influence children’s academic development. In the current study, parental beliefs about children’s school readiness skills are one example of academic socialization, as these beliefs likely influenced the types of activities and behaviors parents engaged in with their children in order to prepare them for kindergarten. Similarly, parents’ use of transition activities can also be considered an element of academic socialization.

Beliefs about School Readiness

Parents and teachers reported similarly high expectations for the school readiness skills that children should possess when they enter kindergarten. On average, parents rated these skills
as “very important.” Although parents gave higher ratings for each skill than did teachers, parents and teachers appear to “rank” the importance of these skills in the same order.

The importance of the alignment of parent and teacher beliefs about school readiness for children’s school success has been well-documented in previous work (Barbarin et al., 2008; West, Germino Hausken, & Collins, 1993). In the current study, parent and teacher ratings of three of the six school readiness skills were significantly (but weakly) correlated, and on average, parents and teachers of the same child rated each school readiness skill within one point of the other (range of 0 to 4 points). This suggests that parents and teachers involved in this study were generally aligned with regards to their beliefs about how important certain skills are for children entering kindergarten; however, the small effect sizes indicate that parents and teachers were not entirely on the same page about these skills. Subsequent analyses examined whether or not this low level of alignment had an impact on child outcomes.

The cross-level interaction term created to reflect the “match” between parents and teachers on school readiness beliefs was not significantly related to the outcomes examined in this study. This indicates that alignment (or lack thereof) of parent and teacher beliefs is not a significant predictor of children’s adjustment to kindergarten or parental involvement in school-based activities. This finding is in direct contrast to previous research and policy statements that emphasize the importance of this alignment in promoting positive early educational experiences, for example:

If parents and teachers hold similar beliefs, then there is a greater opportunity for congruence between the skills parents encourage in their children prior to school entry and the skills teachers look for as children enter kindergarten. Such congruence may
contribute to a teacher’s positive evaluation of the child early in his or her school life and to the child having a successful early school experience. (West et al., 1993, p. 1).

The current study did not find evidence that alignment between parent and teacher beliefs was linked to a more positive adjustment to kindergarten or to their parents’ involvement with school-based activities during that year. Lack of variability in children’s adjustment score could have had an effect on this lack of relationship; if most children adjusted to kindergarten well or easily, the match between parents’ beliefs and teachers’ beliefs may not have been crucial to the transition process.

**Transition Activities**

The initial analyses also examined parent and teacher reports of transition activities that took place before kindergarten began, as well as whether parents and teachers reported experiencing a similar number of transition activities. Parents reported, on average, experiencing just over three transition activities (out of four possible activities). Teachers reported offering an average of just over three activities (out of a possible six).

It was noteworthy that teachers did not report engaging in a greater number of activities before children began kindergarten. Less than half of teachers reported that preschool children spent any time in the kindergarten classroom prior to starting kindergarten, and less than five percent of teachers indicated that they conducted home visits with new families. Although these types of contacts with incoming students and families may be more time- and resource-intensive than other types of transition activities, these more direct connections with families have been found to be more valuable to families and to promote positive child outcomes (McIntyre et al., 2007; Petrakos & Lehrer, 2011). Few studies (e.g., LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008; Schulting et al., 2006) have focused on the specific impact or value of particular transition activities;
additional exploration is warranted into the number of specific activities that are most helpful to families. For example, more research is needed that examines fit for children and parents from low income backgrounds, families in which a mother has lower level of education, and children for whom English is not their first language. Within the current literature, it is also unclear whether transition activities are more or less effective depending on who is offering the activity. It may be that the ability to speak directly with a child’s kindergarten teacher is more valuable to parents than attending a general open house or receiving information from the principal.

Additionally, the current study was not able to assess how well the transition activities were implemented. For instance, although parents were asked if they received information about the kindergarten program, we do not know if they found this information useful, if there were questions they had that went unanswered by the information provided, or if the information came to them in a timely manner. The current study questions also do not reflect how parents were provided such information—whether they were sent letters, or met with school personnel in person. Knowing more about the quality of implementation of the transition activities experienced by children and families may provide a clearer picture of the transition experience than simply knowing whether or not certain events or activities took place. It would also be useful to know more about the informal supports that families draw upon when children are entering kindergarten, and the types of informal supports families report as most effective during this period of transition. These informal supports might include speaking with family or friends whose children who were enrolled in kindergarten in recent years and learning more about their experiences with that particular school or teacher.
**Demographic Characteristics**

I also examined the associations among beliefs about school readiness, transition activities, and the control variables used in later analyses. Several of the selected control variables were significantly correlated with the predictor variables in expected ways. For instance, family demographic characteristics such as language spoken at home, household income, and maternal education were correlated with the number of transition activities reported by both parents and teachers, with English-speaking families, families with larger incomes, and families with higher maternal education taking advantage of additional support. This finding is consistent with results from earlier studies that have found that the families who are often in more need of transition support because of demographic factors generally receive less support than their peers (Pianta, Cox et al., 1999; Schulting et al, 2005). One of the unexpected findings was the negative correlation between the number of transition activities reported by parents and teachers and a child’s participation in a Head Start program. This is interesting considering the explicit focus in Head Start (and specifically, the National Head Start Performance Standards) on supporting families, particularly during the transition to kindergarten (Malsch et al., 2011; NCPFCE, 2013). The efforts taken by Head Start program staff to support the transition to kindergarten may not be reflected in the activities reported by parents and teachers, as Head Start programs may employ other strategies during the transition period than those given as options during this study.

**Home-School Connection**

A positive connection between a child’s home and school environments and caregivers can provide the basis for academic success (Epstein, 1995; Galindo & Sheldon, 2012). The current study examined parent-reported school-based involvement activities as one measure of
the home-school connection. Parents who received more information to help prepare them for their children to begin kindergarten participated in additional school-based parent involvement activities like volunteering, attending events, and participating in the PTA or PTO. Perhaps parents who feel more welcomed into the school by their children’s teachers feel more comfortable engaging with the school throughout the year (Malsch et al., 2011). However, the effect of this relationship is small—it would take four additional transition activities to increase the number of parent involvement activities. For teachers and administrators committed to increasing parent involvement, the goal might not be to increase the number of low-intensity transition activities, but instead to identify which transition activities are most effective at encouraging parent involvement in schools.

**Transition to Kindergarten**

Finally, the study explored the experiences of children transitioning to kindergarten and how smoothly or easily they adjusted during this period. When examining the associations among transition activities, readiness beliefs, and children’s adjustment to kindergarten, a greater number of parent-reported transition activities was associated with a smoother adjustment to kindergarten for children. This finding provides a unique addition to knowledge in the field about the impact of parent-reported transition activities on child outcomes, as previous studies have typically examined only teacher-reported transition activities (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008; Schulting et al, 2005). These studies found that teacher-reported transition activities were associated with positive child outcomes in kindergarten, typically academic achievement and prosocial behaviors. Similar to the association found between parent beliefs and school-based parent involvement, when parents held higher expectations for school readiness skills, children experienced a more positive adjustment to kindergarten. Perhaps holding greater expectations for
children’s skills when entering kindergarten results in parents making a concerted effort to ensure that they support the development of those skills in young children, which helps to ease their transition into the formal educational setting (Puccioni, 2015). Conversely, children who had a less positive adjustment to kindergarten had parents who held lower expectations about school readiness skills. It is possible that these children struggled more than their peers because their parents did not place a great deal of importance on the skills their children needed to be successful in kindergarten.

Although an association between teacher-level variables and adjustment to kindergarten was predicted, no association was found. In addition, there was no impact of the number of parent involvement activities upon children’s adjustment to kindergarten. This was unexpected, as parental involvement in children’s education has been found to be predictive of higher academic achievement in other studies (Dearing et al., 2006; Galindo & Sheldon, 2012; Hill & Tyson, 2009). There may be several explanations for this finding, including the lack of variability in both involvement and adjustment scores. In addition, it may be that there is a relationship between these constructs that is not linear but instead curvilinear. It is feasible that involvement is higher at both ends of the adjustment spectrum—when children are doing well, parents may become involved in children’s education because of positive feelings about the school and their children’s progress. When children struggle, parents may become involved or reach out to the school to provide help for their children.

It is also important to note that in the current study, involvement was limited to formal, school-based activities, which is a traditional (and narrow) way of operationalizing parental involvement in children’s education. More recently, the definition of parental involvement has been expanded to include activities that parents engage in at home (e.g., reading to their children,
helping with homework), as well as out in the community (e.g., visiting museums, going to the library, engaging in cultural activities) (McWayne et al., 2004). Parental involvement in education also includes academic socialization, a process by which parents share with their children their expectations and aspirations for them, to build a shared understanding of the importance of educational attainment (Grolnick & Raftery-Helmer, 2015; Hill & Tyson, 2009). In addition to the school-based parent involvement items included in the current study, the ECLS-K also includes some measures of home-based parental involvement and academic socialization, which should be utilized in future research to examine the myriad ways that parents can be involved in their children’s education.

**Limitations**

A major limitation of the current study is the age of the data used in analyses. Since 1998 there have been significant changes in the landscape of early and elementary education in the United States, which have certainly had an impact on the experiences of children and families. Thus, the findings from this study likely do not reflect the experiences of families whose children are currently entering kindergarten. Use of the ECLS-K: 2010-2011 dataset could provide an updated perspective on the transition experiences of families that may more closely reflect current educational practices and trends.

In addition, there are several challenges presented by the ways in which transition activities were measured in this study. First, the questions about the transition activities that parents and teachers reported were not identical to one another, so it was not possible to understand how parents’ experiences aligned with what teachers reported was happening in the schools. Further, teachers were asked if they or someone else from the school engaged in the transition activities, so it is not possible to know which actions the responding teachers
specifically took, or which activities they presumed were happening in the school. For instance, if a teacher only engaged in two of the activities listed, but responded that they believed that five of the activities were happening in the school, then the children and families associated with that teacher were given the score of five in the dataset, when they may have only been directly offered two activities. Additionally, teachers were asked if they engaged in transition activities in general, and not specifically with the children and parents participating in the study. Once again, it is possible that a teacher reported offering four of the six transition activities with children and families in her classroom, but if an individual family did not attend an orientation meeting or visit the classroom, that family would receive a score of four but have experienced only two transition activities. The current study design aimed to address this challenge with the inclusion of parent-reported transition activities as a predictor. However, direct comparison of reported transition activities to provide a clearer picture of what families actually experienced was not possible since parents and teachers were not asked about the same activities.

It is also worth noting that the questions about transition activities only measured whether or not the activities took place; they did not measure how well (or poorly) the activities were implemented. For example, it is possible that a parent reported that they received information about the kindergarten program, but researchers have no way to know whether parents continued to have questions about the program that were not addressed in the information provided. McIntyre and colleagues (2007) conducted a study with an expanded instrument used to assess family experiences with transition (the Family Experiences and Involvement in Transition survey, FEIT) that allows for a broader understanding of not only the transition activities that parents and children experience during this time, but also the concerns and needs that parents may have during the transition period. This could be a valuable tool for researchers, teachers, and
school administrators interested in a more developed understanding of the transition period and families’ experiences, expectations, and needs around their child entering kindergarten.

In addition, the outcome variable of children’s adjustment to kindergarten was only assessed by the parents of the children using a limited set of questions about children’s behavior in the first months of school. This assessment did not include questions about children’s relationships with peers, their opinions about their school work, or other items that might provide a fuller picture of how well the children transitioned to kindergarten. Including a similar measure for teachers would have provided another perspective for measuring children’s adjustment and transition into kindergarten. If parents’ and teachers’ scores aligned well, this could provide additional reliability for the variable. Conversely, children often behave differently at school and at home, so teachers’ responses may have differed from parents’ and this may have resulted in more variability in the adjustment scores across the sample. In addition, it is possible that the construct of children’s adjustment to kindergarten was not fully captured by the questions asked of parents, or that different aspects of adjustment were not assessed with these questions. The ECLS-K did collect data from teachers on children’s classroom behavior, which could be used to assess adjustment to kindergarten. However, without having a measure of behavior prior to entering the kindergarten classroom, it would be difficult to determine whether children’s behavior during the first weeks and months of school was indicative of the quality of their adjustment to kindergarten.

As mentioned previously, another limitation was the inclusion of only school-based parent involvement activities in analyses. The addition of academic socialization activities and other types of parent involvement would have strengthened the current study by providing insight into the variety of ways that parents might be involved in their children’s educational
experiences. Similarly, the inclusion of teachers’ reports of parents’ involvement activities would strengthen the study, providing another perspective on involvement. Understanding more about how parents prefer to be involved with their children’s educational activities (and barriers to those preferred methods of involvement) would also help strengthen schools’ efforts to engage with parents.

Finally, the current study was a cross-sectional design, as it examined data from only the kindergarten year. A stronger study would include data collection from multiple time points (perhaps during the preschool period and multiple times during the fall semester of kindergarten) so that analysis could focus on the potential causal connections among these constructs. Additional data collection during the preschool year(s) might also allow for targeted transition activities for children and families at-risk of a difficult adjustment.

Implications

The current study uncovered some small associations among transition activities, parent involvement, and adjustment to kindergarten, adding to the body of work in the field of the transition to kindergarten (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008; Schulting et al., 2005). When families experienced a greater number of transition activities, parents were more involved with their children’s education, and their children experienced a smoother adjustment into kindergarten. The effects of this relationship were small; however, the potential impact of providing a smooth transition for families at-risk of struggling during this time period could be quite meaningful. Considering the positive effects of parent and family engagement on children’s educational outcomes (Fan & Chen, 2001; Henderson & Mapp, 2002), coupled with the fact that parent involvement tends to decrease between preschool and kindergarten (Powell, Son, File, &
Froiland, 2012), educators should capitalize on any opportunity they have to support and encourage parent involvement.

Although encouraging parent involvement may require additional time and financial investments, the potential benefits certainly justify the investment. Benefits to increased parent involvement and improved kindergarten adjustment may include increased academic achievement, reduced need for special education or other support services, and reduced retention of students (Barnard, 2004; Fan & Chen, 2001). Providing increased support for parent involvement does not necessarily mean increasing the number of transition activities that all families receive, but instead working to ensure that the supports offered are done so in a way that meets the diverse needs of families as they begin to engage with the school system. Surveys sent to prekindergarten families during the spring prior to the kindergarten year may be one way of identifying what types of information families are seeking as they prepare their children for kindergarten, as well as what other transition activities might best support them during this period.

It should be noted that the majority of children in the current study adjusted to kindergarten without much difficulty, which aligns with previous studies about children’s adjustment (e.g., Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2000). In addition, the majority of parents reported that they experienced at least three transition activities before the school year began. It could be argued that the lack of variability in both children’s adjustment and transition activities experienced suggests that many of these transitions practices are becoming commonplace because school personnel recognize the positive impact of supporting children’s transitions to school. An area that deserves more attention is how schools and teachers support those children who do experience some difficulty transitioning (and how those children might be identified or
targeted before school begins to prevent difficulty during the transition). If teachers and schools are dealing with limited resources to allocate to the transition period, it may make sense for them to target children who are most at-risk of a difficult adjustment (Hausken & Rathbun, 2002). Since the most effective transition activities are thought to occur before children enter kindergarten (Shore, 1999), efforts would need to be undertaken to identify children who may be at-risk during the preschool year or the summer prior to kindergarten. These might include additional collaboration between kindergarten and preschool teachers to identify children and discuss possible supports that could be beneficial to those children and families. It also might include summer programming that allows at-risk children to become more familiar with the school building, the kindergarten classroom and/or teacher, and kindergarten routines and expectations (Berlin, Dunning, & Dodge, 2011; Graziano, Slavec, Hart, Garcia, & Pelham, 2014).

There was no association found between teachers’ beliefs about school readiness skills and children’s adjustment to kindergarten. Once again, this lack of association may be due in part to the limited variability in both teachers’ beliefs about school readiness and children’s quality of adjustment to kindergarten. However, this finding also may have positive educational implications, as it could be interpreted that regardless of their beliefs about what children should know or be able to do, teachers are meeting children’s varied needs when they enter the classroom. This finding suggests that teachers are practicing the tenets of “Ready Schools” when they “expect children to arrive at their doorstep in varying stages of readiness” (Shore, 1998) and engage with each child accordingly. Understanding the diversity of experiences that children bring with them to the classroom and being responsive to children’s individual needs are important for school success. One might posit that the lack of connection between teachers’
readiness beliefs and children’s adjustment is an indicator of this in the current study. In addition, parent involvement was not significantly associated with kindergarten adjustment in any of the models tested, and thus did not mediate the relationship among transition activities, readiness beliefs, and adjustment to kindergarten. Finally, the amount of variance explained by the variables included in the full multilevel model predicting children’s adjustment to kindergarten was relatively small. This was unexpected, considering that many of the predictors included in the model have been associated with child outcomes in other studies.
CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

Summary and Implications

Although the field of early education has increasingly emphasized the importance of supporting children’s entry into school, there have been few empirical studies examining the connections between transition activities and child outcomes (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008; Schulting et al., 2006). The current study aimed to provide additional understanding of the links among parents’ and teachers’ beliefs about school readiness, transition activities to support the transition process, and children’s adjustment to kindergarten. More knowledge about how schools can better support children and families during this time would provide the field of early education with additional evidence to justify making greater investments in the transition process and period. The current study provides modest support for the connection between transition activities and children’s adjustment, particularly the association between the quantity of parent-reported and teacher-reported transition activities and children’s quality of adjustment to kindergarten. Additionally, the study found that a greater number of transition activities were associated with a greater number of school-based parent involvement activities during the kindergarten year. These findings contribute to the knowledge base of the field; however, there are many more questions to be answered.

Future Directions

One avenue of future research should focus on the impacts of transition activities that are more time- or resource-intensive (e.g., summer preschool programs, home visits), so that we might gain a better understanding of how a range of transition activities are related to positive child outcomes. A small-scale study by McIntyre and colleagues (McIntyre et al., 2007; McIntyre et al., 2010) found that parents desired more contact with and more detailed information from teachers before the school year begins. Parents indicated that they wanted
additional information about their children’s teachers, the teachers’ expectations of children’s academic skills and behavior, and how to prepare their children for kindergarten. These are actions that will require more time and attention from teachers. Additional studies that explore these findings on a larger scale could provide important implications for policy and practice. For instance, schools may determine that it is beneficial to have additional opportunities for families to visit the kindergarten classroom or meet one-on-one with the kindergarten teacher prior to the beginning of the school year. Additional evidence of the importance of communication between kindergarten teachers and early educators (e.g., preschool teachers or child care providers) may prompt schools or other institutions to create policies around information-sharing between these educators to best support children during the transition period.

It would also be important to examine which particular transition practices are most effective for which children and families. The match between a particular family’s needs and specific transition activities may be more important than the sheer quantity of transition activities offered by a school or teacher. It may be that some families need more or less intensive transition activities, so the ability to know which activities meet the needs of particular families is important when determining how limited school resources should be allocated. A measure of efficacy or quality of implementation would also shed light on how well (or poorly) transition activities are executed, including whether the support or information that is intended to be distributed actually is received and is helpful to families.

Relatedly, qualitative studies exploring how and why transition activities are effective at supporting families should also be undertaken, with a focus on which activities are most beneficial for children and parents, and how these may differ across various family factors (e.g., SES, language, prior experience with the educational system). These studies would benefit from
examination of both formal transition activities (e.g., those coordinated by schools and teachers) and informal supports, including information- and resource-sharing with other parents.

Finally, a deeper understanding of parent- or family-initiated transition activities would provide a fuller picture of how families help to prepare their children for school. The items around transition in the ECLS-K solely reflected school- or teacher-initiated transition activities; however, there are many things that parents and families may do with the goal of helping their children be as prepared as possible for kindergarten entry. It would be particularly interesting to know how the actions and behaviors of parents whose children adjust well compare to the parenting behaviors of children who struggle when they begin school. Understanding how we can all better support children (and their families) who are at-risk of a difficult adjustment to kindergarten is an essential outcome of research around transition activities. Doing so will help us to ensure that all children are beginning kindergarten on the right track, leading to positive academic and social-emotional outcomes as they progress through their educational careers.
REFERENCES


StataCorp. (2013). *Stata Statistical Software: Release 13.* College Station, TX: StataCorp LP.


APPENDIX A
EXEMPTION FROM IRB REVIEW

.question about use of publically available data for dissertation

Thu, Aug 28, 2014 at 1:02 PM

Hi Abby,

It appears that the dataset is completely de-identified as NCES removes all direct identifiers and characteristics that could lead to identification of participants. If you are only analyzing this data for your study and not collecting additional data, the data is publicly available and completely de-identified, IRB approval is not required. The dataset must be both private and identifiable for IRB oversight. Please know that if you plan to include any other procedures in your research, IRB review may be required. If that is the case, please let us know.

Thanks!
Roxanne

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APPENDIX B
INTERVIEW AND QUESTIONNAIRE PROTOCOLS

FALL KINDERGARTEN PARENT INTERVIEW

[PARENT-REPORTED TRANSITION ACTIVITIES]

PIQ. 020 First, I'd like to ask you about {CHILD}'s school. Did {CHILD}'s school or teacher send home information about any of the following when {CHILD} started kindergarten?

RESPONSES: YES = 1, NO = 2, REFUSED = 7, DON'T KNOW = 9

a. How to prepare {CHILD} for kindergarten?

b. Topics or skills that are part of the kindergarten program?

c. What to do if {CHILD} will be late or absent from school?

d. How to get in touch with a teacher or school staff to discuss any concerns or questions about {CHILD}?

PIQ. 030 Have you met {CHILD}'s teacher yet?

RESPONSES: YES = 1, NO = 2, REFUSED = 7, DON'T KNOW = 9

[CHILDREN’S ADJUSTMENT TO KINDERGARTEN]

PIQ. 090 Children sometimes have problems adjusting to kindergarten. On average, during the first two months of this school year …

{PROBE: Would you say more than once a week, once a week or less, or not at all?}

RESPONSES: 1 = MORE THAN ONCE A WEEK, 2 = ONCE A WEEK OR LESS, 3 = NOT AT ALL, 7 = REFUSED, 9 = DON'T KNOW

a. Did {CHILD} complain about school?

b. Was {CHILD} upset or reluctant to go to school?

c. Did {he/she} pretend to be sick to stay home from school?

d. Did {he/she} say good things about school?

e. Did {CHILD} say {he/she} liked {his/her} teacher?

f. Did {he/she} look forward to going to school?

[PARENT BELIEFS ABOUT IMPORTANCE OF SCHOOL READINESS SKILLS]

PIQ. 110 Now I'm going to ask you how important you think it is for children to know or do certain things to be ready for kindergarten.
How important do you think it is that a child ... 

(PROBE: Would you say it is essential, very important, somewhat important, not very important, or not important?)

RESPONSES: 1 = ESSENTIAL, 2 = VERY IMPORTANT, 3 = SOMEWHAT IMPORTANT, 4 = NOT VERY IMPORTANT, 5 = NOT IMPORTANT, 7 = REFUSED, 9 = DON'T KNOW

a. Can count to 20 or more?
b. Takes turns and shares?
c. Is able to use pencils and paint brushes?
d. Sits still and pays attention?
e. Knows most of the letters of the alphabet?
f. Communicates needs, wants, and thoughts verbally in {his/her} primary language?

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FALL KINDERGARTEN TEACHER QUESTIONNAIRE

[TEACHER BELIEFS ABOUT IMPORTANCE OF SCHOOL READINESS SKILLS]

How important do you believe the following characteristics are for a child to be ready for kindergarten?

RESPONSES 1=NOT IMPORTANT, 2=NOT VERY IMPORTANT, 3=SOMewhat IMPORTANT, 4=VERY IMPORTANT, 5=ESSENTIAL

a. Finishes tasks 
b. Can count to 20 or more 
c. Takes turns and shares 
d. Has good problem-solving skills 
e. Is able to use pencils and paint brushes 
f. Is not disruptive of the class 
g. Knows the English language 
h. Is sensitive to other children's feelings 
i. Sits still and pays attention 
j. Knows most of the letters of the alphabet 
k. Can follow directions 
l. Identifies primary colors and shapes
Communicates needs, wants, and thoughts verbally in primary language

[Note: Bolded items were those used in analysis to align with questions asked of parents.]

[TEACHER-REPORTED TRANSITION ACTIVITIES]

In some schools, special efforts are made to make the transition into kindergarten less difficult for children. Which of the following are done in your school?

RESPONSES 1= YES, 2 = NO

a. I (or someone at the school) phone or send home information about the kindergarten program to parents
b. Preschoolers spend some time in the kindergarten classroom
c. The school days are shortened at the beginning of the school year
d. Parents and children visit kindergarten prior to the start of the school year
e. I (or another teacher) visit the homes of the children at the beginning of the school year
f. Parents come to the school for orientation prior to the start of the school year
g. Other transition activities (PLEASE DESCRIBE)

SPRING KINDERGARTEN PARENT INTERVIEW

[PARENT INVOLVEMENT/ATTENDANCE AT EVENTS]

PIQ. 110 During this school year, have you or another adult in your household taken it upon yourself to contact {CHILD}’s teacher or school for any reason having to do with {CHILD}?

RESPONSES 1=YES, 2=NO

PIQ. 130 Since the beginning of this school year, have you or the other adults in your household…

Attended an open house or a back-to-school night?

RESPONSES 1=YES, 2=NO, -8=DON’T KNOW, -7= REFUSAL, -1 N/A

PIQ. 140 [Since the beginning of this school year, have you or the other adults in your household…]

Attended a meeting of a PTA, PTO, or Parent-Teacher Student Organization?

RESPONSES 1=YES, 2=NO, -8=DON’T KNOW, -7= REFUSAL, -1 N/A

PIQ. 145 [Since the beginning of this school year, have you or the other adults in your household…]
Gone to a meeting of a parent advisory group or policy council?
RESPONSES 1=YES, 2=NO, -8=DON’T KNOW, -7= REFUSAL, -1 N/A

PIQ. 150 [Since the beginning of this school year, have you or the other adults in your household…]

Gone to a regularly-scheduled parent-teacher conference with {CHILD}’s teacher or meeting with {CHILD}’s teacher?
RESPONSES 1=YES, 2=NO, -8=DON’T KNOW, -7= REFUSAL, -1 N/A

PIQ. 160 [Since the beginning of this school year, have you or the other adults in your household…]

Attended a school or class event, such as a play, sports event, or science fair?
RESPONSES 1=YES, 2=NO, -8=DON’T KNOW, -7= REFUSAL, -1 N/A

PIQ. 170 [Since the beginning of this school year, have you or the other adults in your household…]

Acted as a volunteer at the school or served on a committee?
RESPONSES 1=YES, 2=NO, -8=DON’T KNOW, -7= REFUSAL, -1 N/A

PIQ. 175 [Since the beginning of this school year, have you or the other adults in your household…]

Participated in fundraising for {CHILD}'s school?
RESPONSES 1=YES, 2=NO, -8=DON’T KNOW, -7= REFUSAL, -1 N/A

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