

**Parents', Early Childhood Educators' and Grade Primary Teachers' Perceptions of  
School Readiness**

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## ABSTRACT

This research proposes to examine the views of Grade Primary teachers, early childhood educators and parents as they relate to school readiness. A review of the literature has revealed that research considers the idea of school readiness as complex. The issues are explored in a discussion of various points of view, which challenge for the correct response to the question of whose responsibility it is to provide for school readiness in preschool age children. The questions, namely, are whether the child itself should be the target of appropriate programmes resulting in his or her preparation for integration into the formal education system; or should the school be readying itself for the child; or finally whether the responsibility falls on society to provide appropriate programmes that support the readying of both the child and the school system jointly.

The central themes that arose in the literature review were used to compile a series of questions, which sought to extract the perspectives currently held by Grade Primary teachers, early childhood educators and parents on the topic of school readiness and the contending schools of thought mentioned above. These questions were asked of a random selection of Grade Primary teachers, early childhood educators and parents, in an interview setting, who expressed an interest in participating in this study. The process of interviews generated data, which in turn was analysed to reveal a qualitative reflection of the views of Grade Primary teachers, early childhood educators and parents with regards to school readiness. In order to accurately analyse the data, the thematic questions were supplemented by a series of general information questions that were intended to place respondents within a demographic context.

Results of this study may serve to aid those professionals responsible for policy changes, transitioning policies, early childhood education policies and curriculum building. It is anticipated that the information gathered, together with the thematic issues discussed, will lead to informed policy decisions that ensure the best possible services are provided to pre-primary age children and their families and guarantee optimal school readiness.

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To my husband, Michael and my children, Matthew, Roisín, Máiréad and Dominic; I will always be grateful for their support, patience and encouragement. By allowing me the time to be away from them I was able to realise my goal. I also acknowledge the positive energy of my extended family and in particular Heather and Andrew.

Finally I wish to dedicate this work to the memory of my sister, Patricia, whose dedication to teaching the “wee ones” inspires me daily.

## PERSONAL REFLECTION

*I came to live in Nova Scotia, Canada, in April 2000 with my family and immediately started to explore the opportunities to become involved in the field of early childhood education. I started my professional life as a microbiologist and became interested in early childhood development in my experience as a stay at home mother. This interest became more formalised as a result of my youngest child attending a Montessori school and subsequently I came to learn a great deal about early childhood education. I enrolled in a correspondence course with the London Montessori Centre and completed my teaching practice at Fleurette Montessori School in Malta. During the following six years I became involved in establishing preschool classes, for children who would be entering formal school the following academic year, in day care centres and nursery schools in Dubai (U.A.E.) and Bahrain. I became very passionate about the value of quality education/care during the formative years especially as the trend for mothers to return to the workforce was on a steep incline.*

*Upon my arrival in Canada, I was shocked to find no national policy on early childhood education/care as we entered the twenty first century. After much reflection I realised that I would make it my goal to share my experiences and make a positive impact on the early childhood education community. I was encouraged in my quest when in December 2005 the then Education Minister for Nova Scotia, Jamie Muir, officially launched the pre primary pilot project for four year olds. This was a first for Atlantic Canada and was intended to better prepare children for the transition to Grade Primary, the entry level to the public school system. I believed that in so doing the government acknowledged the value of good quality early childhood education and the long-term benefits to the child's life of learning. However in the spring of 2008 it was*

*announced that the government did not have the funding available to continue the pilot scheme. Instead the then Education Minister, Karen Casey, revealed plans to change the intake date to the public school system. This in effect sees those children whose fifth birthday falls between October 1 and December 31 starting school at age four. These recent changes have brought the issue of school readiness back into the minds of the community directly affected by the change: Grade Primary teachers, early childhood educators and parents.*

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## Chapter I

### INTRODUCTION

#### A. Introduction

In 2008 the Nova Scotia Department of Education announced its decision to change the cut off date for those children eligible to enter Grade Primary. In effect this sees four year old children, whose fifth birthday can be up to four months after they start school, entering Grade Primary. This decision came at a time when the pre-primary pilot project was withdrawn due to lack of funding (Government of Nova Scotia, 2008). So with even younger aged children becoming eligible to enter the formal school system issues surrounding school readiness were once again raised. What defines school readiness? A broad spectrum of definitions has been proposed by researchers, parents and educators over the years. At one end of the spectrum parents, especially those of low socio-economic background believe that a child is ready for school when he/she reaches the appropriate age. Such parents consider it the school's responsibility to adapt to differences that may exist among a group of children (Holloway, Rambaud, Fuller, & Eggers-Pierola, 1995). In contrast, other parents and educators believe that readiness is defined by the attainment of skills such as academic, physical, social, and communication (Piotrowski, Botsko, & Matthews, 2000; Marshall, 2003). Children are increasingly expected to demonstrate their attainment of these skills in order to prove their readiness for school. Failure to do so sometimes results in recommendations of holding the child back. This way of defining readiness has been described as "gatekeeping" and implies readiness is quantifiable or, at least, can be assessed (Willer & Bredekamp, 1990). Elkind (2008) proposes that school readiness cannot be defined in a unilateral way. Rather he suggests that:

“[a] true definition of school readiness.... must always take account of the child’s level of intellectual and social/emotional development, his or her experiential background, and the classroom expectations the child will encounter” (p.51)

In accepting these parameters, the notion of the child’s development around the age of 3-5years, emerges as non linear and multidimensional. In this context, the complexities of development happening through this period need to be taken into account. The influences and impact on development by parents, teachers and early childhood educators, who are in direct contact with the child, should be recognised. An understanding of the school environment which the child is preparing to join also must be considered. Development, experiences and environment influence our definition of school readiness.

At the other end of the spectrum is the conceptualisation of school readiness as the responsibility of government, policymakers and community services who should be guided in their decision making so that all children have the opportunity to be in a nurturing environment as they prepare to enter formal schooling (Piotrkowski, Botsko, & Matthews, 2000).

There is no simple straight forward way to define school readiness as the debate continues regarding whether it is the child who should be made ready, the school who should be ready to adapt or the responsibility of community to provide programs which prepare children (Lewit& Baker, 1995).

**B. Purpose of the Study**

Attention has once again been focused on school readiness since the Nova Scotia Department of Education's 2008 decision to suspend the pre-primary pilot project in favour of altering the date for which children are eligible to enter Grade Primary. The purpose of this study is to primarily focus on the perspectives of parents, teachers and early childhood educators regarding issues surrounding school readiness. Currently, most four and five year olds in Nova Scotia enter the school system with no formal pre-primary preparation. This research, then, will shed light on what parents, teachers and early childhood educators currently perceive to be best practices to prepare children for successful integration into formal schooling and whether there is a necessity to have some form of formal early childhood education and care program available for all children.

**C. Significance**

This study intends to explore the perceptions of grade Primary teachers, early childhood educators, and parents relative to school readiness and children's successful integration into a formal school setting. Findings from this research seek to enhance our current knowledge of existing factors considered to impact early school success. Greater knowledge leads to better and more appropriate information that can be shared with all participant groups and ultimately meet the overarching goal, which is to provide pre-primary age children and their families with services and programs that guarantee optimal school readiness.

Furthermore, this study is expected to benefit all participants by highlighting each group's perceptions of school readiness. Such information could be used to initiate a

dialogue among the three groups of participants in a broader sense, so that common beliefs could be emphasised and areas of concern discussed. The benefit of this could be to establish some common ground upon which government and school boards could be approached in order to impact future policies and guidelines in relation to child care and teaching practices.

Finally, the results of this study may provide insight into issues associated with school readiness for professionals whose responsibilities involve transition planning, early elementary curriculum development, early childhood programming, teacher training, and parent education pertaining to early childhood development.

#### **D. Definitions**

For the purpose of this study:

**School readiness** will refer to a level of preparedness which a child must have attained in order to be a successful participant in a school curriculum (May, Kundert, Nikoloff, Welch, Garrett, & Brent, 1994).

**Grade Primary teacher** will refer to an individual who teaches children in their first year of formal schooling in Nova Scotia, and who possesses a valid teacher education certificate recognized by the provincial Department of Education.

**Early childhood educator** will refer to an individual employed by a private or non-profit childcare centre in Nova Scotia, and who is responsible for caring and instructing children in the year before they become eligible for entry into school.

**Private child care centre** will refer to a licensed child care centre which is commercially operated, for profit.

**Non-Profit child care centre** will refer to a licensed child care centre operated on a not for profit basis and which has a Board of Directors overseeing its operation.

## Chapter II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter, literature related to defining school readiness will be reviewed. This leads to a discussion of early childhood development as it relates to school readiness. Also examined are the influences on that development, of the community of people children experience during early childhood. Literature which explores the role the school plays in readiness is considered. Finally, literature that considers the viewpoints of parents, early childhood educators and teachers, as they relate to school readiness will be summarized.

#### A. School Readiness

A review of the literature revealed that several definitions of school readiness exist and these must be considered. Typically school readiness is defined as the child's attainment of certain qualities which are considered necessary in order that the child can successfully participate in a standardised curriculum (May, Kundert, Nikoloff, Welch, Garrett, & Brent, 1994). Of these qualities, the development of academic skills is often given prominence over other skills particularly by parents (Piotrowski, Botsko, & Matthews, 2000; Marshall, 2003). This way of defining readiness as the children's potential to have attained certain skills and abilities before entering school has been likened to defining readiness as "gate keeping" (p. 22) and assumes that readiness is a measurable condition (Willer & Bredekamp, 1990). However Elkind (2008) argues that "readiness does not reside inside the child's head" (p.51) and the ability to demonstrate academic skills is not the only indicator of whether a child is ready for school or not. Instead Elkind argues that in defining school readiness there must be a focus on three

aspects. He acknowledges that one part is the level of academic development but points out that this aspect must be considered in combination with social and emotional skills. Secondly, consideration must be given to the upbringing children have experienced during their early childhood which impacts development. Thirdly, the expectations of the school must also be a consideration when defining readiness (Elkind,2008).

In contrast, Lewit and Baker (1995) explain that school readiness must be considered as two different concepts: readiness for learning and readiness for school. Readiness for learning is attained when a person, irrespective of age, is developmentally ready to learn precise material. Readiness for school ties this idea of readiness for learning to a level of development of the child's physical, social and intellectual ability, which allows the child to meet the constraints of the school curriculum. Therefore the inherent existence, within the child, of a readiness to learn and readiness for school, should be the determinants of whether a child is ready to be a participant in an established school programme (Carlton & Winsler, 1999). Magnuson and Waldfogel (2005) agree that school readiness must encompass an eagerness to learn but this must be accompanied by the development of personal skills and behaviours. They believe that good health and well-being are also contributing factors that must be considered when defining school readiness.

Piotrkowski, Botsko, and Matthews (2000) conceptualize school readiness as having the "social, political, organizational, educational and personal resources" (p. 540) in place to enable children to be successful as they begin formal school. Where more commonly parents or primary caregivers are held responsible for readying children, they suggest that accountability for school readiness is also in the hands of government and

more particularly those responsible for policymaking. In appreciating the extent of the development and learning that occurs in early childhood, policymakers should understand what is required to best prepare children for school. This in turn should guide them to make the best decisions to meet the needs of the children they are serving (Hendrick & Chandler, 1996; McCain & Mustard, 1999).

From these different conceptualizations of school readiness, common threads are evident. It is these that should be considered as defining school readiness. Those who are primarily responsible for children during their early childhood need to have an informed understanding of the development of the child as they are preparing to become a part of the formal school system. This knowledge should raise awareness of their role and its effect on development during the early childhood period. Not to be forgotten is the importance of understanding the school setting. This is necessary as it is ultimately what the child is being made ready to become a part of.

## **B. Development in Early Childhood**

Taylor (1990) and Stipek and Byler (2001) suggest that to define school readiness we begin by understanding what is occurring developmentally in the years around the time children enter the school system. In Nova Scotia, children who turn five by the thirty-first of December are eligible to start school in September of that year (Department of Education, 2008). In the context of school readiness, therefore, the development of children in the three to five year old age group, referred to as the early childhood period, is focused on (Berk & Levin, 2003). Hendrick and Chandler (1996) explained this is the period when children have marked physical, emotional, social, creative and cognitive growth, highlighting the need for parents, early childhood educators, teachers, and those

responsible for policymaking to appreciate the extent of the development and learning that is occurring during this stage. An understanding of the unique characteristics of early childhood development should serve to influence and guide decisions and practices which best meet those children's needs (McCain & Mustard, 1999).

Panter and Bracken (2000) suggest that early childhood development could be viewed from three different perspectives, neurobiological, skills-oriented, and multidimensional. A neurobiological approach focuses on the relevant aspects and extent of brain development during the early childhood period (Blair, 2002). This is explained by paediatrician and neuroscientist Shaywitz (as cited in D'Arcangelo, 2003) as follows,

This period in a child's life is a time of very intense activity in the brain. Between the ages of 4 and 6, the brain is actually pruning synapses – connections between cells. As the child is exposed to different experiences in life, the brain reinforces some of these connections and prunes back others that are not going to be useful. The brain is becoming more focused and more specialized. It's taking shape.  
(D'Arcangelo, 2003, p. 6)

Due to advances in research in the field of neuroscience, there is a better understanding of the growth and activity patterns of the brain during early childhood development (Gallagher, 2005). At the age of three, a child's brain is more wired to receive and process information than an adult's (Bruer, 1998). Shore (1997) explains that the environment in which the child is being raised as well as the quality and quantity of stimulation which the child receives in the early years has been proven to have an effect

on the amount of pruning of synapses which will occur in the child's brain. More specifically, Rhomberg (2007) explains,

Brain research studies suggest that supportive, stable environments lead to emotional well-being; the sense of emotional well-being impacts the release pattern of brain chemicals, causing a balance of their release to excitatory and the inhibitory parts of the brain. These areas are responsible for self-regulation. This balanced release enables self-regulation in the young child and has long-term effects for later behaviour. The ability to self-regulate or self-soothe creates feelings of self-worth resulting in emotional well-being. Positive self-worth or self-esteem has a great deal of influence on how child development unfolds.

(p.14)

The neurobiological approach highlights that it is during the early childhood period that the shaping of the intelligent being itself is taking place and raises awareness of the impact that quality care, experiences and the environment have on the brain and consequently the child's development (Montessori, 1949). Siegel (2001) points out that the developing brain is effected by the relationships between a child and the primary caregiver in such a way that the child is able to experience a balance in different feelings as they begin to relate to others and develop socially.

The literature provides scientific evidence of the intensity of development going on in the brain during early childhood but does it provide all the answers to what is happening developmentally during this phase?

In contrast, the skills-oriented perspective differs by focusing on the child's ability to develop skills in different areas. Katz (2008) believes

[p]hysical, social, verbal, reading, counting and drawing skills are among a few of the almost endless number of skills being learned during the early years. Skills can be learned from direct instruction or by imitation when observing others in the action of applying them.

Skills usually need practice to achieve proficiency. (p.54)

Berk and Levin (2003) explain that by the early childhood period, the physical shape of the body has elongated and the gross and small motor skills become finer tuned. The development in children's physical skills during this period allows them to become more independent and aware of their physical being. At the same time children experience a growth in social, behavioural and communication skills as they develop the ability to form relationships, become aware of what is right and what is wrong and think for themselves (Davenport, 1991). Lillard and Curenton (2001) suggest that only with the development of these skills do children begin to learn that others have feelings. They become aware of the effect their actions have on others and how they should behave in order to develop socially.

McCay and Keyes (2002) and Fantuzzo, Bulotsky-Shearer, McDermott, McWayne, Frye, and Perlman (2007) found that the development of social skills is believed to be necessary for the growth of children's minds which in turn influences their academic abilities. When children are able to socialise with their peers they engage more easily in learning activities in the classroom and this has a significant effect on their early academic achievements. Children, whose development of social skills such as turn taking

and sharing is lacking, can be confrontational or withdrawn. These children do not participate in learning activities to the same extent as their more socially adept peers.

Pianta and LaParo (2003) describe the skills which are indicative of children's readiness for school as "teachability" (p.26) skills. They suggest that children gain the most from the more teacher- directed settings found in school if they arrive with these "teachability" skills developed. Although the literature supports the development of skills as necessary to ready a child for school, can a skills-oriented approach alone define school readiness?

In contrast, the multidimensional perspective considers that a child's readiness cannot be viewed from one single angle, like neurobiological or skills-oriented. Bredekamp and Copple (1997) believe that this approach views the child's development during early childhood as being non-linear and multi-layered, with the different factors affecting development being interactive. Within this context, Kagan, Moore and Bredekamp (1995) identified five dimensions of readiness as "physical well-being and motor development; social and emotional development; approaches to learning; language development; and cognition and general knowledge" (p. 10). An integration of this range of dimensions comes together to form a more holistic approach towards development and serves to explain the complexities of readiness.

Therefore the multidimensional approach does not dismiss either the neurobiological approach or the skills-oriented approach to development. Rather it acknowledges that both brain and skill developments are interdependent. The multidimensional approach highlights the complexities of early childhood development. An approach which acknowledges the intricacies of early childhood development in turn explains the difficulty of trying to define school readiness.

### **C. Role of Community**

Lewit and Baker (1995) highlighted the role the community plays in school readiness. This community approach – where there is collaboration between families and professionals – results in a more meaningful understanding of readiness as the responsibility of society as a whole, rather than of any one group of individuals (Wesley & Buysse, 2003). Elkind (1995) explains how changes in family structure have brought about community involvement in preparing children for school. In the modern world, children, traditionally were cared for in their homes by one or both parents and more typically the mother. Parents were the ones who most influenced the child’s development and therefore readiness for school. However in the postmodern era of today, family structure has changed with an increase in the numbers of mothers returning to the workforce and more single parent families. The result is that increasingly more children are cared for by someone other than their parents. The effect that the community which children experience during early childhood has on their development is well documented. For example, Hertzman (2000) believes that “early childhood experiences have a more powerful and long-lasting effect on subsequent health, well-being and competence than had been previously thought” (p.11).

Winter, Zurcher, Hernandez, and Yin (2007) explain that the role of the community in readying the child for school should be recognised by local governments with the investment of time and money to create policies which support partnerships between community agencies and early childhood programmes. The ancient African proverb “It takes a village to raise a child” encapsulates the belief that the role and responsibility in preparing today’s children for school lies with the community of parents, early childhood educators, and teachers. These are the people whose involvement and

influence directly affects children's development and therefore their readiness for school. They are also the ones who have the ability to put pressure on government policy makers to share this responsibility by providing appropriate facilities and programs where children can be prepared for school (Hendrick & Chandler, 1996; McCain & Mustard, 1999; Piotrowski, Botsko, & Matthews, 2000).

Therefore to consider the role of community in early childhood development as it pertains to school readiness the role of the different groups and environments children experience should be examined.

### **i. The Role of the Parent in Readyng the Child**

Holloway, Rambaud, Fuller and Eggers-Pierola (1995) point out that parents, and in particular low-income parents, do not have an understanding of theories of development relevant in early childhood. Parents believe that their role is to care for their child and that the teaching or readyng for school is best left to the professionals such as the early childhood educators and teachers. However, Brooks-Gunn and Markman (2005) describe how the role of the parent in raising a child is a multidisciplinary one. Children's development is dependent upon the presence of certain behaviours being demonstrated by the parent such as nurturing, guiding, interacting and knowledge sharing. The existence of these characteristics influences a child's development and therefore readiness for school.

Research by Clarke and Kurt-Costes (1997) and Lamb Parker, Boak, Griffin, Ripple, and Peay (1999) demonstrated how differences in parenting styles related directly to differences in school readiness. For example, parents who are aware of and value the role of play and its impact on the socio-emotional development of the child, who have an

awareness of the importance of the development of relevant skills, will have a positive impact on their child's readiness. This will in turn enhance the child's transition to school. Brooks-Gunn, Han, and Waldfogel (2002) and Votruba-Drzal (2003) support these findings, noting that providing a nurturing home environment has a direct effect on the child's early learning experiences. Furthermore, their studies highlighted how young children's cognitive readiness is negatively effected by a home environment that lacks a positive parent role model. They call for society to acknowledge this fact and provide programs which make up for these shortfalls.

Dockett and Perry (2001) pointed out that the diverse environments in which children are being raised, of which parents are a key part, are manifested in the uniqueness of each individual. This influences the shaping of each child.

The contexts in which children live are influenced by issues such as socioeconomic status, geographical isolation, cultural diversity, parental work patterns, language backgrounds, disability, and other special needs. While it is important that this diversity is reflected at a general level in the transition program, it is imperative that differences among individuals and individual families within each community are recognized and valued for the richness they bring. (Dockett & Perry, 2001, ¶ 58)

The Federal/Provincial/ Territorial Early Childhood Development Agreement (2003) noted more specifically the effect of the home environment on development. It states that the quality of parenting, the education level of the mother and the stability of the family unit are directly reflected in children's cognitive development and behaviour. Hill (2001) suggested that there is a positive relationship between prereading and premath

skills and the tenderness and acceptance of the child by their mother. Lower abilities in these skills were evident in children who had experienced maternal impatience and displeasure. Conversely, Kinlaw, Kurtz-Costes, and Goldman-Fraser (2001) found there was no relationship between a mother's behaviour and the child's outcomes. However, they suggested that the importance the mother places on independence was positively related to the child's efforts to learn.

Literature supports the belief that the role of the parent is central to the development of the child in early childhood. The parent's responsibility goes beyond providing for the child's physical needs. Parents who create an environment in which their child feels loved, cared for and nurtured positively effect the development of their child. From this situation will emerge a child who is ready to transition to the school environment with ease. However it cannot be assumed that all children experience such an upbringing. What about those children who do not experience such a nurturing environment, perhaps due to economic constraints or poor parenting? Holloway, Rambaud, Fuller and Eggers-Pierola (1995) found that parents, in particular low-income parents, were not aware of development theories and their relevance to pedagogy. These parents presume that the child is ready for school when they are age appropriate. Such parents take it for granted that the teacher is responsible for making the necessary adjustments to the curriculum to meet the needs of the child. Lewit and Baker (1995) raise the point that not all parents assume their role in readying their child for school. They highlight the idea that for all children the role of early childhood education becomes influential in preparing them for school.

## **ii. Role of Early Childhood Education in Readyng the Child**

A report by the National Council of Welfare (1999) stated that:

.... good child care is an excellent opportunity to provide better early childhood education and to ensure that all children have the same chances for good development. Ensuring that young children have the experiences that allow them to develop and grow to their potential is crucial to the health and progress of the whole population. (p.70)

Friendly (2006) explains that it is only in the last fifteen years that most Canadians have come to acknowledge the role of early childhood education in the development of children and school readiness. She points out that embracing the idea that early childhood education sets the groundwork for future learning. This in turn is believed to have far reaching effects on our society. Espinosa, Thornburg, and Matthews (1997), Stipek, Feiler, Byler, Ryan, Milburn, and Salmon (1998) and Barnett and Hustedt (2003) support this notion that participation in a early childhood education programs positively affects the child's readiness for school and future success in school. However, Cassidy, Mims, Rucker, and Boone (2003) suggest that it is not the availability of early childhood education which is important but rather the quality and the developmental appropriateness of the program which has a positive impact on the child's readiness. Bredekamp and Copple (1997) describe developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) as being founded on an understanding of the development and learning which occurs during the early childhood period. Programs which adopt this practice attempt to acknowledge the child's age, the different levels of individual development as well as the effect of cultural background. To implement DAP, early childhood teachers must have a sound

knowledge of the multidimensional development of the young child. They must use this knowledge to guide what and when they teach. They are also required to be adaptable to the individual learning and developmental needs of each child. Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, Thomasson, Mosley, and Fleege (1993) reported that although early childhood educators support the benefits of developmentally appropriate practice in theory, they felt unable to put it into practice as much as they would wish because of pressure to prepare children for standardized school readiness testing. Stipek, Feiler, Byler, Ryan, Milburn, and Salmon (1998) suggest a more holistic approach towards readiness is achieved by engaging children in instructional dialogue while directing their development of basic academic concepts and skills through provision of information and problem solving techniques.

It is possible that this kind of teacher guided instruction fosters cognitive development more effectively than either an approach that emphasizes child-initiated exploration, or a didactic, teacher-directed learning approach. (Stipek, Feiler, Byler, Ryan, Milburn, & Salmon, 1998, p.63)

Dockett and Perry (2003) reported that the quality of early childhood programs and children's transitioning experiences can be enriched by communication between programs and schools. They found that providing opportunities for early childhood educators and grade Primary teachers to establish relationships among themselves, based on trust and respect for each other's contributions to the child's development, positively improved programs. In turn, the child is ready for the experiences of school. However, Kagan (1999) warns that too much emphasis being placed on the mystery surrounding

school readiness may result in excessive pressure on preschoolers. This could be detrimental to the child's learning in the long run.

The literature examined emphasizes the benefits of early childhood education especially for children cared for outside the home. Those children will have the opportunity to experience a nurturing environment which may not be provided in the home due to socio-economic restraints or a lack of parent involvement. This supports the case for a national program being available to all children regardless of their background and means.

### **iii. Role of the School**

Up to this point school readiness has been considered from the point of view of the child being ready for the school and the community's role in preparing the child. However, Lewit and Baker (1995) highlight the need to examine the schools role in readying itself for the child. When children begin school, the grade Primary teacher becomes a prominent figure in their development and transitioning. Birch and Ladd (1997) explained that the teacher's role has an effect on how well a child adjusts to the school environment. They found that the most influential factors were the child's dependency upon the teacher, conflict with the teacher, and gender differences.

Holloway, Rambaud, Fuller and Eggers-Pierola (1995) found that parents and in particular low income parents, believe that the child is ready to go to school when they have reached the age requirement and unreservedly expect that the teacher will adapt the curriculum to suit the child's needs. Teachers that are genuinely concerned about their school's readiness to provide for the learning needs of children, go beyond the general concept of a child's readiness to learn - the chief focus of readiness discussion to date – by adapting curriculum delivery methods to the particular needs of the groups of children

under their care in a given year. This dynamic approach allows for staff to take on issues that will affect the child's overall success in school (High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 2007).

The National Association of Early Childhood Specialists (2001) support the notion that it is the school which should be ready for the child by suggesting it is the responsibility of the school to provide an environment in which each child's intrinsic desire to learn is nurtured not destroyed. Such a school should strive to meet the individual and diverse needs of the young students who are new to this formal environment. The school should be dynamic, eager, and open to the changes which become apparently necessary to best serve its students: "A ready school is a comprehensive vision of what a school can do to ensure that all children who enter its doors will fulfil their potential as learners." (Dowker, Schweinhart, & Daniel-Echols, 2007, p.68)

Examples of changes which can be made to serve the diverse needs of the student demonstrate schools' acknowledgement of their role as it pertains to readiness. Butzin (2004) offers such an example with the innovative approach of "triangulated learning" (p.308). A team teaching approach is used with teachers teaching to their strengths in groups of three, across three grade levels. Evidence suggests this practice is successful.

This move away from the traditional single teacher approach could be adapted to support children as they undergo the transition from home or child care to school. A teaching triangle of parent, early childhood educator and grade Primary teacher could be the answer. Schools that are ready to open their doors to parents and who place value on developing a relationship with parents see positive outcomes for the student, the teacher

and the parent (Eldridge, 2001). Pianta and Kraft-Sayre (1999) identified the importance of regular and open communication links being established between the school and home from the outset. In so doing, teachers and parents can support the child's transition to school and make it a positive experience. School districts that have implemented a preschool-to-kindergarten transition project in the year prior to a child beginning school, have reported positive outcomes. Such projects are a starting point for parents and teachers to "become strong and effective advocates and partners in the education of young children" (Meier & Schafran, 1999, p. 46). In a report on the Toronto First Duty project, Pelletier and Corter (2005) concluded:

It is our hope that our future teachers will see education not as needing to cover curriculum expectations that children must meet, but as a partnership with families in which the school is the hub of the community. (p. 36)

#### **D. Perceptions of School Readiness**

The perceptions of parents, teachers and early childhood educators as they pertain to school readiness were examined. This served to highlight the commonalities or differences which exist between the three groups. Lin, Lawrence, and Gorrell (2003) examined the views of grade Primary teachers as they pertain to school readiness and reported that teachers prioritise the child's development of social skills over their academic development. Specifically, the skill, which teachers most valued, was children's ability to communicate their needs and thoughts. Teachers felt that turn taking and being able to share with peers were qualities they would like to see in children as they enter formal schooling. Teachers reported that these skills enhanced the children's

ability to participate in group activities without causing disruption. Pianta and LaParo (2003) go as far as to describe these as “teachability” skills. They suggest that the development of these skills enable the child to gain the most from the more teacher-directed setting found in school.

Conversely, a study carried out by King and Boardman (2006) found that teachers felt the presence of social skills such as turn taking, asking for help, completing a set task, good manners and listening, although of value when entering the grade Primary level, are mostly developed during the first year in school. They found the parents reported that such personal skills are important as children begin school so that teachers can focus on the development of more academic abilities. Their results indicated that teachers placed more value on the development of physical skills which enabled the child to be more independent. Johnson, Gallagher, and Cook (1995) supported these conclusions as they found that teachers believed a child would experience success upon entering school if they were able to care for their own physical needs and had a solid understanding of themselves as an individual.

In the context of school readiness, Espinosa, Thornburg, and Matthews (1997) examined factors which contribute to transitioning difficulties. Teachers indicated that language deficits and immaturity are detrimental to children successfully transitioning to school. Furthermore, the results demonstrate that teachers blamed a lack of social skills and a child’s poor knowledge base as factors which negatively affect the changeover to school. Piotrowski, Botsko, and Matthews (2000), Lin, Lawrence, and Gorrell (2003), Marshall (2003) and Pianta and LaParo (2003) all reported that parents believe children need to enter school with an academic knowledge base. Parents perceive that in order to be ready for school, children must be proficient in academic abilities such as number and

letter recognition, identification of colours and shapes. Furthermore, Piotrowski, Botsko, and Matthews (2000) and Marshall (2003) found that children must be ready to comply with the teacher's authority in order to be ready to learn.

In conclusion, the literature highlights a skills oriented focus towards school readiness. Teachers, parents and early childhood educators recognise the importance of the development of skills such as social, behavioural, physical, academic and independence. Teachers place most importance on the development of social skills in early childhood. Also of importance are the development of physical skills as these empower the children to be independent and care for their own personal needs. Similarly communication skills need to be developed to enable children to listen, learn and question. Parents and early childhood educators recognise the value of these skills but place more importance on the development of academic skills which teachers feel are developed during the beginning years of school. Children's readiness for school is enhanced when these skills are well developed. A lack of development of these skills has been blamed for a lack of readiness for the school environment.

As far as how best to develop these skills in young children, Champion (2004) found that parents, teachers and early childhood educators expressed a need for government bodies, school boards and community services to support them in readying children for school. Parents called for more guidance as to what skills need to be developed and how these skills can be developed in order that children can be ready for school. They highlight the need for the provision of programs and facilities for all children so that regardless of socio economic background, children can experience an environment where they are readied for school. Holloway, Rambaud, Fuller and Eggers-

Pierola (1995), in their study of low income mothers, found that these mothers believed education was their child's passport to a better socioeconomic future.

### **E. Conclusion**

Irrespective of its definition, the topic of school readiness and its impact on a child's early learning experience continues to be of interest to researchers. An examination of the literature concludes that factors that affect a child's readiness for school are family lifestyle and early childhood experiences, which serve to nurture or suppress the child's own intrinsic desire to learn. The perceptions of teachers, parents and early childhood educators serve to foster a belief that there is a need to have in place developmentally appropriate programs which enhance the child's development. In such an environment, children are able to build a foundation of skills which will enable them to transition successfully to formal schooling.

## Chapter III

### METHODOLOGY

#### **A. Qualitative Method**

It is the perceptions of the participants that are most important to this study. Therefore, a qualitative method of research was used as it is considered to be the most appropriate way of uncovering and revealing the participants' perceptions (Wiersma & Jurs, 2005). The researcher wished to have a deeper understanding of Grade Primary teachers, early childhood educators and parents' points of view as they pertain to school readiness. In collecting the data, the researcher maintained neutrality by simply recording the responses of the participants in order to uphold the validity and reliability of the study (Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996). In so doing, the data collected speaks for itself. In qualitative research, the data is analyzed by undergoing a process of categorizing, describing and synthesising the material. The data collected by audiotape during the interview process is transcribed and the material carefully examined. As qualitative research tends to create copious amounts of descriptive material, it is necessary to code the data by organizing and reducing it. The purpose of this process is to identify emerging themes. Responses, which show similarities, are grouped together in order to demonstrate a support for participants' perceptions.

#### **B. Participants**

Participants included two Grade Primary teachers, three early childhood educators, and five parents. Specifically, two Grade Primary teachers employed by independent schools in the Halifax Regional Municipality agreed to take part in this study. Three early childhood educators employed by either a private child care centre or a

non-profit child care centre in the Halifax Regional Municipality also accepted the invitation to participate. Furthermore, five parents of children eligible for Grade Primary were interviewed. In total, ten interviews were conducted by the researcher.

### **C. Data Collection**

To collect the data for use in this qualitative study the researcher proposed to employ an interview schedule and a demographic survey. As the researcher was interested in the perceptions of Grade Primary teachers, early childhood educators and parents' regarding school readiness, an interview process was chosen as it is considered to be the most effective way of understanding the views of others. As Seidman (1991) succinctly stated, “[a]t the heart of interviewing research is an interest in other individuals’ stories because they are of worth.” (p.3)

#### **i. Interview Schedule**

Based on a current literature review conducted by the researcher, together with the experience of the researcher, and under the guidance of the thesis supervisor, a series of interview questions were compiled. The questions were designed to obtain a deeper understanding of what Grade Primary teachers’, early childhood educators’ and parents’ perceptions of school readiness are. The questions addressed issues such as the individuals’ understanding of a child’s readiness for school, the competencies necessary to enhance the child’s learning, and how the child can best be prepared for the formal learning environment. (See Appendix A)

In designing the questions, every effort was made to use terms which were meaningful to the participant and not ambiguous. The researcher and the supervisor reviewed the interview questions several times in order to make sure they were valid and

unambiguous. A Grade Primary teacher, parent and early childhood educator, none of whom participated in the proposed study, were asked to review the questions and comment on their clarity and relevance to the topic of school readiness. Suggested changes were incorporated.

## **ii. Demographic Survey**

Interviewees were asked to complete a brief demographic questionnaire. The responses were used to compile relevant demographic information. This information was used to identify commonalities among participants that may influence their perceptions of school readiness, based on their demographic context.

To this end, teachers and early childhood educators were asked to provide information on their gender, age, ethnicity, education level and teaching experience, while parents were asked to provide information on gender, age, ethnicity, occupation and education level (Appendix B).

## **D. Procedure**

Once approval from the Thesis Committee and Mount Saint Vincent University Ethics Board was granted, the researcher proceeded by contacting the Principal/Headmasters of independent schools, the directors of non profit child care centres, and the owners of private day care centres in the Halifax Regional Municipality by telephone to explain the study. Follow-up letters (Appendix C, D), summarizing information discussed during the telephone conversations, were sent to each person.

Once approval to conduct interviews with Grade Primary teachers, early childhood educators and parents had been granted, the researcher arranged a convenient

time to drop off thirty five research packages. The Principal/Director distributed these packages at each school/centre. Each package contained:

1. A letter (Appendix E) to potential participants explaining the purpose and details of the research and information regarding informed consent;
2. A demographics information form (Appendix B) to be completed by participants;
3. A Free and Informed Consent Form (Appendix F) agreeing to be interviewed;
4. An envelope to return completed forms.

This method of distribution respected the confidentiality of families, as no participating school or centre was asked to disclose information that teachers or parents considered private. Arrangements were made to collect the eighteen completed parent and teacher packages from the schools and centres by the researcher.

A stratified random selection process was used to select five parents, two Grade Primary teachers and three early childhood educators from those who demonstrated an interest in participating in the study. Once selected, the researcher contacted, by telephone or email, each person to confirm their willingness to be interviewed. A time and place, which was suitable to both parties, was arranged to conduct an informal, semi-structured interview. Once ten interviews were completed, the researcher contacted all others who indicated a willingness to participate but who were not chosen, to explain this fact and to thank them for their interest in the study.

All interviews were conducted face to face. Before the interview began, the researcher reviewed the information on the signed Free and Informed Consent Form (Appendix F), which the interviewee had completed when agreeing to participate in the

study. The researcher attempted to create an atmosphere, which is conducive to a successful interview process by initially building a rapport with the interviewee. The interviewer ensured that the interviewee was in agreement with the audio recording of the interview. When the interviewer felt confident that the conditions were conducive, the interview began. The interviewer took field notes, ensuring that comments and non verbal actions which may have been considered relevant to the data collection process were recorded. The interviewer used unobtrusive prompts to assist the interviewee in answering questions. For example, if the interviewee gave a yes or no answer the interviewer prompted further discussion of the question by inviting the participant to elaborate or explain in more depth. Following completion of the interview, the interviewee was thanked for his/her willingness to participate and the audiotape number coded. All interview recordings were transcribed verbatim at a later time and all number coded transcriptions were stored securely in a locked file cabinet at researcher's home. The audiotapes were destroyed once the thesis is completed.

Participants were contacted and invited to review the transcription of their interview. Any changes which participants wished to make to their original comments were made in an effort to ensure that all responses were an accurate representation of the participant's perceptions. This "member checks" process establishes validity in this type of qualitative research.

#### **E. Data Analysis**

In qualitative research, the reliability of the study focuses on how accurately and consistently the recording of the data by the researcher is a credible reflection of what actually occurs in the interview (Bogdan & Knopp Bilken, 2007). Therefore, the interviews were audio recorded to ensure accuracy for transcribing and data analysis. The

researcher also took field notes so as to further enhance the reliability of the interview data. The audiotapes were transcribed. The audiotapes and transcripts were stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's home throughout the entire thesis process. The researcher read, marked and labeled the transcripts with an open mind looking for points of interest which emerged from the data gathered. Subsequently, recurring perceptions were grouped together. Likewise, points of view which stand alone but are relevant to the study were acknowledged. The thesis supervisor acted as a second coder as this enriched the reliability of the coding process. Upon completion of the coding process the researcher expected to have a deeper understanding of the complexities of school readiness (Seidman,1991). The audiotapes and transcripts were destroyed upon completion of the thesis process.

#### **F. Research Questions**

The following questions were developed and used to direct the research.

1. How did participants define the term "school readiness"?
2. What are some of the skills participants felt most important for children to have as they enter the school system?
3. How did participants feel early childhood educators could ensure children had these skills?
4. What were participants' perceptions of the role of play in designing programs for young children?
5. Were participants aware of any effective information to assist in preparing children for school?

6. What role did participants feel preschool experiences outside of the home have in preparing a child for entry to Grade Primary?
7. Did participants indicate that the majority of children entering Grade Primary are ready for school?
8. What did participants feel was the role of the following groups in preparing a child for a successful transition to school: a) early childhood educators b) Grade Primary teachers c) parents d) the community?

## **G. Ethical Considerations**

Participation in this research was completely voluntary. All attempts were made to ensure that the participants were fully informed of the purpose of the study. The information collected as a result of this research was confidential and the name of any individual or centre did not appear at any point in the process. The data, collected on audiotapes and transcript form, was stored by the researcher in a locked filing cabinet. The audiotapes were destroyed upon completion of the study. Participants were told they had the right to withdraw at any time. This study involved only adults and the questions were not intended to be intrusive in nature. The researcher anticipated no harm to participants in this study and considered the risk to participants as being minimal.

### **i. Informed Consent**

Participants were asked to complete and sign a free and informed consent form before the interview commenced (Appendix G). This form clearly stated to the participants the purpose of the study, the procedures, and aims. The form stated what was required of the participant and the time commitment that was necessary. Participants were also informed of their right to decline to answer any questions with which they felt

uncomfortable and the option to withdraw from the study at any time without being penalised. They were also assured of the confidentiality of their data and that the results of the study would be presented in the form of group data only with no reference to personal identification. Furthermore, quotations would not be accompanied by any information which could be identified with the participant. Participants were made aware of university guidelines regarding storage and disposal of tapes, transcripts, and field notes. The researcher gave the participants the opportunity to ask questions with regards to the study.

## **ii. Confidentiality**

Every effort was made to protect the confidentiality of participants' statements. During the taping of the interviews, the researcher did not identify the participants by name. The anonymity of participants was ensured by number coding the tapes and transcripts. Names of family members or co-workers that may have been mentioned during the interviews were omitted from the transcripts. This ensured that quotations that may be used could not identify any person. During the review of the informed consent form it was explained that the participant's data would be presented in group format only. Quotations that appear in the analysis are not accompanied by names. Participants were assured of the anonymity of the demographic survey which they completed and informed that the information would be used to contextualise the data. No connections were made between the demographic information and the statements of individuals.

### **iii. Voluntary Participation**

Participation in this study was on a voluntary basis. The participants were informed by the researcher of their right to decline to answer any questions that they were uncomfortable with and that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time without being penalised. The researcher did not recruit participants directly but instead a third party (director of a day care or principal of a school) approached them. Those who expressed an interest in participating in the study were given a research information package and asked to complete it. The researcher collected the completed packages and contacted those randomly selected to participate. Those not selected were contacted by the researcher and thanked for their interest in the study. Contact between the researcher and the participants was not established through any other means.

### **iv. Issues of Harm**

Those who participated in this study did so only on a volunteer basis and only shared with the researcher the information with which they felt comfortable. During the interview, if the researcher receives a “yes” or “no” answer and felt the response needed to be expanded upon, a non-directive prompt such as “tell me more” may have been necessary. However participants were made aware of their right to decline to comment further should they wish. In this event participants were not be pressured or coerced into elaborating on their answers. If it became obvious to the researcher that the participant was experiencing distress due to participation in the interview process, the interview would have ended and the participant offered the contact information of a local support service. Before the interview took place, the researcher prepared this information. The

possible risk of participants experiencing harm due to participation in this study was considered to be very low.

## **Chapter IV**

### **RESULTS**

#### **A. Introduction**

This chapter includes a summary of both the qualitative and quantitative data collected. Demographic information on participants who were interviewed is summarized and presented using percentages. A summary of the results of the qualitative analysis of the recorded interviews is also presented

#### **B. Survey Response Rate**

Thirty five participant packages were distributed to independent schools, a non profit day care centre and a for profit day care centre in the Halifax Regional Municipality. These were distributed by the principals/director/owner to parents, grade primary teachers and early childhood educators. Eighteen people completed and returned the demographic survey and signed the Free and Informed Consent Form indicating their willingness to be interviewed. This represented a 51.4% response rate.

#### **C. Participants**

Contact was established by email or phone with the eighteen prospective participants who returned the completed demographic survey form and the Free and Informed Consent form, depending on how they had indicated they wished to be contacted. Ten participants responded, arranged a time convenient to them and were interviewed. The remaining eight did not respond or did not respond within the time set aside for interviews. Within the respondent group, the three participant groups were represented as follows: 50% (n=5) of interviewees were parents, 30% (n=3) were early childhood educators and 20% (n=2) were grade primary teachers.

With respect to gender, 90% of the participants were female and 10% were male. Within the group of parents interviewed four were female and one was male. Early childhood educators and grade primary teachers were female. All participants interviewed were Caucasian and parents interviewed reported having two children in the household.

Forty percent of participants reported their age to be between 25 to 35 years of age, 50% were between 36 and 45 years of age, while the remaining 10% reported their age to be over 55 years. Of the parents who were interviewed, two were between 25 and 35 years of age and three were between 36 and 45 years of age. Within the group of early childhood educators, two were between 25 and 35 years of age and one was over 55 years of age. All of the grade primary teachers were in the 36-45 years age group.

Participants identified various levels of education. One parent reported diploma/certificate level of education and two parents reported having a Bachelor's degree. One parent had a Master's degree and another had a Doctorate degree. Among the early childhood educators, two reported having a Bachelor's degree and one had a Master's degree. Both grade primary teachers reported having a Bachelor's degree.

When asked to identify years of teaching experience, one early childhood educator had less than ten years. One had more than ten years but less than fifteen years and one reported having more than thirty years. The response of grade primary teachers indicated that one had less than ten years teaching experience and one had more than fifteen years but less than twenty years. With regards to teaching certification level, one grade primary teacher had attained TC5 and one had attained TC1. The occupations of

parent respondents were categorized as follows: two were administrators, one was a manager, one a health care worker and one an educator.

#### **D. Qualitative Content Analysis**

This section presents a review of the responses of those participants who were interviewed. The recorded interviews were transcribed and coded to elicit themes.

##### **Research Question 1: Did participants feel beginning school should be determined by a child's age at a specific cut off date?**

Responses fell into two categories when participants were discussing whether beginning school should be determined by a child's age at a specific cut off date. One opinion which was evident in statements from participants in all three groups - parents, early childhood educators and grade primary teachers, was that beginning school should not be determined by a child's age at a specific cut off date because of the individual differences exhibited by children at this age. Those participants reasoned that in early childhood, although children may be the same age, they differ in their abilities and their social skills. One participant felt that beginning school should depend on the individuality of children at this age:

“I think that depends on the child. I think some children are ready at a specific date no matter what the date is but I think some others are definitely not ready even if they do fall within the cut off date.”

Participants who did not believe age at a specific cut off date should be the determinant for starting school offered alternatives to determine readiness, such as considering the child's past experiences and development. One participant expressed that entry should not depend on children being tested to determine when they should begin school.

Another category also arose based on opinions from participants in all groups. These respondents agreed that a cut off date should determine when children begin school. They felt that a cut off date was easy to mandate and the most feasible and logical way to determine when to begin school. One participant commented as follows:

“Well it has to be determined by something so I suppose a cut-off date is as good as anything else.”

One participant felt that the cut off date should be set by referencing research to determine when a child is ready to learn in a teacher directed environment.

“ If there was a cut off date based on best research to show when a child would most reliably be ready to learn, and advance, not just in grade primary but at a later age as well, I think would be better for the child.”

Another participant suggested rather than having a specific date, there could be benefits to having children enter as and when they reached their fifth birthday should that occasion fall between September and December.

“I think having a September through December date gives a little more flexibility”.

On the whole, participants acknowledged that some form of order is necessary to avoid a situation where parents would place their child in school as and when they wished.

However, a child’s age at a specific cut off date was not perceived to be the best way to determine whether the child was ready to begin school mainly because of the varying levels of individual development in children during the early years.

**Research Question 2: What were participant's understandings of how children learn and develop during the early years?**

Participant's perceptions of how children learn and develop during the early years could be categorized into four themes a) modelling b) through play c) from environmental experiences d) by structured learning.

Parents, early childhood educators and grade primary teachers felt that adults and other children play a role in the learning and development of all children. More specifically the role models were identified as parent, day care professionals, teachers and peers.

“... just to be excited by learning alongside with their teachers and their peers”.

“And also from modelling from more experienced peers or some of the adults in their lives.”

“It's partly the parent's job obviously ...”

“...they learn through their peers, they learn through the educators, myself and other teachers, they learn through the parents.”

Some participants responded that children learn and develop through play. A few respondents in each of the three groups of participants emphasised the importance of play

for children during early childhood. However all the early childhood educators in their responses mentioned play as the medium through which three to five year olds learn and develop.

“They learn a tremendous amount through play. That would be the primary learning medium.”

“I think through fun, through play...very unstructured learning activities would be how they learn best.”

Respondents from all three groups emphasized the role of environmental experience on learning and development during the early years and to some extent this overlapped with their perceptions of play. It was expressed that when exploring their environment children use and develop their senses in order to learn. Participants felt that the early years are a very tactile, hands-on learning period.

“Three to five year olds is hands on and experimenting and re-evaluating. Hands on, everything must be touched, tasted, smelled, manipulated. Sometimes thrown, sat upon, kicked. It is obviously a very tactile time for learning.”

“...all the five senses need to be engaged in learning; feeling, seeing, experiencing themselves is the best way to learn in the early years for sure.”

Even so most parents perceived that children do need to have structure to learn more academic material such as alphabet, numbers, colours, listening to stories, reading books.

Grade primary teachers also felt that although children learn through play, it is important to begin to transition children to more structured learning.

“They learn a lot by “doing”. And although we do a lot of that in Primary we start to move them away from that not quickly and not entirely, but we do start them on the learning curve towards the higher grades where they are doing a lot more individual seat work but they certainly do learn a lot by “doing” initially during those early years.”

Participants from all three groups perceived that during the early years, children’s learning and development is influenced and shaped by modelling the actions of peers and adults in their lives. Participants also understood that both play and environmental experiences influence development and learning with structured learning also having a role to play.

**Research Question 3: What did participants understand by the term "school readiness"?**

Participants from all three groups initially expressed difficulty in pinpointing an understanding of the term “school readiness” with an early childhood educator expressing that:

“It’s so widely used no one really has that definition I don’t think. I think clarification would be a very good thing around that term....”

“... school readiness has different areas...is a very broad thing”

However, participants' understanding of the term "school readiness" fell into three broad categories: a) readiness for formal/academic learning b) possession of independent living skills c) socially appropriate skills.

Most early childhood educators and grade primary teachers expressed the need for a child to have reached a level of maturity where they are ready to engage in formal learning by sitting, listening, concentrating, asking questions and problem solving. They also perceived that children need to be naturally curious and have a knowledge base in order to be ready for school.

"It refers to... their readiness to learn within a classroom setting where they need to be sitting and listening and not always active and on the go like preschoolers typically are."

"Ready to learn to me means being able to be in a group, be comfortable, be curious, to have enough verbal skills to ask a lot of questions and express what they already know. And then after that, no matter what stage they're at in terms of learning academic concepts, if they are curious and they're eager then they'll learn anything."

Early childhood educators and grade primary teachers acknowledged the role of academics in understanding "school readiness" however they tended to emphasise the role of independence/social/behavioural skills, stating that these need to be present in order for academic skills to develop.

“... independence skills, getting themselves ready and preparing their own belongings, eating their own lunch.”

“Being able to be comfortable with their own self in order to tell somebody what they need or how they feel so I think that a lot of school readiness, for me, has to do with social skills and being able to express oneself and also to feel comfortable in various groups as well.”

“There is also the social aspect of it too... being able interact with children and play with children.”

Likewise parents perceived “school readiness” to mean the development of social and academic skills however some placed more emphasis on the academic while others felt both had equal roles to play.

“School readiness means that when a child has reached a certain level of knowledge about subject areas. So they should know their alphabet, their colours, know how to read a few words, basic maths, understand the concept, I guess, of basic maths.”

“Probably school readiness is knowledge based and behavioural based in my opinion.”

One parent understood that although much emphasis is placed on readying the child by developing their independence and academic knowledge, there should be more focus placed on developing social skills.

“So when I hear “school readiness” ... I often think in terms of a social readiness. Is my child ready to interacting with other children...?”

Respondents from all three groups acknowledged that school readiness means children have reached a point where they are ready to learn less from interacting with their environment and more from a teacher. When children demonstrate an eagerness and anticipation to have the opportunity to learn from a teacher this is an indicator they are ready to be challenged by more structured activities and environment.

“...school readiness is a point at which a child is eager and anticipates the opportunity to learn from someone aside from their primary caregiver, whoever that is.”

Parents, grade primary teachers and early childhood educators all articulated a difficulty in expressing an understanding of “school readiness” however their general perception was a point at which a child is ready to learn in a more formal, teacher directed environment. This is attained by the child through the development of social/academic/independence skill sets.

#### **Research Question 4: How did participants tell if a child was ready for school?**

Participants across the three groups felt they could tell if a child was ready for school by their level of development in a number of different skill areas. More specifically,

participants perceived that by observing the level of development of academic, social and independence skills you would be able to determine if a child is ready to enter school.

“Well there are signs; there are signs when children are ready academically. That’s one big area but another big area is social readiness. Ready to deal with the children of their own age, ready to not only deal with the children when they are happy and everybody’s content but also when some disagreements arise and also when child is ready to be responsible for own actions and own personal stuff too and also academic readiness is important too...when they know the alphabet, when they recognize the numbers, when they can tell colours and their language is ready and developed..”

Parents, in particular, placed more emphasis on the combination of the development of both social and academic skills. Educators, while acknowledging the role of social and to a lesser degree academic skills, highlighted the importance of independence skills as an indicator that a child is ready.

“...if they have all the academic school readiness as well as their social readiness then one would say that they are ready for school.”

“[R]eally just assessing the social aspects, the personal care aspects, the emotional development of the child and also the academic level that they’re at as well. So those... things need to be considered.”

One parent commented “I’m of the opinion that a child knows” while another parent included emotional development as an indicator that a child is ready for school stating:

“Well I think it’s ... really just assessing the social aspects, the personal care aspects, the emotional development of the child and also the academic level that they’re at as well.”

A few parents and early childhood educators suggested that some form of testing or assessment should be required in order to determine if a child is ready for school. It was suggested that this could be an observation by grade primary teachers during an informal play date or orientation day in the school setting.

“You would have to do some kind of assessment of the children when it came time for them to start Primary as opposed to the orientation I went to you know. You would actually have to bring the kids in and do an assessment to determine if they are ready for school or not...”

As responses to the previous question suggested, respondents believed that to tell if a child is ready for school, it is necessary to have attained a level of development of skills which will enable the child to cope with a shift in the learning environment. Participants were unsure how best this could be done but some suggested a form of observation or assessment by grade primary teachers and early childhood educators.

**Research Question 4a: Who did participants perceive should determine if a child is ready for school?**

For the most part, all groups of respondents identified a combination of parent and educator as being the persons who should determine whether a child is ready for school.

“That should be parents, as well as early childhood educators.”

“Probably a combination of parent and... maybe the Principal of the school.”

“Teachers definitely know but of course parents think they know, they feel when they know but they should just definitely discuss it with the teachers and ask for their opinions or talk to more than one person too.”

One parent believed “ we need rules so I think the school board needs to determine and ultimately the province.”

One respondent considered grade primary teacher to have no role in this determination as they have no previous experience of the child before coming to school.

“Teachers wouldn’t really necessarily know whether they are ready because they don’t have them prior to being in their room.”

Some parents considered early interventionists and speech/language pathologists as having a role to play while an early childhood educator suggested that the child plays a part in determining readiness to go to school.

**Research Question 4b: Were participants aware of alternatives for children who were not ready for school?**

Responses from participants from the three groups indicated that they were aware of two alternatives. Parents, grade primary teachers and early childhood educators believed that a child who was not ready for school could be held back or asked to repeat the year. This was perceived as being the parents' choice rather than educators, however, educators could advise parents in making their decision.

“I thought somebody told me recently that you could hold your child back for a year if the parent determined that they were not ready for school.”

Some participants stated that they did not know of any alternatives. One parent believed that all children begin school at the same age and if they are not ready they would be labelled as such and grouped with children of similar abilities.

“I'm not aware of any alternatives to be honest. I've no idea. I would just assume that they would be sent on to the school and then during their first year in Primary they would be the ones lagging behind in the class that the teacher would help. And then once they got to Grade 1 they'd be put in, I don't know how it works now but when I was at school there was a slow class or a slow group, so then they would kinda be categorised as that from the beginning.”

Another alternative suggested for children who are not ready was repeating preschool or entering a Junior Primary or pre primary program. Parents and educators suggested that

this would be considered a suitable alternative especially if a foundation could be put in place so the child is successful when they do enter school. Specifically, respondents felt that children who are not ready should be placed in an environment where there was a low ratio of children-to-adults so that children could have one-on-one help.

“A Junior Primary program I think would be a very suitable position for them for an additional year until everyone deemed it is the best place, Primary.”

“Preschool is the only option that I know of.”

“There are some places around the city that have smaller ratios, lower ratios. I would want to see a child that is not ready in a preschool or an early childhood environment which has the lower ratio as possible.”

Respondents believed that alternatives for children who are not ready for school are low ratio programmes, such as preschools or Junior Primary programmes, or repeating the grade primary class.

**Research Question 4c: What alternatives would participants like to see available for children who are not ready?**

Overwhelmingly parents, early childhood educators and grade primary teachers expressed that programs should be designed to transition children, who are considered not ready, into the school system. The hope was that this would be publically funded and

a part of the school system enabling all children to access this service. Participants also felt such a program would enable children to enter school on a level playing field.

“I know the pre-primary thing that was thrown into the school system...and I know that they do have some of those available at other sites and that but I think that having sort of that transition time is a really positive thing to get to know the environment of your school even if you’re not in that primary classroom, you’re still in that building.”

One parent suggested an alternative for children who were considered not ready would be a part day programme. Younger children would attend initially for a few hours and this would gradually increase as they matured.

“A graduated entry program. Perhaps a half day program when the children are younger, until they can become more comfortable, engaged, do what their peers are doing and want to be there full day. And are capable to be there all day.”

Alternatively, education for parents in advance of their child starting school was suggested as one way of raising awareness of what is required to prepare children for school.

“If a child was determined to not be ready I think that there should be some sort of programs or system in place for parents to understand what it is that determines school readiness, ‘cos maybe we don’t all have that understanding and then to bring their children back to that skill level, they may need assistance to do that. Maybe they don’t understand how to teach those things or understand those things.”

Respondents expressed the need for a public funded system available to all children which was intended to facilitate the child’s transition to school. Other alternatives that were suggested were the option to repeat Primary or a graduated entry system for children whose birth date fell between September and December.

**Research Question 5: What specific skills did participants think indicated a child was ready for school?**

The specific skills which participants thought indicated a child’s readiness for school fell into three main themes: a) academic readiness (also includes listening, attention, problem solving) b) social readiness (turn taking, communicating, interacting) c) independent self readiness.

Respondents across all groups emphasised the importance of a child being able to listen and having developed an attention span. This was considered an indicator that the child is ready to learn by listening to information or by observing material. Some perceived the ability to demonstrate specific academic skills such as being able to print and read as necessary upon entering school.

“An interest in reading and being able to sit down for you know maybe twenty minutes at a time and not necessarily read a book but to be able to

look at the picture, recognise a couple of words, but basically tell you the story and just actually have the interest to sit there and do that for a while.”

“...being able to know their name, print their name, the academics aspect.”

“Academically they need to have an interest in and some experiences related to reading books, knowing that letters are... we make letters, letters make words, words make sentences and sentences make stories. That stories and pictures correlate. They need to know that numbers, the shape of numbers and what these numbers represent in our life in relationship to them.”

Some respondents felt that no matter how academically ready a child is, if they do not possess the social skills to be able to interact with their peers and adults, this would be an indicator that the child is not ready for school.

“...it’s important to be able to interact with peers successfully or at least without too much anxiety as far as being comfortable with speaking with people that are your age.”

“Social, a part of it has to be their intrinsic motivation to want to be in that educational setting and relating to their peers and relating to their individual

teacher and to the school and the community that the school represents to them.”

Respondents felt that another indicator of whether a child is ready for school is the demonstration of skills which allow the child to function independently of parents or caregivers. By being able to cater to their own needs children assume a role of “self” by being responsible for their own physical and emotional needs.

“[B]eing able to independently get themselves ready. I don’t mean all independent skills but being able to dress themselves, being able to toilet themselves. Ah, to open their lunchbox, open their thermos. Eat their lunch without someone reminding them constantly...”

“being able to be responsible for your own self and to know to be comfortable in your needs and in your wants and desires.”

The specific skills which participants thought indicated that a child is ready for school were a combination of academic, social and independence skills.

**Research Question 5a: Which skills did participants feel were most important for success in school?**

The skills which participants felt were most important for success in school fell into three themes: a) social b) academic (also includes verbal and reading) c) behaviour ( includes independence).

Parents, early childhood educators and grade primary teachers, almost unanimously perceived that social skills were one of the most important skills required to be successful in school. Some participants commented that a child who cannot interact with peers and teachers will not be able to sit and focus, and, in turn, more academic learning will not take place.

“I think their social skills are extremely important. I think those are key.”

“ If you have socially appropriate behaviours you have less struggles in the school from an early age and you can also form relationships with your teachers which is a powerful thing to have.”

“I know a lot of people base the success on the school readiness skills academically. But if a child is not socially ready it can be detrimental to the child because if they are not socially ready to be in school then it can affect them academically obviously.”

Some participants could not identify one particular skill as being responsible for school success, feeling that the different skills were interrelated and the development of skills such as social/independence/academic were dependent on each other.

“I think they go hand in hand. I cannot pick one that is more important than the other. Obviously academically in order to feel successful and to feel on par socially with their friends, they need to grasp the topics and understand and be able to write and without that, socially they will feel inept, behavioural issues will emerge. Conversely, if socially their not able to relate to their peers then they can’t function academically and again behavioural issues will occur. So I can’t pick one, I’m sorry I can’t pick one I think they have to be all three.”

“Personal skills including dressing, and looking after their belongings, going to the bathroom independently, and exposure to and with print and print materials. Social absolutely. Academic, I think children who have had a lot of exposure to a lot of different materials and a lot of different experiences and a lot of different people are ready to pick up the academic skills.”

Only one parent expressed a belief that reading was the most important skill for success in school stating that “...if you can’t read, it’s hard to do math”. All other respondents perceived that social, academic and behavioural/independence skills are the most important for success in school.

**Research Question 5b: Did participants consider most children to possess these skills on entering school?**

Respondents were in agreement that most children do possess some level of social, academic and independence skills upon entering school and especially if the child has attended some form of day care or preschool. One participant went as far as to say that children who do not experience some form of group setting will suffer as a result.

“In my opinion, if a child enters school after they spend a few years in childcare, in a group setting, most likely they are going to be successful and most likely, the transition is going to be smooth for them but I found that children who spend their preschool years in a very small and kind of sheltered setting like very small groups or even in a family and not in a preschool, they have a hard time with social interaction and quite often with independence also and the routine of the school.”

An early childhood educator did express concern for some children’s lack of acceptable social skills expressing concern as to the impact on their readiness.

“The things that I find are lacking in today’s society are social skills. I think some four and five year-olds have already developed some quite questionable social habits. Either they might have been indulged and not had any rules at home or they just aren’t very polite and that’s sometimes quite shocking at such a young age. And then you get aggressive children who just haven’t been around other kids and don’t know how to be appropriate with them.”

**Research Question 6: Were there specific activities or experiences which participants felt prepared children for school?**

Participants felt that four types of experiences or activities played a role in preparing children for schools. These were: attending a day care formal group setting, play, being read to and participation in organized sports. As previously indicated parents, early childhood educators and grade primary teachers all expressed their belief that attendance or experience with some form of good quality child care or preschool setting best prepared children for the school environment.

“...our daycare has been invaluable for preparing our children for school.”

“It would be an actual preschool setting not just the day care setting because there is a huge difference between day cares and preschool whereas day cares don’t necessarily do the school readiness skills whereas in a preschool setting they do get school readiness.”

Participants from all three groups also highlighted the importance of play in preparing children for school. The importance of play as opposed to engaging children in more structured work during these years was noted by participants from all three groups and especially highlighted by one early childhood educator.

“Free play as opposed to completely always this structure thing.”

Another activity participants felt prepared children for school was being read to during the early years. Participants from all three groups recognised the value of exposing children to books and other forms of literature so as to nurture a love of reading. Participants felt that through reading children are exposed to letters, writing, rhyme, vocabulary, written language and so much more.

“I think being read to is the most important thing that a parent can do because they (children) aren’t in school. And reading many different types of books to them and allowing the child to chime in. And predictable books and exposing them to things like nursery rhymes where they can pick up the rhyme and recognize patterns in language.”

“Definitely lots of reading because reading good quality children’s literature helps them to become better readers themselves. Exposure to alphabet, exposure to letters, exposure to words, to written language, lots of pencil work, crafts, art activities, visiting the library.”

Parents alone mentioned that participation in organized sports and other forms of physical activity were considered important experiences for children entering school. Apart from the benefits to physical development, they felt that being part of team activities helped develop social skills.

“Taking him to classes, like swimming classes to help him become more comfortable in new settings with teachers other than who he has known for the last three years, helps him to get use to new environments.”

“Early sports teams, physical activity, sports... swimming.”

One parent and one early childhood educator believed that rather than specific activities, life experiences in general prepare children for school. For example they cited trips to museums and public places as opportunities to learn new things as well as how to behave appropriately.

One parent stated: “every single experience that a child has, that’s functional, that has purpose, helps prepare children for school.” While an early childhood educator expressed that:

“ just experiences in the world, being taken out and about and learning how to be in all different kinds of situations. You know, if you’re at a museum, you act this way, if you are outside on the playground it’s alright to be rough and tumble, and if you’re in a restaurant you need to be quiet. All those different kinds of life experiences are very valuable.”

Based on the experiences of parents, grade primary teachers and early childhood educators, it is perceived that play, both formal and informal is an activity which definitely prepares children for school. Another activity which was cited as having an influence on a child's preparedness for school was attendance at a preschool, specifically one of good quality. Some respondents placed importance on the child being read to so that they in turn become interested in learning to read, as this was considered an important part of preparing for school. Finally the participation in organized sports was considered to play a part in preparing children for school.

**Research Question 7: How relevant did participants feel these experiences were when preparing children for Grade Primary?**

Participants' responses ranged from these experiences being "critical" for preparing children for school to "one and the same". For the most part participants felt that these experiences were "essential" because they "set the foundation for ... lifelong learning".

Respondents were unanimous in valuing the important role that experiences, during the early years, have on preparing children for the next stage.

"Children will become what their environment will allow them to become. A stagnant environment fosters a stagnant child whereby a child who's challenged will continue to want to be challenged, will rise to the challenge."

**Research Question 8: What were participants' opinions on the role of "play" in early childhood development and school readiness?**

Parents, early childhood educators and grade primary teachers all perceived play to have an "extremely important" role as it "is the basis by which children at this age learn". A parent succinctly expressed that "for a three to five year old all they want to do is play so it makes sense that play has big role in the learning process."

From the opinions expressed by participants, two major themes emerged regarding the role of ‘play’ in early childhood development and school readiness. It is considered to a) enhance learning and b) develop imagination. Respondents felt that play is important because it is initiated by the child and is “open ended”. In this way children remain engaged for as long as the activity is of interest to them and so they will be learning at some level throughout. While engaged in “play” the child learns and develops how to communicate and deal with others while refining physical skills. In essence “play” is perceived as impacting all areas of development.

“I think they learn almost everything through play and that is why they stay engaged in it because it is fun.”

“Play? Crucial. It’s preparing for the real world; your children are learning all kinds of skills to deal with other children, to play, to share, a big word...share, share, share; to problem solve, to communicate with other children, communicating with adults, letting people know about their feelings, asking for help.”

In agreement with this some parents also felt that because children have fun while playing, it captures their attention and they remain engaged. During “play” the child explores boundaries, makes mistakes, rethinks and tries different methods and experiences success without adult intervention.

“Play can look like a variety of things. Drawing squares in the sand is play but it is part of cognition and understanding and vision and articulating, storytelling and mathematics. So play is the basis by which children at this age learn.”

“Play can have the goal to teach them something but also to just to have fun, and enjoy life.”

An early childhood educators viewed play as an opportunity for children to become creative and use their imagination but cautioned that it is important to understand what is meant by “play” implying that it can be construed as different things

“I think it’s the most important thing of all. I define as being open-ended, self-initiated, imaginative, and then it can becoming quite complex. If a child has had those kinds of opportunities to play, not structured, not play dates, not being taken to activities after school but real play. I think it’s huge in development and school readiness.”

Not everyone was in agreement that learning through play alone is the only way to prepare children for school. One parent, while agreeing that play does have an important role, cautioned that children need to be able to learn in other ways than just through play.

“So it is important (play) so that they do learn but they also need to be prepared to learn in not so much a play environment.”

Participants perceived “play” to have an “essential” role in early childhood development and school readiness as it is the medium through which children enhance their learning while developing the imagination.

**Research Question 9: Who did participants think should be responsible for preparing children for school?**

Respondents from all groups most commonly noted that parents should be responsible for preparing children for school. Some parents and early childhood educators expanded on that by suggesting a shared responsibility between parent and day care worker. On the other hand one parent felt it was definitely not the responsibility of day care workers.

“Ultimately I think it is the parent’s responsibility.”

“myself and my husband and as well the day care teachers.”

“Parents. A lot of people think that the daycare should be responsible but it’s not.”

One grade primary teacher felt that in order for children from all socioeconomic backgrounds to have an equal opportunity starting school, the government should take a more active role.

“Well if we want them all to come in on a level playing field then I would say it should be the government who should be responsible for the preschool

years. But as it is right now it is the parents and it completely depends on what they can afford and what is available in their area.”

A parent respondent, while agreeing that parents have a role to play in preparing children for school, expanded that role to the greater community of people who are a part of children’s lives.

“All primary caregivers. The parents, the family, day care providers, preschool teachers, a trusted adult in the children’s lives. Doctors and nurses with whom they have regular contact, dentists, other parents in the neighbourhood, parents of their friends, you know. I think they play an integral part.”

Participants thought that parents should be responsible for preparing their children for school however professionals such as early childhood educators and primary caregivers do have a role to play, all be it a supportive one.

**Research Question 10: Did participants feel preschools and pre-primary classes played a role in preparing children for school?**

Participants from all three groups expressed that preschools played a huge role in preparing children for school as they provided opportunities for children to develop curiosity and a love of learning.

One participant felt that all children should be able to access a pre-primary programmes and hoped funding would become available to reinstate them.

“I think about all the money that they put in to the pre-primary programs for across HRM, even just HRM...I mean I was involved in that process and to see all of that time...like how many people were involved...you know...how

much time and effort it took for them to get a curriculum base together and to look at the environment and how much money was spent just putting in to this project and have it all just kind of fade away is really disheartening.”

Parents felt that preschool was the best environment because the professionals who work in that field would have the expertise to encourage children’s development. Parents, in turn, would enhance that development at home. Furthermore parents felt that this offers an opportunity to establish relationships between home and school which will in turn benefit the child.

“My job is to find a place where my daughter is happy and learns well but they are the ones who have all the expertise in developing children and being ready for school. So I think they play a very important role.”

“So significant. I think it might be easier for parents to rely on preschools and pre-primary classes to do that. A relationship in which a parent can come into a preschool class, observe what their children are doing and augment that at home, I think is paramount. That is so critical. And having an incredible relationship with the teaching staff is a valuable asset to any parent preparing their children for school. That being said also the role of teachers ( did I say that, no) the role of teachers and teachers observing how parents interact with their children is also critical in being able to gain experience from that, that will enable them to extract the best outcome from each learning experience. I can’t stress enough the home and school relationship.”

The grade primary teachers emphasized that children who attend preschool usually have a problem free transition to school.

“Well the preschool is crucial I think for all children who are entering primary. I think they should be attending preschool because you can spot the children who went to preschool on the first day of school, you can pinpoint them without even talking to the children...you know who they are...just simple tasks...they can perform simple tasks much easier, they can communicate with their peers easier, the transition from preschool to school is way easier for those children than the rest of them.”

Although parents had previously been identified as the ones responsible for preparing children for school, all respondents to this question felt the preschools and pre-primary classes do have a role to play in preparing children for school.

**Research Question 11: What sources of information pertaining to readying a child for school were participants aware of?**

Participants identified a range of different sources of information on readying a child for school. Almost all their responses fell within three categories: a) networking b) access to print materials c) information from school sources. One source which participants from all groups mentioned was networking with other mothers or through play groups and other centres.

“talk to other parents”

“ networking...mothers talk to each other...that’s a good way”

“In Halifax there’s an early childhood resource centre at St. Josephs College and the Mount has a huge resource centre as part of their child and youth studies program.”

Most parents said they had sought out information through printed matter either from online articles or school board websites. Some had sought information by visiting the library or purchasing books on the topic. Others mentioned reading parenting magazines for information and guidelines on preparing their child for school.

“I know the Halifax Regional School Board has some information on their website.”

“I looked up information on primary readiness for Nova Scotia and I think it was through Nova Scotia government or school...”

Most parents knew that the schools conduct orientation evenings and provide handouts which provide useful information for prospective school parents.

“Well we went to a Primary orientation and we were given hand outs from the school.”

An early childhood educator knew of current sources of information and expressed the need for professionals, in this field, to remain abreast of the latest research on child development and readiness through professional development workshops.

“I think all teachers should be reading constantly about what’s new in the field, what the latest brain research says, the new regulations, methods and approaches. I think a teacher should be reading constantly and keeping herself up-to-date. The educational resources are out there if you go looking for them and certainly the professional development workshops are there both at the Mount and St. Joseph’s and all around the province.”

### **E. Summary**

Participants were divided with regards to whether entry to school should be determined by a cut off date. Participants acknowledge the difficulties in determining when children are ready to start school. Some felt the cut off date approach was acceptable because there has to be some definition to determining who should start school. It was proposed that in conjunction with a cut off date, a graduated entry over the period between September and December would better cater to the children’s readiness. Others expressed a preference to see some kind of readiness assessment in place with the facility to access publicly funded preschools for those children deemed not ready. Finally the option to repeat Primary was expressed.

School readiness was understood to be the attainment of combination of skills such as social, academic, behavioural and independence, all of which were considered interdependent and of importance. It was agreed that these skills were necessary for a child to be able to transition into school successfully. The majority of participants felt that most children did possess these skills upon entering schools, recognising the role of

the environment children had experienced influencing development. Although participants felt the role of readying the child for school is the responsibility of parents, respondents were unanimous in their belief that some form of good quality preschool, day care or pre primary experience was tantamount to readying a child successfully for school. Participants perceived play as having an invaluable role in children's learning during the early years.

Although parents were in agreement that preschools play an important role in readying children for school, they believed that the responsibility of preparing children for school lay with parents. However some parents stated that it is the parent's responsibility to find a good quality day care. They also recognized that qualified early childhood educators play a major role in readying children for school.

## Chapter V

### DISCUSSION

#### **A. Introduction**

The Nova Scotia Department of Education announced, in 2008, its decision to change the cut off date for those children eligible to enter Grade Primary. In effect this meant that four year old children, whose fifth birthday can be up to four months after the school year starts, are eligible to enter Grade Primary. At the same time, it was decided that the pre-primary pilot project would not continue due to lack of funding (Government of Nova Scotia, 2008). Issues surrounding school readiness were once again raised as even younger children became eligible to enter the formal school system and as the publicly funded pre-primary pilot project, which had been deemed successful as a preparatory program, was no longer available. This study considered the perspectives of parents, early childhood educators and grade primary teachers with respect to school readiness in the hope of highlighting current and local issues surrounding school readiness. The timing of this study was appropriate in light of the recent changes and the intention was to involve parents, early childhood educators and grade primary teachers who were indirectly affected by the changes. The ones, who were directly affected, of course, are the children, who are too young to speak for themselves. The information gathered could guide future policies and guidelines as they relate to best practice in early childhood education and transitioning to school for both parents and professionals, but ultimately for the children.

## **B. Emergent Themes**

### **i. Understandings of School Readiness**

Participants from all three groups acknowledged the difficulty of defining simply what they understood the term “school readiness” to mean. There was no real controversy among responses and in general their responses were in keeping with the literature defining school readiness as the point at which children have attained specific skills which enable them to be successful participants in the formal school system. ( May, Kundert, Nikoloff, Welch, Garrett, & Brent, 1994). Most respondents believed that a cut off date was the most logical way of determining when children should start school but acknowledged that not all children are at the same level of readiness by a specific age. The wide variations in the development of children during the early years was identified and considered to be reflected in the complexity of school readiness. However, parents and teachers described the demonstration of specific skills sets such as social, academic and behavioural as indicators of readiness for school. This was consistent with the literature which goes further by saying that the development of these personal skills must be accompanied by an eagerness to learn (Magnuson & Waldfogel, 2005). From my personal experience, I believe that a child is born with an intrinsic desire to learn, which is nurtured or diminished depending on the life experiences, such as parenting and environment, during the early years.

Participants’ responses were consistent among groups and with the literature when identifying the social skills indicative of readiness (e.g. turn taking, sharing, communicating with peers and teacher). Some parents and educators acknowledged the interdependency of social and behavioural skills. They expressed the importance of the

child being able to “sit and listen” and be attentive to their own personal needs in order to be socially accepted by their peers. This theme is supported by literature which goes further by saying that social skills must be developed to foster the maturity of the child’s mind, which has a significant effect on their early academic achievements (Fantuzzo, Bulotsky-Shearer, McDermott, McWayne, Frye, & Perlman, 2007). However when asked what specific skills participants felt influenced success in school, parents tended to consider that academic skills are also necessary. Parents perceived abilities such as “knowing and recognizing the alphabet”, number strategies, and early reading skills as necessary tools for their child’s success. This focus, by parents, on a proficiency in academic skills as a preparedness for school, has emerged recently (Pianta & LaParo, 2003). These findings could be a reflection of the demographic nature of the parents who participated as all reported having completed some form of tertiary education with the highest level attained being a Doctorate.

On the other hand, the early childhood educators, from a professional standpoint, believed social and behavioural skills to be important but in practice they bowed to parental pressure and focused on the development of academic skills to prepare children for school. The grade primary teachers focused more on the child being independent and socially adept as they entered the primary level. They believe their role is to transition the children to more academic and teacher directed learning. This finding is in keeping with recent literature which found that teachers believed the development of independence to be an invaluable prerequisite for early school success (King & Boardman, 2006).

Participants’ perceptions were to a large extent in keeping with previous research acknowledging the complexity of defining school readiness. However emergent themes

were that development of social and behavioural skills were imperative precursors to preparedness for school and indicative of success in learning. Educators believe that these skills sets will enable children to transition comfortably to developing academic skills. The parents, for the most part, felt the academic skills need to be in place in order for the child to be successful upon entering school.

## **ii Readyng the child for school**

Previous research examined the role of preparing the child for school from three angles, namely the parent's role, the early childhood educator's role and finally the role of the school. This study found that respondents expressed a belief that the responsibility of preparing the child for school lies with the parent. However, as all of the parents involved were in the work force they relied upon the expertise of early childhood educators at the day care centres to assist in preparing their child for school. Parent's perceived their role as being responsible for finding a centre, which advocated for a good quality program. They also believed it was necessary for parents and early childhood educators to be on the same page with respect to development of social and behavioural skills. Early childhood educators perceived their role to be supportive of parents not a replacement for parents. There was evidence to suggest that early childhood educators found difficulty in adhering to what they had learned and believed were the developmental goals in early childhood by succumbing to parental pressure and adopting a more teacher directed role in order to develop academic skills. Grade primary teachers perceived the role of preparing the child for school to be shared between the parent and the early childhood educator. With respect to younger children coming into the school setting they believed

there was even more need for children to have been a part of a pre primary program if they are expected to maintain the academic goals of the primary level.

Although the findings of this study were in tune with the literature in identifying the need for collaboration between parent and early childhood educators in preparing children for school, interestingly no one spoke of the need for a partnership between early childhood educators and grade primary teachers. Dockett and Perry (2003) found that when opportunities for early childhood educators and grade primary teachers to communicate are common practice, this serves to enhance the transitioning process. I have experienced this in practice during recent visits to a nursery school in Scotland where for more than twenty years a publically funded “foundation stage” program has been available. These programs are commonly located within the school grounds allowing for open and two way communications between early childhood educators and teachers. In this way transition to the more formal school setting is a natural progression rather than a huge step into an unknown void.

This study did reveal that participants valued the role that participation in a preschool or pre primary program had on readying children for school but in contrast to other developed countries, Canada lags behind. For the role of early childhood education as setting the groundwork for future learning has only recently been embraced here (Friendly, 2006). Participants did express a need for government to support and provide access to a pre primary program. However as the participants were drawn from privately funded facilities, they have the financial where with all, by their own admission, to provide their children with good quality early childhood education. Concern must be for

those children whose parents cannot afford to access these facilities and with no provincial policy in place to provide for their needs surely the gap will continue to widen.

### **iii Developmentally Appropriate Practice**

The value of “play” as a developmentally appropriate way of learning during the early years was identified. Many participants from all three groups acknowledged that when the child is engaged in play they are learning and developing without the direct intervention of adults. However this does not mean that “play” should be unattended. Rather it is the adult’s role to be present and attentive to the child’s needs by creating a atmosphere conducive to play and by being a subtle part of that environment. Respondents agreed that as “play” is initiated by the child, they become absorbed and remain engaged for as long as they feel the need. Even when daily routines interrupt “play” a child will often return to that activity time and again to satisfy an intrinsic need. Only when the child feels satisfied will they move on naturally to another activity. This was perceived by participants as the way in which the children learn during the early years. Also mentioned was that “play” is a necessary part of developing imagination which in turn enhances the growth of the mind. This maturity is identified in the literature as being a necessary precursor to academic learning so in a roundabout way academic learning does occur when children are engaged in “play” (Cassidy, Mims, Rucker, & Boone, 2003).

In practice and from my own personal experience, education of parents and professionals, in the value and learning opportunities presented during “play” is imperative. All efforts to dispel beliefs that “play” is a useless pastime must be made and

replaced with an understanding that “play”, in a nurturing environment, is a necessary function of future success in learning.

### **C. Recommendations**

#### **i. Research**

1. The study was not without its limitations; however, it did expose a need for further research on the subject of “school readiness” in light of the fact that the change in the cut off date in effect sees younger children eligible to enter the school system in the Halifax Regional Municipality.
2. Further research should involve larger numbers of participants in all three groups represented. In this way a greater representation of the population would be heard. This in turn allows for repetition and replication of perceptions adding strength to emerging themes.
3. Due to time constraints, the current study drew parents and grade primary teachers from independent schools. Future research must consider the perceptions of parents and grade primary teachers in the public system as this is necessary to completely evaluate perceptions of school readiness.
4. The schools and day care centres that participated were all located in the and around the city of Halifax. Participation of schools and child care centres in rural areas would enhance the understanding of differences which may or may not exist between parents, early childhood educators and grade primary teachers in rural areas as opposed to urban areas.

5. As the participants in this study came from privately funded establishments it is assumed that there was no representation from those in the lower socio economic groups. It is essential that future research must focus on the perceptions of this group in order to give a voice to those who exist at both ends of the social spectrum.
6. The province of Nova Scotia encompasses a diverse population which includes African Nova Scotians, First Nations and other ethnic groups. Any research should endeavour to establish what the perceptions of school readiness are that exist within these groups. This would provide a platform for cultural differences to be highlighted and in turn catered for.
7. Future research could employ focus groups as a way of generating greater dialogue by reaching a broader base of people.

## **ii. Policy**

8. Further research would serve to inform and advise both Municipal and Provincial governments on future policies surrounding early childhood education and the long term effect on society. Such research could be used to support social policy changes.
9. In order that all children enter school on a level playing field, there is a need to develop, at the early childhood level, stronger and more detailed guidelines for programme content. Such guidelines should emphasise the importance of creating an environment where children are able to learn through “play”. Legislation would ensure that all children irrespective of socio economic or cultural background have access to these programmes.

10. Government must make available the funding necessary to carry out the research, establish guidelines and programming and implement these at a provincial level.

11. The production and distribution of a pamphlet discussing issues and uncertainties surrounding school readiness would serve to educate parents whose children are eligible for entry to school in future years rather than waiting until the months immediately before the child starts school.

### **iii. Parents and Educators**

12. The current study exposed a lack of understanding of the meaning of “learning through play” as occurs in the early years. Therefore there is a need to clearly express the meaning of “play” and to promote it as a valuable part of the learning process at this point in development. This could be achieved through some form of parental education over a sustained period of time.

13. The literature suggests that parents and some educators consider early school success is achieved by focussing on academic skills. Parents and educators should be encouraged to put less emphasis on academics and instead adopt a more holistic approach in preparing children for school.

14. The current study found that participants unanimously identified parents as the ones responsible for preparing children for school. However in these post modern times lifestyle shift sees more children cared for outside of the home by someone other than their parents. Parents should be encouraged and supported in their role by being able to be more involved in their children’s early development.

**iv. Educators**

15. Early childhood educators and grade primary teachers have a supporting role to play. Through professional development they should have the opportunity to enhance their own development. This will serve to enhance their understanding of school readiness and the importance of “play”.

16. Early childhood educators and grade primary teachers have a role to play in educating families by sharing their knowledge with them. This knowledge should be put into practice through establishing best practice facilities. This can be achieved through familiarity with and belief in developmentally appropriate practices.

17. Professionals working with young children should continue to engage in reflective practice. This will ensure that they present programmes that meet the needs of all children.

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APPENDIX A  
**Interview Schedule**

## INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Beginning September 2008, the Nova Scotia school system accepted all children for Grade Primary whose fifth birthdays were before December 31st. This was a change from previous years where October 1<sup>st</sup> was the cut off date. This change has generated some discussion regarding when children are ready to begin school.

1. In your opinion, should beginning school be determined by a child's age at a specific cut off date? (If only yes/no response) Why or Why not?
2. Could you share with me your understanding of how children learn and develop during the early years?
3. What is your understanding of the term "school readiness".
4. Based on your experience, how can we tell if a child is ready for school?
  - a. Who should determine whether a child is ready for school?
  - b. What alternatives are you aware of for children who are not ready?
  - c. What alternatives would you like to see available for children who are not ready?
5. What specific skills do you think indicate that a child is ready for school?
  - a. Of the skills you mentioned, which ones do you consider most important for success in school? (If academic/social/behavioural skills are not mentioned, ask participants of their role)
  - b. In your opinion do most children possess these skills when they enter school? (If academic/social/behavioural skills not noted, ask participants their relevance)

6. Based on your experience, are there specific activities or experiences that seem to prepare children for school?
7. How relevant are these experiences when preparing children for Grade Primary?
8. In your opinion, what is the role of “play” in early childhood development and school readiness?
9. Who do you think should be responsible for preparing children for school?
10. What role, if any, do preschools and pre-primary classes play in preparing children for school?
11. Are you aware of any sources of information pertaining to readying a child for school? Do you know where to access such information?

## APPENDIX B

### Demographic Information

**Demographic Information****Parent/Guardian Form**

Please complete the following:

1. Gender      Male \_\_\_\_\_

                    Female \_\_\_\_\_

2. Age:        Under 25 \_\_\_\_\_

                    25-35 \_\_\_\_\_

                    36-45 \_\_\_\_\_

                    46-55 \_\_\_\_\_

                    Over 55 \_\_\_\_\_

3. Ethnicity:    Caucasian \_\_\_\_\_

                    First Nations \_\_\_\_\_

                    African Nova Scotian \_\_\_\_\_

                    Other \_\_\_\_\_

4. Number of children in your household: \_\_\_\_\_

5. Your current occupation: \_\_\_\_\_

6. Highest level of education obtained:

                    High School Diploma \_\_\_\_\_

                    Community College Diploma/Certificate \_\_\_\_\_

                    Bachelor's degree \_\_\_\_\_

                    Master's Degree \_\_\_\_\_

                    Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**Demographic Information**  
**Grade Primary Teacher Form**

Please complete the following:

1. Gender:    Male \_\_\_\_\_  
                  Female \_\_\_\_\_
2. Age:        Under 25 \_\_\_\_\_  
                  25-35 \_\_\_\_\_  
                  36-45 \_\_\_\_\_  
                  46-55 \_\_\_\_\_  
                  Over 55 \_\_\_\_\_
3. Ethnicity:    Caucasian \_\_\_\_\_  
                  First Nations \_\_\_\_\_  
                  African Nova Scotian \_\_\_\_\_  
                  Other \_\_\_\_\_
4. Years of teaching experience: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Teaching Certification Level: \_\_\_\_\_
6. Highest level of education obtained:  
                  Teacher's College Certificate \_\_\_\_\_  
                  Bachelor's degree \_\_\_\_\_  
                  Master's Degree \_\_\_\_\_  
                  Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**Demographic Information****Early Childhood Educator Form**

Please complete the following:

1. Gender:    Male \_\_\_\_\_  
                  Female \_\_\_\_\_
2. Age:        Under 25 \_\_\_\_\_  
                  25-35 \_\_\_\_\_  
                  36-45 \_\_\_\_\_  
                  46-55 \_\_\_\_\_  
                  Over 55 \_\_\_\_\_
3. Ethnicity:    Caucasian \_\_\_\_\_  
  
                  First Nations \_\_\_\_\_  
  
                  African Nova Scotian \_\_\_\_\_  
  
                  Other \_\_\_\_\_
4. Years of teaching experience: \_\_\_\_\_
5. Highest level of education obtained:  
  
                  High School Diploma \_\_\_\_\_  
  
                  Private/Community College Diploma/Certificate \_\_\_\_\_  
  
                  Bachelor's degree \_\_\_\_\_  
  
                  Master's Degree \_\_\_\_\_  
  
                  Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

APPENDIX C

**Letter to Principal/Headmaster of Independent Schools**

(MSVU Letterhead)

Principal/Headmaster of Independent School

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Bernadette Fegan and I am a graduate student in the Master of Arts Child and Youth Study Programme at Mount Saint Vincent University. I am writing to you as a follow up to our recent telephone conversation regarding a research study for my graduate thesis entitled "Grade Primary Teachers', Early Childhood Educators' and Parents' Perceptions of School Readiness". This research will investigate the perceptions of grade Primary teachers, early childhood educators and parents in regards to school readiness. Information gained from this study may be used to better understand the beliefs guiding those involved in transitioning children into Grade Primary and to gain insight into what skills participants feel are most important for school readiness.

I am requesting permission to carry out this study at your school. If permission is given you will be contacted to discuss the study and ascertain the number of eligible teachers and parents at your school. I require you to distribute research packages to potential participants.

Each package will contain:

- 1) a letter explaining the purpose of the study, responsibilities of participants and researcher, and outlining participants' rights;
- 2) a demographic survey seeking information such as participants' gender, age range, education, and teaching experience;
- 3) an informed consent form;
- 4) a return envelope.

I will arrange a convenient time to drop off and collect research packages for potential participants. I am also requesting that you permit me to conduct one-on-one interviews at your daycare/school if participants request.

Those eligible, who are willing to be interviewed, must complete the enclosed consent form and place it in the envelope with the completed demographic form. Early childhood educators randomly selected for an interview will be contacted by the researcher to arrange a time and place for the interview that is convenient for them. All others will be contacted and thanked for their willingness to participate. Audiotapes of interviews will be numerically coded and destroyed upon completion of the thesis. All data will be stored in a secured location in the researcher's office. The results of this study will be presented as group data and no individual participants will be identified. Quotes from interviews may be used in future publications and presentations to illustrate themes arising from the data, however, no names or identifying information will be reported.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and participants may decline to participate or withdraw, at any time, from this study. Those who do participate may skip or decline to respond to any questions that they are uncomfortable answering. All information obtained in this study strictly confidential and anonymous.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me at [REDACTED] ([bernadette.fegan@msvu.ca](mailto:bernadette.fegan@msvu.ca)) or my thesis supervisor Dr. Carmel French at (902) 457-6187 ([carmel.french@msvu.ca](mailto:carmel.french@msvu.ca)). This research activity has met the ethical standards of the University Research Ethics Board at Mount Saint Vincent University. If you have any questions or concerns about this study and wish to speak with someone who is not directly involved with this study, you may contact the University Research Ethics Board by phone at (902) 457-6350 or by email at [research@msvu.ca](mailto:research@msvu.ca).

Thank you for considering my research project. It is my hope that this research will advance our current knowledge of school readiness. I will contact you in the near future to follow-up.

Sincerely,

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Bernadette C. Fegan  
Graduate Student  
Mount Saint Vincent University

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Dr Carmel French  
Department of Child and Youth St  
Mount Saint Vincent University

**APPENDIX D**  
**Letter to Director/Owner of Non Profit/Private Day Care Centre**

(MSVU Letterhead)

Director/Owner of Non Profit/Private Day Care Centre

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Bernadette Fegan and I am a graduate student in the Master of Arts Child and Youth Study Programme at Mount Saint Vincent University. I am writing to you as a follow up to our recent telephone conversation regarding a research study for my graduate thesis entitled "Grade Primary Teachers', Early Childhood Educators' and Parents' Perceptions of School Readiness". This research will investigate the perceptions of grade Primary teachers, early childhood educators and parents regarding school readiness. Information gained from this study may be used to better understand the beliefs guiding those involved in transitioning children into Grade Primary and to gain insight into what skills participants feel are most important for school readiness.

I am requesting permission to carry out this study at your centre. If permission is given you will be contacted to discuss the study and ascertain the number of eligible early childhood educators and parents at your centre. I request your cooperation in distributing research packages to potential participants.

Each package will contain:

- 1) a letter explaining the purpose of the study, responsibilities of participants and researcher, and outlining participants' rights;
- 2) a demographic survey seeking information such as participants' gender, age range, education, and teaching experience;
- 3) an informed consent form;
- 4) a return envelope.

I will arrange a convenient time to drop off and collect research packages for potential participants. I am also requesting that you permit me to conduct one-on-one interviews at your centre if participants request.

Those eligible, who are willing to be interviewed, must complete the enclosed consent form and place it in the envelope with the completed demographic form. Early childhood educators and parents randomly selected for an interview will be contacted by the researcher to arrange a time and place for the interview that is convenient for them. All others will be contacted and thanked for their willingness to participate. Audiotapes of interviews will be numerically coded and destroyed upon completion of the thesis. All data will be stored in a secured location in the researcher's office. The results of this study will be presented as group data and no individual participants will be identified. Quotes from interviews may be used in future publications and presentations to illustrate themes arising from the data, however, no names or identifying information will be reported.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and participants may decline to participate or withdraw, at any time, from this study. Those who do participate may skip or decline to respond to any questions that they are uncomfortable answering. All information obtained in this study strictly confidential and anonymous.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me at ( [REDACTED] ) ([bernadette.fegan@msvu.ca](mailto:bernadette.fegan@msvu.ca)) or my thesis supervisor Dr. Carmel French at (902) 457-6187 ([carmel.french@msvu.ca](mailto:carmel.french@msvu.ca)). This research activity has met the ethical standards of the University Research Ethics Board at Mount Saint Vincent University. If you have any questions or concerns about this study and wish to speak with someone who is not directly involved with this study, you may contact the University Research Ethics Board by phone at (902) 457-6350 or by email at [research@msvu.ca](mailto:research@msvu.ca).

Thank you for considering my research project. It is my hope that this research will advance our current knowledge of school readiness. I will contact you in the near future to follow-up.

Sincerely,

---

Bernadette C. Fegan  
Graduate Student  
Mount Saint Vincent University

---

Dr Carmel French  
Department of Child and Youth St  
Mount Saint Vincent University

APPENDIX E  
**Letter to Participant**

(MSVU Letterhead)

Grade Primary Teacher/Early Childhood Educator/ Parent

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

My name is Bernadette Fegan and I am a graduate student in the Master of Arts Child and Youth Study Programme at Mount Saint Vincent University. I am writing to you regarding a research study for my graduate thesis entitled "Grade Primary Teachers', Early Childhood Educators' and Parents' Perceptions of School Readiness". This research will investigate the perceptions of Grade Primary teachers, early childhood educators and parents regarding school readiness. Information gained may be used to better understand the beliefs guiding those involved in transitioning children into Grade Primary and to gain insight into what skills participants feel are most important.

I am inviting you to participate in this research by completing the demographic information form and the Free and Informed Consent Form agreeing to be interviewed, sealing these in the enclosed envelope and returning it to the school/centre administrator.

All participants are being asked to complete the enclosed demographic form, which should take approximately five minutes. The demographic survey is designed to gather personal information such as gender, age, education, and work experience. This information will be used to identify commonalities among participants that seem to influence their perceptions of school readiness.

The interview session will be audio taped, take approximately 30-40 minutes, and should provide greater insight into educators' and parents' beliefs regarding preparing children for formal schooling. Participants randomly selected for an interview will be contacted by the researcher to arrange a time and place for the interview that is convenient for them. All others will be contacted and thanked for their willingness to participate.

Audiotapes of interviews will be numerically coded and destroyed upon completion of the thesis. All data will be stored in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's office. The results of this study will be presented as group data and no individual participants will be identified. Quotes from interviews may be used in future publications and presentations to illustrate themes arising from the data, however, no names or identifying information will be reported.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and participants may decline to participate or withdraw, at any time, from this study. Those who do participate may skip or decline to respond to any questions that they are uncomfortable answering. All information obtained in this study will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me at [REDACTED] ([Bernadette.fegan@msvu.ca](mailto:Bernadette.fegan@msvu.ca)) or my thesis supervisor Dr. Carmel French at (902) 457-6187 ([carmel.french@msvu.ca](mailto:carmel.french@msvu.ca)). This research activity has met the ethical standards of the University Research Ethics Board at Mount Saint Vincent University. If you have any questions or concerns about this study and wish to speak with someone who is not directly involved with this study, you may contact the University Research Ethics Board by phone at (902) 457-6350 or by email at [research@msvu.ca](mailto:research@msvu.ca).

Thank you for considering my research project. It is my hope that this research will advance our current knowledge of school readiness. I will contact you in the near future to follow-up.

Sincerely,

---

Bernadette C. Fegan  
Graduate Student  
Mount Saint Vincent University

---

Dr Carmel French  
Department of Child and Youth Study  
Mount Saint Vincent University

APPENDIX F

**Free and Informed Consent Form**

## FREE AND INFORMED CONSENT FORM

**Thesis Title:** *Grade Primary Teachers, Early Childhood Educators and Parents' Perceptions of School Readiness*

**Thesis Student:** *Bernadette Fegan*

I am a graduate student in the Department of Child and Youth Study at Mount Saint Vincent University. As part of my Master of Arts requirement, I am conducting research under the supervision of Dr. Carmel French. I am inviting you to participate in my study, *Grade Primary Teachers', Early Childhood Educators' and Parents' Perceptions of School Readiness*. The purpose of this study is to examine your perceptions regarding school readiness.

This study requires participants to complete a demographic questionnaire, and an interview. The interview will be recorded and will take approximately 30-40 minutes to complete. The results of this study will be presented in group data only, and no individual participants will be identified. Quotes from the interviews may be used in the thesis and in future publications and presentations to illustrate important findings. Quotes will not be accompanied by any identifying information.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You may decline to respond to any questions that you may be uncomfortable answering, and are free to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

Every effort will be made to maintain participants' confidentiality. Although interviews will be taped, the researcher will not identify participants by name on the recordings. Tapes and transcripts will be coded using a number system so as to ensure that participant anonymity is maintained. In the event that names, such as family members or coworkers are mentioned during the interview, they will be omitted from the transcripts, and therefore from quotations that may be used. The demographic questionnaires will also remain anonymous, and will be used only as a means of contextualizing data. Individuals' statements will not be linked with their own demographic information. No individual participants will be identified without their permission.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me at (██████████) or my thesis supervisor Dr. Carmel French at (902) 457-6187 ([carmel.french@msvu.ca](mailto:carmel.french@msvu.ca)). This research activity has met the ethical standards of the University Research Ethics Board at Mount Saint Vincent University. If you have any questions or concerns about this study and wish to speak with someone who is not directly involved with this study, you may contact the University Research Ethics Board by phone at (902) 457-6350 or by email at [research@msvu.ca](mailto:research@msvu.ca).

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**By signing this consent form, you are indicating that you fully understand the above information and agree to participate in this study.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Participant's signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Researcher's signature**

\_\_\_\_\_  
**Date**

*One signed copy to be kept by the researcher and one signed copy to the participant.*