

Preschool and Kindergarten Teacher's
Views on School Readiness:
A Comparison
between Silkeborg, Denmark
and Truro, Nova Scotia

Jenny Gillis
Mount Saint Vincent University

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Abstract

The question of which skills children should possess upon entrance into the public school system has been a topic of much debate for decades (Elkind, 2006; Katz, 1996). Due to beliefs and values held by many individuals in North American society, parents often feel pressured to help their children have an edge over other children when it comes to academics and therefore feel the need to expose their children to academic materials from a very young age. Other parents, however, feel that children are best prepared for a successful transition into kindergarten by having lots of opportunity to play, explore and be creative in their formative years. These divergent views often place early childhood educators in a difficult position. They must decide how they will help foster children's growth and development based on what they have learned, what they believe to be true, what they feel parents are looking for in terms of early learning experiences, and which skills teachers expect children to possess when they enter kindergarten.

Therefore, this research looks at preschool and kindergarten teachers' views on school readiness in Silkeborg, Denmark and Truro, Nova Scotia. It explored the notion that teachers' perception of readiness can, and do vary, depending on the beliefs and values held by the society in which the teacher lives. It also takes a look into what teachers feel is currently working within their respective settings, how much support they feel they are receiving, and where they would like to see change. Preschool and kindergarten teachers in both communities were sent research packages via their principal or director. Each package contained: 1) a letter outlining the purpose

of the research, 2) a demographic survey, 3) a School Readiness Surveys, 4) a consent form to complete if they were willing to participate in an individual interview, and 5) a return envelope. Approximately 60% (n = 93) of the surveys were returned. Eight teachers were interviewed, two preschool teachers and two kindergarten teachers from each community for a total of eight.

Results from the survey analysis and the interviews were consistent, indicating few differences by professional group but philosophical and functional differences between responses from teachers in Silkeborg in comparison to teachers in Truro. It appears that both preschool and kindergarten teachers in Silkeborg feel relatively well supported and content. They have a holistic view of children and feel it is their responsibility to keep children engaged in learning. They believe in preschool teachers, teachers parents and communities working together to help make a child's transition into school run smoothly. Conversely, teachers in Truro felt substantially under resourced and often unsupported. They struggle to maintain balance between academics and other skills related to the overall well-being of the child such as social skills, independence and emotional competence. Developmentally appropriate practice seemed to be well understood and often talked about, but not always practiced.

Teachers in Truro indicated that they would like to see more support provided to them from their respective government departments. In-service training opportunities should be offered on topics such as developmentally appropriate practice so as to raise the general public awareness regarding how children learn, and therefore lead to a broader understanding of which skills are most valuable for children to possess upon entrance into the public school system.

Personal Reflection

In 1996, I had the opportunity to be a nanny in Miami, Florida for a year. While there, I met a Danish girl with whom I instantly became friends. She was a nanny there as well, studying child studies part-time at a university back home in Denmark. Because of our similar interests and comparable backgrounds, we had many long and detailed conversations about childcare, philosophies, educational priorities and methods of teaching. This Danish girl was in her second year of child studies and had an opportunity to do a practicum at a childcare center abroad. Since I was the assistant director of a small preschool here in Nova Scotia at the time, we thought that this would be a golden opportunity for us to discuss even further how our countries compared and contrasted when child care was the issue at hand. So, from February until July of 2002, a preschool in Bedford, Nova Scotia, had the fortune to welcome this Danish girl aboard.

My friend had stated to me on many occasions that our preschool system here was much more rigid and structured than the preschools she had known in Denmark. Once she had begun her practicum, she began to notice what she felt were drastic differences between this Nova Scotia preschool and the centers where she had worked in the past. Everything from the set-up of the program to the daily routine, the teaching methods to the emphasis on primary readiness, all were seen as being starkly different when comparing Canada to Denmark. She noted that although they did do many of the same activities as we did, there was no set time or place where these activities had to occur. Snack, she said, could be eaten whenever the child was hungry. Craft supplies were always left out and children were rarely told what they needed to make using these supplies. Cut and paste activities were virtually unheard of as were printing and math activity sheets. The preschool day in Denmark was basically described to me as being of the child's own choosing, the adults following the lead of the child.

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Chapter I Introduction

A. Introduction

For many years, there has been a debate regarding what skills and knowledge children should have before they enter kindergarten. North American countries have often looked to European countries for ideas on what is best practice, and European countries have looked to Canada and the United States to study their philosophies. Generally speaking, North American preschools have tended to follow a teacher directed approach, use lots of individual pencil and paper type of activities and teach to the whole class. European preschools on the other hand, have tended to use child led or child centered activities, a lot of creative art and movement activities, and they often teach and work within small groups (Katz, 1999).

Here in Nova Scotia, Canada there have been several initiatives introduced within the last couple of years which address early learning on one level or another. For example, the Oxford Learning Program claims to have a unique program to teach children to learn how to learn. Their claim is that through one or two hours a week, children can develop the right skills and habits to succeed. They promote a “Little Readers” program, geared toward children aged three to six and state on their website (www.oxfordlearning.com) that:

“The early learning years are irreplaceable; critical to lifelong success.

Neuroscience tells us that these early years of development are extraordinary and

fleeting. For example, a child's ability to learn a new language or large motor skill such as music or sports rapidly declines after age twelve. Children aged three to six years experience a dramatic rate of growth in the front part of the brain that governs organizational behaviours. Now is the time to take advantage of this critical period to help your child accumulate the basic skills that will carry through a lifetime of learning.”

They continue to suggest that early learners flourish in school and in fact, note that “studies show that 25% of children arrive for their first day of school lacking the skills they need to begin a lifetime of learning.” There is no reference to which studies they are referring.

Sylvan Learning Centre offers similar programs designed with the preschool aged child in mind. Named the pre-primary reading program and academic camps, these programs aim to give children a head-start in school and prepare them for a lifetime of learning by focusing on things such as phonetics, letter recognition and listening comprehension. While they do note that it is appropriate for children as young as four years old to not show signs of being interested in this type of program, the fact that they are even offering the program assumes that they feel it is worthwhile, valuable and appropriate for some children.

In October 2005, a pre-primary pilot program was launched in Nova Scotia. It assumed that this program would emphasize the push on learning for increasingly

younger children. According to the Nova Scotia Government Website release

(www.gov.ns.ca/news):

“Research shows a high-quality pre-school program fosters a positive attitude toward learning, gives youngsters a strong educational foundation, and makes them better prepared for public school. The Pre-Primary Education Act will give the Minister of Education the statutory authority to pilot a pre-school program for children under the age of six in each of the province's eight school boards over the next two years. The program is in 19 schools beginning this school year and is voluntary and free of charge. Each pilot site will offer a full-day, activity-based program for up to 18 children. Emphasis will be on developing social skills and acquiring the foundation skills children need to read, write and learn mathematics.”

These types of programs have sparked a great deal of discussion in the Early Childhood Community, largely surrounding the notion that we are becoming an increasingly academic society and pushing children into structured learning far too early. This is potentially worrisome due the fact that research shows that some problems have arisen as a result of using a teacher directed approach that emphasizes readiness and also as a result of the polarity in what it is felt children should know.

Many parents feel pressure to make their children “ready” for kindergarten. Some kindergarten teachers in local areas have noted that they feel children are coming

to school without essential social and adaptive skills. While children in highly structured academic preschool programs may do okay in areas such as reading and math skills once they enter school, they tend to have difficulties in solving problems independently and their self-help skills tend to lag behind others (Dunn & Kontos,1997). On the other hand, kindergarten teachers in some European countries have expressed that they feel children are lacking in cognitive or academic skills, along with an ability to concentrate. While these children may get along well with one another for the most part and they tend to be fairly independent, it is felt that they do not come adequately prepared for a more structured learning environment (Jacobson, 2000).

Lally (2005) writes about the differences he noted in the way that societies define the basic rights of their youngest citizens. In speaking with professionals from countries in Europe, Australia and New Zealand, he noted that it was commonly felt that children need to be viewed as citizens in their own right and not just the property of their parents. Early learning experiences and child care should not be viewed as a place where someone looks after your child while you are out doing other things, it should be seen as an “opportunity for intellectual, social and emotional learning for the sake of the infant’s or toddler’s experience in the present moment” (p.46) instead of getting children ready for a subsequent part of their lives. He feels that when a community believes in the intrinsic importance of early childhood, this belief is reflected in every aspect of early childhood services. North America, according to this author, may have a robust economy, but its children are suffering because quality care is largely absent.

There is currently no national child care system in Canada. The Liberal Government signed an agreement with the provinces promising to finance a national child-care program to the level of five billion dollars for five years and six billion for the following five years. When a new Conservative government came into power shortly thereafter, fronted by Prime Minister Stephen Harper, this agreement was scrapped and instead replaced with a taxable grant of \$1200.00 provided for each child under age six, allowing parents to use it towards covering costs of the child-care option that best suits the needs of the family. This has sparked debate amongst interested individuals, but we are still no further ahead when it comes to having a national child care system. In an article published in The Chronicle Herald in February 2007, Marguarite Keeley, spokeswoman for “Code Blue for Child Care”(a coalition calling for a national child-care system) says:

"Canada desperately needs a child-care plan and funding to back it up. We are at the bottom of the heap among developed nations when it comes to child care. Harper seems intent on keeping us there. His first act as prime minister was to cancel federal-provincial child-care deals that laid the groundwork for a real child-care system. A year later, we're seeing what happens to families when a prime minister doesn't play fair and doesn't do his homework."

As can be seen from this quote, there is a certain amount of distain among supporters of a National childcare system for current Canadian government when it comes to the issue

of what has been done and has yet to be done towards establishing an effective national childcare system for Canadians.

B. Statement of the Problem

Differences in preschool curriculum philosophies and between many European and North American countries seem to have lead to an uncertainty as to what preschool aged children should be learning to help them be successful upon entrance into kindergarten. Essential skills for kindergarten readiness remain open to debate, especially when taking into account cultural differences and varying societal beliefs. Therefore, the primary purpose of this study is to explore attitudes regarding school readiness from the perspective of preschool and kindergarten teachers in Truro, Nova Scotia and Silkeborg, Denmark. These locations were chosen as they are geographically similar and are relatively close in population size. A secondary purpose of this research is to gage preschool and teachers' perceptions of best practices when helping children smoothly transition into the public school system.

C. Significance

The aims of this research will be to develop an understanding of what skills each teacher group feels are most important for children to possess upon entrance into kindergarten and to delve deeper into why these skills are felt to be important within each context.

Findings from this study should increase our knowledge of school readiness as current literature does not always reflect readiness factors adequately. Most research illustrates positions following either an academic or play-based approach but does not discuss both sides of this dichotomy simultaneously. Information on this topic as it relates to cross-cultural beliefs and perspectives is also limited. While only two different communities in two different countries are being studied, this research does increase our knowledge of school readiness from the perspective of these two cultures.

Findings from this research also provide insight into preschool and primary teachers' perceptions of predictive factors for early school success as they relate to individual societal beliefs. Their perceptions can be compared with those of experts in the field and used as a basis for discussions regarding school readiness. Knowing teachers' perceptions of school readiness is a starting point for supervisors, families and government to have an open dialogue on this issue. Hopefully, these discussions will lead to a consensus on the concept of school readiness that is governed by knowledge of child development and developmentally appropriate practice. Government documents and preschool/daycare policies should be encouraged to reflect and promote practices that are developmentally appropriate rather than submit to the ever-increasing pressure to begin academics at an earlier age.

D. Definitions

School Readiness: For the purposes of this study, school readiness will refer to the personal skills and resources a child has acquired during early childhood experiences to help him or her successfully adapt and learn within a structured school context.

Kindergarten Teacher/ Primary Teacher: For the purposes of this study, a kindergarten or primary teacher will refer to an individual who teaches children in their first year of the formal school system who teaches in Truro, Nova Scotia or Silkeborg, Denmark and possesses a valid teacher education certificate recognized by the region's corresponding government body.

Preschool Teacher: For the purposes of this study, a preschool teacher will refer to an individual employed by a private or non-profit childcare centre in Truro, Nova Scotia or Silkeborg, Denmark who provides direct care and instruction to children eligible for school in 2007.

Private Child Care Centre: For the purposes of this study, private child care centres will refer to a licensed child care centre which is operated commercially, for profit.

Non-Profit Child Care Centre: For the purposes of this study, non-profit child care will refer to a licensed child care centre operated on a not for profit basis and has a Board of Directors overseeing its operation.

Chapter II

Literature Review

In this chapter, literature relating to school readiness will be reviewed.

Throughout the review, there are two major camps which emerge- a play-based teaching philosophy and an academic teaching philosophy. These two philosophies will be discussed along with factors related to early school success as they relate to the culture within which they arise. The issue of quality will also be discussed as well as early education background information from both Nova Scotia and Denmark.

A. Brain Development and How it Affects Readiness to Learn

Over the past several decades, a large amount of research has been done on early brain development and how it affects the ability to learn. It is largely felt by many that children come into the world eager to learn and that the experiences of the first years of a child's life are fundamental in what kind of adult they will become. Bowman, Donovan and Burns (2000) note that:

“...the first five years of life are a time of enormous growth of linguistic, conceptual, social, emotional and motor competence. Right from birth a healthy child is an active participant in that growth, exploring the environment, learning to communicate, and, in relatively short order, beginning to construct ideas about

how things work in the surrounding world. The pace of learning however will depend on whether and to what extent the child's inclinations to learn encounter and engage supporting environments." (p.1)

Continuing along this line of thought, D'Arcangelo (2003) reports a conversation with neurologist and pediatrician Sally Shaywitz where she stated that:

"The brain is a living dynamic organ that is plastic throughout life. It is always taking in information and refining and reinforcing connections once they're made. But when a child is young, this refining goes on more easily and as a matter of course. You're starting with so many possibilities. It's like a house. Think of it this way. It's much harder to renovate an already standing house than it is to build it right from the start."(p.6)

Many of the efforts to relate brain development to development overall are based on a maturational framework meaning that as certain parts of the brain develop, the child is then able to experience more by way of cognition, motor skills or senses (Johnson, 2000). This may suggest that there are critical periods of development that if a skill is not obtained during which time, the child will be at a loss forever.

Bruer (1998) suggests that when it comes to applying neuro-scientific research to practice, educators and parents need to really understand the research that has been done before jumping to conclusions. He says that the three big ideas regarding rapid

formation of synapses in the very young brain, critical periods of development and enriched environments need to be carefully interpreted by educators and parents. It is true that the first few months of an infants' life show the brain's ability to form synapses far in excess of adults. In fact, he notes that "by age four, synaptic densities have peaked in all brain areas at levels fifty percent above adult levels" (p.15). While Bruer proceeds to tell us that the brain can reorganize itself for learning throughout our lifetimes, it is hard to deny the value of early learning experiences, how they will impact us in our later life and how they help to shape the adult into which we become.

As noted by Quart (2006) a new child-enrichment business has emerged in recent years. She notes:

"The vast giftedness industry has expanded to include such disparate phenomena as the teaching of baby sign language, the IQ testing of toddlers, and the proliferation of video programs like the Baby Einstein series. It reflects a faith that if babies are exposed to enough stimulating multimedia content, typically in tandem with equally stirring classes, bright children can be invented. Parents who press their children to succeed do so in hopes of preparing them for an adulthood of high achievement. Economically anxious, many parents see their children's accomplishments as a sort of insurance against the financial challenges. But with so much competition for everything from preschool to summer camp to college, children must work harder and train more extensively

than ever to out-achieve their equally avid young rivals. It's into this nexus of anxiety and aspiration that these new brainy-baby products have flooded, promising scientifically demonstrated mind enrichment for your children....whose purpose does all of this aggressive early learning serve? The infants inculcated with the early-reading DVDs and flash cards are supposed to deploy their early advantage to get ahead of other reasonably affluent children. For those who can afford them, the DVDs and toys are just the beginning. After all, the educational-toy-and-video industry is a gateway into the larger giftedness culture; it's the start of the voyage on which America shapes its children into champions.

This brings us back to the issue of how we can best prepare children for their futures. Is it helpful to inundate children with early learning materials so that they may potentially gain an academic edge over other children, or should we instead give children more time to play, have fun and be children?

B. Play-Based versus Academic Philosophies

For parents and teachers working with preschool aged children, an age-old question has been what should be taught to preschool children. What knowledge, skills and abilities are thought best to carry into the public school system upon entrance into kindergarten? Certainly, parents and professionals would agree that they all want what is best for children. Everyone wants children to learn what will help them to be healthy, strong and contributing members of society. Although there are those who would

disagree, research has backed up the notion that there is a definite advantage for children who attend preschool versus those who don't in areas such as social skills, academic ability and readiness to learn (Daniels, 1995). We all want children to be eager to learn and to be exposed to a wide variety of knowledge and information, but the question then arises, how should this be done?

There has been a long existing dichotomy between what is now referred to as academic versus play-based preschool classrooms. This polarity has also been referred to as the instructivist versus the constructivist approach where the former reflects a belief that children need to be "taught" what they will learn, and the latter believing that children are active constructors of their own knowledge (Katz, 1999). It is argued that the type of preschool program in which a child is enrolled could contribute to the child having more or less difficulty upon entrance into kindergarten.

Some research brings up the notion that the best way to ensure a child's successful transition into kindergarten is to give them a strong academic background, with the majority of what is taught being on basic readiness skills such as learning letters, numbers, shapes and days of the week. Rimm- Kaufman and Pianta (2000) and French and Song (1998), for example, discuss the fact that due to an increasingly academic kindergarten curriculum, there has been a push down into preschool classrooms suggesting a need to increase the amount of academics taught in the younger

years. Many preschool children are pressured to succeed academically from a very young age.

Jacobson (2000) refers to the preschool population when he states that “young children are more capable than ever before believed” (p.6) and notes the point that while art music and crafts are important, curriculum should focus primarily on reading, math and science. Other comments argued by those presenting the academic approach are that play is wasteful of valuable learning time (Bodrova & Leong, 2003), that children may not otherwise be given the opportunity to be exposed to academic learning opportunities (Katz, 1999) and that it is up to preschools, working together with parents to prepare children for kindergarten in fields such as knowledge of colors and numbers, recognition of shapes, word concepts and various other “basic skills” (Schmitt, 1986).

Others feel that these academic skills are not relevant or necessary for success in kindergarten and rather feel that the important things for a child to learn are more social and adaptive in their nature. Bergen (2001), for example, is a firm believer in the notion that children need ample opportunity to play, be creative and have fun. Children also need to be given lots of uninterrupted playtime so they may form necessary social foundations. This is echoed by Riihela (2002) who adds that children need fewer adult-directed interruptions and more time to work independently and in small groups. Sociality, according to the aforementioned study, originates in children’s play.

C. Skills viewed as important upon kindergarten entry

There are many studies which shed light on what kindergarten teachers feel are important skills for children to possess (Pianta et al, 2003, Espinosa, Thornburg & Mathews, 1997, Willer & Bredekamp, 1990 and Johnson, Gallagher, Cook & Wong, 1995). Pianta et al (2003) and Willer et al (1990) tell us that while teachers certainly value academic skills, they also place strong emphasis on children's social and task oriented skills such as following directions, working independently for short periods of time and working as part of a group. Espinosa et al (1997), on the other hand state that while it is never explicitly stated, kindergarten teachers do certainly hold the belief that children must bring certain skills with them to the school setting in order to be successful. Johnson et al (1995) tell us that kindergarten teachers feel that while academics should certainly never be diminished, getting along with peers and skills of independence are far more important.

These distinctions can be traced back to Piaget (1970) and Vygotsky (1978), both of whom had specific views on optimal, yet interrelated, learning environments for children. Piaget felt that children learned best by doing, by being self-directed and active. Vygotsky, on the other hand, would argue that learning needed to be much more influenced by others in the child's environment such as peers and adults.

Research shows that in some cases, children in classrooms where the curriculum consisted largely of pencil and paper and large group activities became delayed in social abilities. Pianta et. al. (2003) state that there are negative social consequences within strict academic settings. This is supported by Katz (1999), who claims that too many drills will eventually make a child become disinterested in learning. Clark (1996) noted the social risks in overly-academic environments as did Stipek, Feiler, Byler, Ryan, Milburn & Salmon (1998) who believe that there is a negative effect on social pretend play when the focus is too academic. Some say that teachers should, therefore, resist the temptation to include more didactic, academic instruction (Karweit, 1992).

Would it then stand to reason that preschools which are play-based and allow children lots of unstructured free time will show that academic opportunities are lost or at risk of being compromised? An interesting study by French et al (1998) tells us of a Korean preschool classroom where a Vygotskian approach is followed. It is their belief that children need a great deal of adult direction and guidance, and that too many opportunities to play independently will send them to school unprepared. While they feel that an overly-academic program can be inappropriate for young children, they maintain that this does not mean that cognitive skills should not be built through teacher-directed activities. Essential cognitive functions, they feel, will not be developed unless a teacher-directed approach is employed.

Academics and play should not have to be mutually exclusive. Social and cognitive learning can, and should, both occur in a classroom (Katz, 1999). Preschool classrooms should be able to have a combination of teacher-led and child-centered activities. According to Dunn et al (1997) and Charlesworth, Hart, Burts, Mosley & Fleege (1993), studies show that while most teachers believed in developmentally appropriate practice, few actually followed its suggestions.

According to Katz (1999) we:

“need to define an appropriate instructional curriculum and provide professional development to teachers in how to deliver that curriculum through rich, active, feedback producing interactions that offer children opportunities to think, solve problems and actively practice skills.” (p.4).

D. Developmentally Appropriate Learning

i. Defining Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP)

The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) issued guidelines for what would be considered “developmentally appropriate practice” in 1987. These guidelines were then revised in 1997 (Bredekamp & Copple). Initially, they stated that children learn best when actively involved, when activities are child-centered and when the children’s own topics of interest are expanded and investigated. The earlier guidelines followed a more Piagetian way of thinking; that knowledge is gained through self-guided interaction with the world. The revised guidelines added a bit of

Vygotskian flair with the role of teachers and other adults in a child's life gaining more relevance (Pianta et al, 2003). Here, there is a definite increase on the role of socialization in learning. Regardless of earlier or revised guidelines, developmentally appropriate programs always assume that all children vary and progress at their own rates and in their own manner (Nurss, 1987).

In their book on *Diversity and Developmentally Appropriate Practice*, Mallory and New (1994) hoped to expand the definition of developmentally appropriate practices to include alternative theoretical and practical perspectives necessary for addressing the needs of young children with cultural and developmental differences. This seems to suggest that what may be deemed "developmentally appropriate" by one culture, may not be seen the same by those of a different culture. Just as what is considered appropriate can vary from one culture, so too can the role of the teacher in early childhood learning.

ii. Role of the Preschool Teacher in DAP

What then is the role of the teacher in early childhood education? Some say that the teacher should merely be a by-stander, someone to ensure the child's health, safety and well-being are monitored. Others feel that the teacher should act as a facilitator, someone who guides and prompts a child in his or her quest for learning. Still others

believe that the role of the teacher should be to engage children in teacher-directed discussions, instruction and learning.

Due to the strong beliefs of those who adhere to each philosophy, programs with a social emphasis and play-based learning have often become mutually exclusive from programs offering academic, teacher-centered learning. For some reason or another, it is felt that when a social and less structured program is followed, cognitive abilities are not addressed as they could be. The reverse is said to be true for programs whose focus is on academics. Children in highly structured, academically focused preschools are said to be at risk of becoming delayed in their social abilities and independence (Dunn & Kontos, 1997).

E. Education in Denmark

i. Value of Education in Denmark

Research shows that there are currently many differences in early childhood education between Canada and Denmark. Wolston and Dickey (1995) note that education is felt to be of great importance to the Danes as it is seen as a way to not only better individuals, but also a way to better the country. They state that:

“Education is highly-respected in Denmark and the Danes rely on education to better themselves, their country, and their place in world economic competition. In this small, homogenous country, there is much agreement about the importance

of education and the necessity for a diverse educational system that will meet the needs of students and society.” (p.16).

Bjerg, Callewaert, Elle, Mylov, Nissen and Silberbrandt (1995) note that according to the Danes:

“education is the means by which one is placed within the technical and social division of labor, with its corresponding hierarchies of prestige, status and access to resources”.

Clearly, this signifies the importance Danes place on their education. It is a way of defining who you are in relation to society, something that to them is not to be taken lightly.

ii. Historical Overview and School System in Denmark

In *Principles and Issues in Education* (2004), an historical overview of the Danish school system is presented. According to this publication, the very first preschools in Denmark were established as a result of both parents working outside the home in 1820. Because Danish society believes that everyone deserves a fair chance, Danish Education is relatively free of charge. Nurseries and preschools receive a large portion of their funding from the government; therefore parents pay only a portion of the cost (Woolston and Dickie, 1995).

In Denmark, the youngest age a child can attend childcare is six months, at which point they would attend a nursery. They may stay there until they are three years old. Kindergartens are designed for the children age three up until they are six or seven. Once a child reaches the year of their sixth or seventh birthday, they are eligible for a voluntary preschool class within the basic school system. Ninety-eight percent of children attend this voluntary preschool year. The basic school system is called *Folkskole*. It is a nine year comprehensive education which is made up of nine forms (grades), preceded by a voluntary preschool year and followed by a voluntary tenth year. The Department of Social Services (municipal government) is responsible for maintenance of nurseries and kindergartens. Ministry of Education oversees preschool classes, forms one through nine, and the optional tenth form. (www.uvm.dk, 2004).

It is certainly noteworthy that children do not begin formal education until they are six or seven. The rationale for starting school later than many other countries is based on the work of Piaget and Erikson who provided insight into a child's progression through various stages of development. Danes feel that the child is not ready for formal education until they are cognitively ready, which is felt to be around their seventh year (Morrill, 2003). This view goes back several years. Moore, Kordenbrock and Moore (1976) cite the superintendent of schools at Naerum as having said (along with his leading principal) that "until age eight or nine, most children would be better off in their homes." (p. 69). Although this may seem a bit extreme, it reflects the belief that when children are in their younger years, they are not ready for formal education.

According to Haddad (2002), Danes show a great continuity between childcare and education. Actions of caring for and educating children have been integrated; a teacher is able to work with all age levels. A teacher who is employed in a preschool class has received the same education and training as a teacher at the kindergarten level in Denmark. Their training is called a pedagogical education and lasts for three and a half years. All those teaching at the preschool and kindergarten level have the same amount of education and training. Because of this, the majority of teachers hold the same ideals when it comes to children and their optimal learning environments. Haddad (2002) notes that children at all ages are seen as:

“active, autonomous and participative and all environments a child is in are meant to offer a variety of situations that promote social interaction, stimulate and challenge children’s perceptions, curiosity and imagination, promote their autonomy and independence and enable them to experience and explore the environment freely, spontaneously and safely.” (p.39).

Once children enter into formal education, the Danish government has made sure that children maintain a sense of continuity and comfort. Students in some areas remain with the same group of children and the same teacher from the first year up until the ninth year. Morrill (2003) states that this way, the children and teacher can really get to know each other, develop a good working relationship, and find ways to get

along. The teacher gets to know each student very well and also has the added bonus of not having to teach the same material year after year. The teacher also has the opportunity to see the students develop and grow from one year to the next and gets the chance to really feel that she has made a difference in their lives. Bjerg et al (1995) also agree that this policy of teachers remaining with students throughout their nine years brings with it a continuity that can have a great impact.

iii. Curriculum and Grading in Denmark

Unlike North America, teachers have a great deal of freedom when it comes to curriculum and lesson planning. Although there are general guidelines laid down by the social services act (in the younger years) and by the Ministry of Education (upon entrance into the formal school system), teachers do enjoy a great deal of flexibility to adapt and adjust the guideline in any way they see fit through the use of materials and lessons of their own choosing. Curriculum is seen as advisory rather than mandatory. Danish teachers develop and use their own material to a degree unknown in most schools (Morrill, 2003). Bjerg et al (1995) also note that teachers enjoy freedom of method and realize that “the learning process is not synonymous with the mere reception and reproduction of pre-packaged knowledge” (p. 44).

This leads us to what is actually being taught at the kindergarten, preschool level and in the early years of Folkskole. It has long been a widely held belief that European

education tends to be much less formal and unyielding than North American education. A publication set out by the municipal government (www.uvm.dk , 2004) informs us that at the kindergarten/daycare level, education is, as far as possible, to be given in the form of play and other related activities. There are no formalized lesson plans. The aim of the kindergarten/daycare teacher is to familiarize the children with the daily routines of school life. Some of the areas of focus are teaching children to concentrate, remember, retell and make drawings of what they have experienced. Social skills are also highlighted. Children are encouraged to listen to each other and tell stories through words or rhythm and movement. They are prepared for learning through play. Woolston et al (1995) tell us that the preschool class is;

“....intended to teach children to play together and strengthen their social skills. Emphasis is on the school routine and activities are intended to help the child prepare for grade one” (p. 19).

The Consolidation Act on Social Service, in fact, lays down the following within their legislative framework:

1) Daycare suppliers are- in cooperation with the parents- to provide care to children and support the individual child's acquisition and development of social and general skills with a view to strengthening the individual child's all around development and self esteem and contribute to giving children a good and secure childhood and adolescence.

2) The daycare offers are to provide opportunities and experiences which contribute to stimulating the imagination, creativity, and linguistic development

of the child as well as giving room to the child to play and learn and room for physical development, interaction and possibility of exploring the surroundings.

3) The daycare offers are to provide children with a possibility of participation in decision-making and of joint responsibility and thus contribute to developing children's independence and skills to participate in engaging communities.

While there are a certain number of hours per day that should be considered lessons (twenty lessons per week, divided over three or four hours per day) at the preschool level, these lessons can be taught in many different and playful ways. Upon entering grade one (Folkskole) the lessons are forty-five minutes long and average eighteen lessons per week. This means only about 3 hours in the average day are what they would consider to be "lesson time". Based on the curriculum guideline from the Ministry of Education for this same grade one level, the subject matter to be followed includes Danish, free class discussion, math, physical education/ sport, Christian studies, creative art and music (Woolston et al, 1995). Aside from the math component, there does not seem to be much focus on what Western culture considers to be academics.

Rodney (1976) supports this philosophy when he says that Denmark maintains an orientation to play. He noted that this orientation is largely based in Froebel's theories of play and development, a child can learn a great deal through play alone. Engberg (1989) also stated that the works of Froebel and Montessori have been largely adapted into Scandinavian culture and that this is seen through their emphasis on play. He goes on to note that:

“...the main objective of the child in the nursery school/kindergarten is the physical and psychological needs of the child based on the psychology of the development of the child during its period of early childhood. The teacher organizes the daily routine of the institution, with a view to offering each child optimal development in environments which stimulate the verbal and social development of the child and the development of independence and personality” (p. 11).

Moore et al (1976), in their study of European daycares, also noted that the schools producing the happiest children were most homelike. Engberg (1989) supports this notion in stating that the personal development of the individual child is best accomplished through opportunities to perform daily activities such as preparing food, exploring nature, using a variety of materials such as wood and clay and expressing themselves through use of primitive instruments and singing. They state that;

“There is no sense in distinguishing between learning and playing. Authentic creative activity becomes part of the learning process, on par with intellectual activities.” (p. 13)

A study by the United States General Accounting Office (1995) of the development of young children in Denmark, France and Italy supported this notion of

early education being home-like. They found that in Denmark, the broadly stated guidelines for early childhood programs were to provide “an environment that supplements child-rearing experiences in the home, offer security and protection, and encourage the child’s curiosity and desire to learn” (p.5). They go on to quote Jacob Vedel-Petersen:

“Danish nursery schools pay little heed to formal instruction, competition and achievement. Instead, the emphasis is on self-expressive games, on the role of the imagination and on creative activities, on the attainment of social maturity through group activities, on linguistic development, and on the overall stimulation of the children with the help of a wide range of materials and activities.” (p. 22).

Vedel-Petersen (1989) discussed daycare issues in Denmark at great length. He stated that because children spend so much valuable time in childcare, this is where they must “draw nourishment for the development of their personality, for social maturation, and for learning to meet cultural and intellectual challenges” (p.263). He goes on to comment that close contact with teachers, a sense of security and mutual confidence are more important than a large vocabulary, concept knowledge and high IQ. He believes that children need to be given time and freedom to just be children, and that social and emotional maturity are more important than “an intellectual vitamin supplement” (p. 263).

It is plain to be seen that Danes tend to value the importance of play in the early years. In fact, Woolston et al (1995) noted that throughout the entire school system, “there is evidence of great respect for pragmatic, hands on experience...experience other than academic is equally as important.” (p.16). It is believed that children should have a very active role in their own education and become involved in the decision making process. Education and democracy are seen as going hand in hand within the Danish way of life. The US Accounting Office study (1995) found that European programs had a strong child-development emphasis and a developmentally appropriate curriculum that encourages children to be actively involved in their learning.

Principals and Issues in Education (2004) claims that:

“...the aim of the school is to ensure that children and young people acquire certain knowledge. It is also to convey to them certain central values of our outlook on man and society and to see that they become able citizens in society”
(p.3).

This on-line publication continues with the argument that if children can be actively involved in their education and become partially responsible for decisions made, they will be better able to become active members in a democratic society. Emphasis on preparing students for life carries on from the very young years, right into the Folkskole. It is believed that aside from basic education in later years, students must also learn to be good decision makers, be creative and adaptable, innovative,

cooperative and flexible enough to meet the needs of an ever-changing society. Broad life skills are seen as crucial to success in work and later life.

It is for this reason, among others, the Danish Education does very little grading of students. Evaluations that do take place are usually verbal, with the child's parent and the student twice a year. The teacher not only discusses the child's academic life but also emphasizes how the child is able to cooperate with others and get along in a social environment. These meetings tend to be very personal, emphasizing the child's strong and weak points and how comfortable the child seems to be (Woolston et al, 1995).

This lack of emphasis on grading is echoed by Morrill (1995). He tells us that grades and report cards are practically unheard of in grades one to six. This does not mean that teachers are not well aware of the children's progress, they simply do not believe that testing and grading are necessary as they tend to divide the class into winners and losers rather than as diverse and individual learners in a unified whole.

The question as to how this play-based approach affects children in the transition from daycare to basic school has been raised by many. If children are only taught to communicate, play and be creative in their youngest years, how will they be ready for formal education? Kagan (1999) addresses the readiness issue and states that it is possible that Western culture may just be placing too much emphasis on readiness. She states that many preschool programs even have school readiness as their reason for

being, their rationale. She believes that European culture may just be right in emphasizing the *process*, not the product. Morrill (1995) tells us that Danish students generally outscore Western students in international math and science competitions.

Current research conducted by the UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre (2006) focusing on the well-being of children and youth indicates that Denmark is among the top four (out of twenty-one) countries in terms of overall well-being. This study looked at material well-being, health and safety, education, peer and family relationships, behaviours and risks and young people's own subjective sense of well-being.

It appears from this research that there are many benefits to a play-based education system for young children in Denmark. Play-based learning is consistent with the values and beliefs held by the Danish population and Danish children overall seem to be doing very well under these guidelines. The fact that research has indicated that some teachers at the primary level are reporting that children entering the formal school system unprepared for learning is however cause for concern. It is possible that increasing the amount of time children spend on academically based material and learning could be beneficial.

A. Education in Nova Scotia

Between 1808 and 1811, Education Acts were established schools throughout the province of Nova Scotia and acknowledged the right of all citizens to be educated.

In 1864, The Free School Act was released. This act is regarded as the great turning point in public education in the history of the province. The Act established a system of free education for all. Between 1865 and 1890, a period of strong growth and development took place in public education. Schools were built, county academies were established and the structure of the school system was organized.

Because of the fact that there are many working parents in Nova Scotia, child care is essential for Nova Scotian families. Currently, there is no federal child care system in place for preschool aged children in Canada that sets guidelines/policies for a national childcare program. Available instead are various facilities in which a child can be enrolled for either a full or part day. In Nova Scotia, these facilities are typically referred to as nursery schools, daycares or preschools, and can either be regulated through the Department of Community Services (D.C.S.), or run privately in a care-givers home (up to six children). Those that are regulated through D.C.S. have to meet the standards set out in The Nova Scotia Daycare Act (1989), which states things such as amount of space required, number of fire exits, and guidelines for a quality program;

“A daily program shall be established by each facility with provision to facilitate and stimulate intellectual, physical, emotional and social development appropriate to the developmental level of the child and should include activities to encourage language development.”

An individual from the Department then visits the centre on a regular basis to ensure the guidelines are being followed and that quality care is being provided. While there are no curriculum guidelines in place, it is assumed that children will learn in a safe, nurturing, developmentally appropriate environment.

According to The Nova Scotia Daycare Act, the chief administrative officer of a facility shall be a person who has completed a training program in early childhood education or its equivalent and at least two-thirds of the staff in a facility must be persons who have completed a training program in early childhood education or its equivalent. This means the Saint Joseph Children's Centre, Early Childhood Education Training Program; the Child Development Services Pre-School Program provided in conjunction with the Nova Scotia Teachers' College; and the program provided by the Mount Saint Vincent University Department of Child Studies, and such other training programs in early childhood education which, in the opinion of the Director, are comparable in content to the training programs described above. A person will be considered to have the equivalent of early childhood education if he or she complies with the following requirements:

- (a) successful completion of Grade XII or the equivalent through the General Education Development program of the Department of Education;
- (b) a minimum of two years' experience in a licensed day care facility
- (c) successful completion of a full credit course of two semesters in a post-secondary education program in at least one of the following areas, and

successful completion of 25 hours in training programs, seminars or workshops in the other area not completed by way of post- secondary education:

- (i) human growth and development with an emphasis on the young child;
- (ii) curriculum development and implementation of programs for young children in day care facilities.

This means that teachers at the daycare/ preschool level can, and often do, have very different educational backgrounds varying from someone who may not have graduated from high-school, to someone who has a university degree in child development or more. This could mean that they would have very different ideas and knowledge about child development, and varied child care philosophies as well.

Due to the fact that there is no regulated, national child care program in place, there are many privately operated child care facilities running in private homes which are not regulated by government. These private child care options are often more accessible as they exist within residential communities, are more readily available and often less expensive than regulated child care. It is basically up to the child's guardian to locate child care that best meets their needs and budgets.

After the preschool years, typically when children are aged four to six, the transition is made into grade primary (kindergarten) within the public school system. Currently, Nova Scotia is divided into six regional school boards, and three district school boards. There are approximately 450 schools in the province of Nova Scotia. Educators in Nova Scotia believe that every child can learn, and that every child can achieve their best. It is felt that schools have a vital role to play by instilling in students the value of lifelong learning.

Public schools in Nova Scotia are regulated under the Department of Education. There are curriculum guidelines and learning outcomes for each grade level, and all staff must meet education and training requirements set out by the Department of Education. Children must meet the criteria set out for each grade in order to move on to the next grade level. Regular report cards are sent home with children to their families and parent-teacher meetings occur regularly throughout the year as well. Public education in Nova Scotia runs from grade primary up until grade twelve, at which point the students go on to university or follow their chosen life-path outside of university.

Elementary schools are responsible for the education of students from kindergarten (usually referred to in Nova Scotia as "grade primary") or grade one to grade five or six. A number of Nova Scotian schools combine elementary or the later grades of elementary with junior high or the earlier grades of junior high to form what is referred to as a consolidated school. Finally, a few schools have all grades from kindergarten to grade twelve. The most prominent patterns by which Nova Scotian

grade school students attend school is elementary school (grades primary to six), junior high school (grades seven to nine) and high school (grades ten to twelve).

Due to the fact that there are specific curriculum guidelines and outcomes, education in Nova Scotia tends to follow a very specific structure. Teachers are responsible for planning and implementing a daily plan and routine that will ensure monthly and yearly outcomes are attained. Children are expected to obtain a certain skill set at various stages throughout their educational process in order to move forward. Children who do not meet the expected outcomes are often held back a year so that they may have an opportunity to catch up on skills they are felt to be lacking.

By the end of grade primary, children are expected to reach learning outcomes in several areas including English language arts, health education, mathematics, music, physical education, science, social studies and visual arts. A detailed listing of Learning Outcomes guides teachers in their day to day planning, and children are expected to be able to do most if not all of the outcomes listed for each grade level. (www.ednet.ns.ca)

In looking at the education systems in both countries presented, huge differences can be noted. While the Danish education system seems to be more free-flowing, adaptable and flexible, the education system in Nova Scotia seems to be pretty well-established, solid and often rigid. Specific curriculum guidelines and outcomes are provided for primary teachers in Nova Scotia and children are assessed on a regular basis to ensure they are reaching academic milestones. In Denmark, on the other hand,

the assessment of children is never formally conducted, nor are they expected to meet curricular outcomes.

This research takes a look at which skills preschool and kindergarten teachers in both Truro, Nova Scotia and Silkeborg, Denmark believe are most important for children to possess upon transition into the public school system. Given the historical and current educational beliefs of each of these communities, it would not be surprising to see some major discrepancies as to which skills are deemed to be more valuable than others. Interviews with teachers in each location provide further insight into teacher responses and look at why teachers in each location may be more inclined to respond the way they do.

Chapter III

Method

A. Participants

Participants were 23 kindergarten teachers and 70 preschool teachers from Truro, Nova Scotia, Canada and from Silkeborg, Denmark who work with children who are in kindergarten or eligible to enter kindergarten in 2007. For the purposes of this study, kindergarten teachers were those who teach children in the first level of the public school system and preschool teachers were those who work with children who were in their final year of preschool in public or private centers. Approximately 40-50 surveys were distributed to kindergarten teachers and approximately 50 surveys to preschool teachers in each town. Interviews were conducted with two teachers from each group in each town for a total of eight interviews.

B. Measures

The measures used in this study include a demographics form, a 25 item survey and an interview schedule. Measures had been reviewed by preschool and kindergarten teachers in areas of Nova Scotia (with the exclusion of Truro) and Denmark (excluding Silkeborg) to ensure that questions were easily understood and clear. Measures had face validity and content validity as they had also been reviewed by the researcher, her thesis supervisor, practitioners, and a team member in Denmark to determine whether they

made sense for what they measured and covered relevant areas noted in the literature.

Rapport was built with interviewees prior to interview. This helped to enhance trust and lower reactivity, thus enhancing the reliability of the responses.

Demographics Survey

The demographics survey requests information on age, gender, teaching experience and education level and was included in all survey packages sent out to preschool and kindergarten teachers. Participants were also asked to indicate the type of facility where they were currently employed (private, non-profit, or school). Collecting demographic information helped situate the data and make comparisons based on demographic categories (Appendix A).

The Survey

A survey on school readiness was developed by the researcher (with thesis supervisor). Items on the survey are based on an extensive review of the literature, the researchers ten years of experience in the child care field, and consultation with relevant professionals. Statements relating to the academic, social, communicative, self-help and behavioral aspects of school readiness were presented. Teachers were instructed to rate their level of agreement with each of the twenty-five survey statements using a three point Likert scale (less important, important, more important). The school readiness survey can be found in Appendix B.

Interview Schedule

Interview questions were developed to allow the researcher to obtain a more in depth account of teachers' beliefs and philosophies regarding school readiness and to provide an opportunity to ask questions as to how these beliefs on school readiness have been developed. The interview schedule was developed by the researcher in conjunction with her thesis supervisor. It includes questions allowing teachers to elaborate on issues such as their perceptions of school readiness, appropriate preschool curriculum and philosophies as well as what is felt to be important in determining a child's readiness for not only school, but life as an adult within each culture (Appendix C).

C. Procedure

Once approval was received from Mount Saint Vincent University Review Ethics Board, the researcher contacted board chairs of centres and school board administrators in Truro by phone to assess interest in participating in this study. The researcher followed up on these conversations with letters (Appendix D) reviewing the proposed research and seeking permission and cooperation to carry out the proposed research. A consent form, to be returned to the researcher, was enclosed with each letter. A colleague in Denmark followed the same procedure in Silkeborg.

Once permission was obtained from Boards (schools and daycares), directors of childcare centres and school principals were contacted to obtain their permission to conduct the study in their settings and to seek their cooperation in distributing packages

within their centres and schools (Appendix E). Packages were dropped off to each school/ centre in person (by the researcher in Truro and her colleague in Silkeborg).

Each package contained:

- 1) An information letter (Appendix F) requesting participation in both the survey and a short interview. This letter also gave background on the purpose of the study.
- 2) Consent form for interview (Appendix G).
- 3) A short, 25 item survey regarding attitudes on kindergarten readiness, and
- 4) A demographic survey.

Since most teachers in Silkeborg can speak and read English, packages were written in English only, however, translations were available if necessary. An attempt was made to have an equal number of survey packages distributed in each location. Participants were asked to place completed packages in a large drop-off envelope at each setting. Packages were picked up by researcher/colleague two weeks after being distributed. It was hoped that the short length of the surveys and the ease with which they could be filled out and returned to the researcher increased the number participating. Once the packages had all been retrieved, potential interview participants were randomly selected from those who indicated a willingness to participate. Two participants were randomly selected from each group using a stratified random selection process. A total of eight interviews were conducted-two teachers from Truro schools, two teachers from Truro

preschools, two teachers from Silkeborg schools and two teachers from Silkeborg preschools.

All interviews were face to face, some within the school/ preschool setting, others at convenient locations for the interviewees. Participants' rights were reviewed and they were made to feel comfortable. The researcher also made sure to not make leading comments and rather, used non-directive prompts to encourage participants to expand their comments. Interviews were audio recorded for later transcription by the researcher. Field notes were also taken on paper to note things like mood and atmosphere, or any other relevant issues that came up. Local interviews were conducted first followed by interviews in Denmark.

All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed to capture exactly what information was offered from respondents. Participants were given the opportunity to review their interview transcripts to ensure that what was reflected was what they had intended to articulate. Respondents were encouraged to suggest changes to any responses they did not feel accurately reflected their perceptions.

D. Data Analysis

The data has been analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. Quantitatively, survey data was calculated to determine the percentage of agreement with survey

statements between and among the participant groups. Chi Square was used to calculate whether there are significant differences between groups. Cross tabulations were also done to see if there are any relationships between agreement on individual survey items due to group membership or characteristics.

The interview component of the research allowed for some qualitative analysis. Interview data has been transcribed and scrutinized in an attempt to identify emergent themes and patterns within and among groups. The researcher has tried to identify any linkages appearing between philosophy regarding skill sets deemed to be important and larger societal beliefs. Skills listed as important for readiness were grouped according to similarity and then organized into developmental domains to see if any domains emerge as prominent within each group.

E. Ethical Considerations

Participation in this research was strictly voluntary. Participants were fully informed about the nature of the study and were informed that information is confidential as no individual or centre name would be used. Data (tapes, surveys and transcripts) were stored with the researcher in a locked filing cabinet and tapes destroyed following transcription. Participants were told they had the right to withdraw at any time. This study involved only adults and questions were non-intrusive in their nature. Researcher anticipated no harm to participants in this study and felt that participation involved minimal risk.

Research Questions:

- 1) How did respondents respond to items on the School Readiness Survey overall and by respondent group?
- 2) Were there statistically significant differences between overall and item responses by participants from Denmark and Truro on the School Readiness Survey?
- 3) What were participants overall beliefs regarding how children learn and develop during their early years overall and by respondent group?
- 4) What are some of the issues/demands participants have encountered when teaching young children overall and by respondent group?
- 5) How did participants define the term “school readiness”?
- 6) What are some of the skills respondents felt most important for children to have as they enter the school system? B) Which skills emerged as essential for a successful transition into public school and why? C) How did participants feel early childhood educators could ensure children had these skills?
- 7) What strategies and methods did participants feel were the most effective in enhancing children’s growth and development and preparing them for future learning?
- 8) What were participants’ perceptions of the roles of play and academics in designing programs for young children?
- 9) What types of curriculum guidelines did participants indicate were available at their settings? Did participants indicate these guidelines were helpful and followed?
- 10) What role did respondents feel preschool experiences outside of the home play in getting children ready for school?
- 11) Did participants indicate that a majority of children entering kindergarten today are ready for school? Where there specific skills that participants felt children had or were missing?
- 12) What role did respondents feel the following groups played in preparing a child for school transition: a) preschool teachers b) kindergarten teachers

c) schools and d) community?

13) Did respondents feel that the skills valued and passed onto young children by their teachers related in any way to the skills we value as adults in society?

Chapter IV

Results

A. Introduction

In this chapter, demographic information on participants is summarized. An analysis of participant's responses to survey and interview questions is presented. Responses to items on the School Readiness survey were analyzed quantitatively for percentage of agreement. Data has been calculated to determine the percentage of agreement with survey statements between and among the participant groups.

Chi Square was used to calculate whether there were significant differences between groups. Cross tabulations have also been compiled to see if there were any relationships between agreement on individual survey items due to group membership or characteristics. Finally, responses to interview questions were analyzed qualitatively using content analysis. A copy of a complete interview transcript may be found in Appendix H.

B. Survey Response Rate

A total of one hundred and seventy three survey packages were distributed to primary and preschool teachers in Truro, Nova Scotia and Silkeborg, Denmark for teachers and early childhood educators to complete. Ninety-three were returned,

representing a 53.8% response rate, 40.9% of responses came from Denmark and 59.1% from Truro.

C. Participants

Of the 93 surveys returned, the four participant groups were represented as follows: 46.2% (N=43) of respondents were preschool teachers in Truro, Nova Scotia, 12.9% (N=12) were primary teachers in Truro, Nova Scotia, 29% (N=27) were preschool teachers in Silkeborg, Denmark and 11.8% (N=11) were primary teachers in Denmark. Thus, roughly 75% of respondents were preschool teachers and 25% were primary teachers. Within the respondent group only 4% were male and 96% were female.

With respect to age of participants, 7.5% were under 25 (all from Truro), 28% were between 25 and 35 (10.8 from Silkeborg and 17.2% from Truro), 33.3% were between 36 and 45 (16.1% from Silkeborg and 17.2% from Truro), 24.7% were between 46 and 55 (7.5% from Silkeborg and 17.2% from Truro) and 6.5% were over 55 (all from Silkeborg). The majority of teachers, therefore, were between 36 and 45 with only 13 of the 93 under 25 or over 55.

Years of experience ranged from 1 to 37 years with the mean number of years of experience being 13.3 years. Interestingly, participants were almost evenly distributed over the four ranges presented.

Another demographic factor considered was the highest level of education of the participants. 3.2% of respondents had a high school diploma, 38.7% had an Early Childhood Education diploma, 5.4% a teacher's college certificate, and 45.2% had a university degree or pedagogical education, 5.4% a Bachelor of Education degree and 2.1% had a Master's Degree.

The final demographic considered was the type of establishment the respondent was working in. 19.4% of responses came from a private childcare facility, 54.8% from a non-profit child care facility and 25.8% came from a school.

D. Quantitative Responses

Research Question 1: How did respondents respond to items on the School Readiness Survey overall and by respondent group?

Overall

Participants responded to statements on the School readiness Survey using a 3-point Likert-type scale with the three categories being less important, important and more important. "Important" and "more important" responses were combined to obtain the percentage of participants who agreed with each item. Items reflected behaviours typically expected of preschoolers and covered all areas of development including cognition, self-help, social skills, fine motor and behavior. A summary of results, both overall and by respondent group, can be found in Table II. Overall, skills related to self-

help seemed to emerge within this study group as being most valued by the majority of participants with “ability to use the washroom” and “dress independently” being deemed most important along with a good sense of self. Between 90 and 96% saw separating easily from caregivers as important, along with working co-operatively in groups, asking questions when necessary and following 2-step directions. Other skills seen as important for preschoolers to have by at least 72 to 78% of the participants included the ability to walk in line and wait in line, recognize letters of the alphabet, print and spell their own name and participate in organized games or sports. Fewer than 63% of teachers felt working independently and sitting and listening for 30 minutes was important. The ability to count to ten and the ability to print some letters were also not highly valued when looking at the data overall with fewer than 70% of teachers indicating their importance.

According to the data collected here, there are no significant mean differences on survey responses between Preschool and Primary Teachers ($p>0.05$, 95% C.I -0.58, 6.52). There were also no significant correlations ($p>0.05$) between total test scores and years of experience, highest level of education, or age. According to the data obtained in this study, these variables did not affect how the individuals responded to the survey.

Denmark Preschool

Danish preschool teachers did not seem to consider many of the academic skills as important. Between 51 and 67% of teachers in this respondent group in fact felt that academic skills were of value. The number of respondents who considered the following academic skills as important is shown in brackets following the statement. Examples of skills only considered important by less than 67% of Danish preschool teachers include: sitting and listening for 30 minutes (66.7%), recognizing letters of the alphabet (63%), printing and spelling own name (66.6%) attending to work quality (70.4%), printing some letters (51.9%), counting to ten (59.7%) and working independently until work was completed (59.3%).

Conversely, 92-100% of participants indicated a number of behavioral and personal characteristics as important characteristics such as dressing self (96.3%), working co-operatively (92.6%), playing independently (100%), having a good sense of self (96.3%) and following routines and directions (92.6% for both). All of these were viewed as important by a large number of teachers.

This seems to show that skills of independence are highly valued by this respondent group. Children are expected to be an active, well adjusted and independent participant in a group. Skills typically seen as academic are not seen to be as imperative among these group respondents, nor are skills of attending to work for a set amount of time.

Denmark Primary Teachers

Responses given by Danish primary teachers were similar to those given by preschool teachers in Denmark in that they seemed to place value on skills of independence and personal/ behavioral skills. Of particular importance to primary teachers in Denmark (90-100% of teachers agreeing on importance) were the ability to dress independently, ability to work co-operatively as part of a group, ability to play cooperatively, ability to use the washroom independently, ability to resolve conflict independently, ability to walk in line and wait in line, having a good sense of self, ability to separate easily from caregivers, ability to ask questions when necessary and direction following abilities.

Skills which were somewhat important but not of extreme importance (between 70 and 90% of teachers recognizing their importance) included children's ability to print and spell their own name, ability to participate in organized games and sports, ability to use scissors and glue independently, and routine and curriculum following abilities.

Those skills viewed as less important (less than 70% feeling skill was important) were the ability to sit and listen to others for at least 30 minutes, ability to count to ten, ability to tell similarities and differences among objects, ability to recognize letters of the alphabet, ability to identify shapes and colors, ability to hold and use writing instruments properly ability to work independently until work is completed, ability to print some letters, and ability to tell age, address and phone number. Interestingly,

nearly all of the skills deemed to be of lower importance for Danish kindergarten teachers fall under the academic category.

Again, we note that skills of independence are highly regarded by this group of respondents and academic and fine motor less so.

Truro Preschool

Preschool teachers in Truro showed a range of responses to what they felt to be most important. Among those which emerged as most dominant (90-100% of teachers in agreement of importance) were the ability to dress independently and use the washroom independently, ability to work co-operatively in a group, ability to use scissors and glue independently, having a good sense of self, ability to separate easily from caregivers, following routine and curriculum, ability to ask questions when necessary and follow two-step directions.

Skills which this group felt were not as valuable (less than 70% agreement of importance) were ability to sit and listen for 30 minutes, ability to participate in organized games and sports, ability to work independently until work is completed and the ability to walk in line and wait in line.

The remainder of skills on the survey showed a fairly wide variety of responses in this respondent group, with middle-of-the-road percentages being reflected (between

70 and 90 % of teachers feeling the skill was important). In particular, skills appearing to be reflecting varying views by respondents in this group include the ability to count to ten, the ability to play co-operatively, and the ability to resolve conflict independently (which was viewed by 100% of Danish teachers as being important). This seems to indicate that teachers in this respondent group had mixed feeling about the importance of several skills on the survey.

Overall, respondents in this group saw skills needed for completion of academic tasks as being important, as well as skills of independence. Teachers here did reflect the importance of asking for help, following curriculum and directions and having a good handle on self-help skills as well.

Truro Primary

There were only five skills which Truro Primary teachers felt were of significantly little importance (less than 70% of teachers indicating the skill was important). They were ability to sit and listen for 30 minutes, ability to count to ten, ability to print and spell own name, problem solving abilities and ability to walk in line and wait in line.

Skills which were somewhat important (70-90% of teachers agreeing on their importance) included ability to play co-operatively, ability to resolve conflict

independently, ability to follow routine and curriculum and ability to tell personal information such as age, telephone number and address.

Of utmost importance for this respondent group were several items. Between 90 and 100% of teachers in Truro felt that ability to dress self, ability to work cooperatively in a group, ability to use the washroom independently, ability to separate easily from caregivers and ask questions when necessary, ability to print some letters and the ability to hold and use writing instruments and scissors properly were highly valued, among others.

Like the majority of all teachers, Truro primary teachers saw the value in skills of independence such as ability to use washroom and dress independently, however, in looking at the percentages of agreement comparatively, there is clearly a higher value placed on skills requiring the child to possess a particular skill set such as knowledge of letters, numbers and shapes and the ability to spell and print one's own name. Also emerging as more important among the respondents in this group were fine motor skills such as ability to use writing instruments, scissors and glue.

Table 1- Participants Responses to Demographics Survey Questions

<i>Participants</i>	<i>Denmark</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Truro</i>	<i>%</i>
<i>Profession</i>				
Preschool	27	29	43	46.2
School	11	11.8	12	12.9
<i>Gender</i>				
Male	4	4.3	0	0
Female	34	36.6	55	59.1
<i>Age</i>				
Under 25	0	0	7	7.5
25-35	10	10.8	16	17.2
36-46	15	16.1	16	17.2
46-55	7	7.5	16	17.2
55+	6	6.5	0	0
<i>Years of Experience</i>				
1-5	11	11.8	16	17.2
6-10	7	7.5	13	14
10-20	14	15.1	11	11.8
20+	5	5.4	16	17.2
<i>Education</i>				
High school	0	0	3	3.2
ECE/ Diploma	0	0	36	38.7
Teacher's College	0	0	5	5.4
University Degree/ Pedagogical Educ.	38	40.9	4	4.3
Bachelor Ed. Deg.	0	0	5	5.4
Master's Degree	0	0	2	2.1

$\mu=93$

Table II- Participants Responses to Items on the School Readiness Survey Overall and by Respondent Group

<i>Items*</i>	<u>Percentage Viewing the Skill as Important</u>				
	<i>Overall</i>	<i>Denmark</i>		<i>Truro</i>	
		Psc.	Kind.	Psc.	Kind.
Sit and listen for 30 min.	59.1	66.7	45.5	52.8	41.7
Count to Ten	66.7	59.2	18.2	86.0	58.3
Dress Self	98.9	96.3	100	100	100
Play co-operatively/indep.	88.2	100	100	81.4	83.3
Work coop. in group	95.7	92.6	100	95.4	91.7
Use washroom indep.	98.9	100	90.9	100	100
Resolve conflict indep.	82.8	81.5	90.9	81.4	75.0
Tell sim./ diff. between objects	75.3	70.4	45.5	86.1	75.0
Rec. letters of the alphabet	72.1	63.0	36.4	83.7	83.3
Prints/spells own name	77.4	66.6	81.8	76.8	66.7
Part. in org. games/sports	78.5	88.9	89.9	57.4	83.3
Identifies shapes/colors	81.7	77.8	63.6	88.4	83.3
Use scissors/ glue indep.	87.1	81.5	81.8	93.0	90.9
Have a good sense of self	96.7	96.3	100	97.7	91.7
Attend to work quality/finish work	72.1	70.4	72.7	72.1	75.0
Separate easily from caregivers	92.4	88.8	100	90.7	100
Hold/use writing inst. prop.	79.6	70.4	54.5	88.4	91.7
Work indep. until work is comp.	62.4	59.3	54.6	62.8	75.0
Be a good problem solver	78.5	81.5	81.8	79.1	66.6
Print some letters	69.9	51.9	36.4	83.7	91.7
Walk in line and wait in line	75.3	85.2	90.9	67.4	66.7
Follow routine/ curriculum	89.3	92.6	81.8	93.0	81.8
Tell age/ tel. numb. /address	72.1	66.7	18.2	88.3	75.0
Ask questions when necessary	93.5	85.2	90.9	100	91.7
Follow 2-step directions	95.7	92.6	100	100	83.4

When looking at the percentage of respondents viewing skills as important in Table II, both overall and between/ within respondent groups, there are some rather distinct differences which emerge on several items.

The ability to count to ten, for example, shows an overall agreement of importance of 66.7%, but in looking closely at respondent groups, we note that only 18.2% of kindergarten teachers in Denmark view it as important as opposed to 86% of preschool teachers in Truro.

The ability to tell similarities and difference between objects follow a similar pattern, as does an ability to tell age, telephone number and address. Both of these skills also show percentage of agreement for Denmark preschool and Truro kindergarten falling closer to the “overall” percentage, while Denmark kindergarten and Truro preschool show dramatic difference (45.5% & 86.1%, and 18.2% & 88.3% respectively).

The ability to recognize letters of the alphabet and also the ability to print some letters of the alphabet interestingly show another unique pattern type. Both of these skills show a percentage of agreement reflecting that their value is higher in Truro than it is in Denmark. When averaging both locations individually, we can see that only 49.7% of Danish respondents noted letter recognition to be important, whereas 83.5% of Truro respondents felt that it was an important skill. The same is true for being able to

print some letters of the alphabet. An average of 44% of respondents in Silkeborg felt this skill was important when 88% of respondents in Truro did.

The ability to hold and use writing instruments properly showed the greatest difference in importance value between respondents in Denmark and those in Truro with Denmark viewing the skills to be more important. Participating in games and sports and the ability to walk in line and wait in line reflect percentages of importance which are distinctively higher in Denmark than they are in Truro as well. Preschool teachers in Truro, in particular, did not seem to view participation in sports as being important, relatively speaking, with only 57.4% feeling it was important when all other respondent groups show a percentage of agreement between 83% and 90%. The ability to walk in line and wait in line reflects average town percentages of over 88% in Denmark as opposed to 67% in Truro.

Research Question 2: Were there statistically significant differences between overall and item responses by participants from Denmark and Truro on the School Readiness Survey?

Results of the T-test indicated that there were significant differences in overall response between teachers from Truro and Silkeborg (91, $F=3.22$, $p=.001$). Responses on several items by participants from Truro and Silkeborg were statistically significant at the item level (see table III).

According to these statistics, nearly half of the items proved to be significant at the item level between Truro and Silkeborg. Items emerging as statistically significant at the item level, and put at a significantly higher level of importance in Truro were the ability to count to ten, tell similarities and differences between objects, recognize letters of the alphabet, print/ spell own name, identify shapes and colors, use scissors/glue independently, be a good problem solver, tell age telephone number and address, ask questions when necessary and follow two-step directions.

Those which emerged as being statistically significant with respondents in Silkeborg indicating the higher level of importance were the ability to play cooperatively and the ability to hold and use writing instruments properly. This seems to indicate that teacher's views on what skills are important is quite varied between the two towns involved in this study, especially in terms of the above mentioned survey items. Table III below illustrated mean differences at the item level for each of the survey items.

Table III- Item Comparisons between Participants from Denmark and Truro

(*=significant)
(df=1)

Item	value	sig*
Sit and listen for 30 min.	0.342	.559
Count to Ten	10.20	.001*
Dress Self	0.002	.961
Play co-operatively	6.808	.009*
Work in group	2.969	.085
Use washroom independently	2.541	.111
Resolve conflict independently	0.173	.677
Tell similarities/diff. between objects	6.017	.014*
Recognizes letters of the alphabet	17.25	.000*
Prints/spells own name	6.142	.013*
Participates in organized games/sports	2.998	.083
Identifies shapes/colors	6.957	.008*
Use scissors/glue independently	6.710	.010*
Have a good sense of self	1.281	.258
Attend to quality/ finish of work	0.020	.889
Separate easily from caregivers	0.120	.729
Hold/use writing instruments	9.030	.003*
Work independently/ work is completed	0.768	.381
Be a good problem solver	2.382	.123
Print some letters	17.07	.000*
Walk in line and wait in line	0.870	.351
Follow routine and curriculum	1.166	.280
Tell age/tel. number/ address	15.32	.000*
Ask questions when necessary	7.742	.005*
Follow 2-step directions	4.712	.030*

* $p \leq .05$

E- Qualitative Responses

In this section, participant responses to interview questions are reviewed. Interview transcripts were analysed using a modified grounded-theory approach where participants' responses underwent three levels of coding to detect emerging themes. Direct quotes have been used to support each theme.

Research Question 3: What were participants overall beliefs regarding how children learn and develop during their early years overall and by respondent group?

Responses from preschool teachers in Truro regarding how children learn and develop fell into four themes: observation, environment, imitation and guidance. This respondent group noted the importance of children watching and playing with others, observing their environment and imitating the behaviour they observed. The importance of being social and having friends was paramount and the impact of others on development was obvious. One preschool teacher in Truro noted the following:

“I think that children learn a lot by what they see. At this stage, they're like little sponges, and they'll take in anything they hear, any words they hear, they'll learn them easily. What their parents or caregiver do, they'll try to do that when they see these things happening. I think with development, you can certainly aid them along, depending on what skills the adult has. This will determine to what extent the child will develop and in what direction they will develop. It's definitely

environment first and within that environment are people who will help along the way.”

Responses from this group demonstrated the impact they felt environment has on the development of young children.

Preschool teachers in Denmark were very clear in their responses to this question. The overwhelming feeling from this respondent group was that children learn best by being involved. For Danish preschool teachers, participation, experience and children having an opportunity to try things for themselves were believed to be critical to optimal development. It was even noted that children need to be involved in the planning of what they will learn and do, as one teacher states:

“...they (children) learn when they are very interested in what is going on around them and when they take part in planning what they will do. If they are not interested, they will not be ready to learn but if they are part of the process, they will learn much more.”

Another preschool teacher in Denmark echoed this feeling that children learn by doing as can be seen in her response to this question:

“Children grow and change just like the rest of us, only at a faster rate when they are younger. They learn by doing and they learn a lot very quickly as children because their

minds are so curious and wanting to know all of the information they can. But they learn through experience, what works and what doesn't, and they grow from each experience."

Kindergarten teachers in Truro mirrored to a great extent what was noted to be important for preschool teachers in Truro. Things like modeling, experience and environment were noted as key elements in how children learn. One teacher felt imitation was a great way for children to learn. Like the Truro preschool group, the term "little sponges" was also reflected in this group. The belief that children learn from their surroundings dominated their responses. One teacher in Truro noted:

"Mostly children learn and develop by imitating those around them. Parents, caregivers and teachers need to be aware of just how important it is to talk and model many different behaviours and experiences to children."

Kindergarten teachers in Denmark on the other hand, reflected responses from their preschool teachers noting themes like trying for themselves, doing things independently and experimentation as being the overriding ways in which children learn. It was felt by this respondent group that children learn best through play, by doing things that will keep them interested and challenged. While this group did note the value in watching others, modeling and experimenting, the overall belief was that children

need to be active participants in order to learn most effectively. This philosophy can be noted in the following comment:

“They (children) are learning all the time in everything they do. They develop based on the series in which they are exposed to things. The adults in their lives must keep them interested and keep challenging them to explore further and think deeper, and this is how they build a knowledge base and learn the things which interest them and the things that don’t.”

When comparing the overall responses from preschool teachers to kindergarten teachers, very few distinctions can be noted. Both of these respondent groups felt that children learn through experience and being actively involved in their environment. Most respondents felt that children learn best through observation, imitation and through play. Nearly all respondents referenced the environment of the child and a couple noted that children were “like little sponges”, taking in everything in the world around them.

When comparing respondents’ perceptions of how children learn between Denmark and Truro distinctions were evident overall. Teachers in Denmark saw children as active participants in their own learning. They note that children learn by experience, stating that children learn by doing and that they will learn best when they are deeply involved

in something. In contrast, Truro teachers generally seemed to feel children were primarily “absorbers” of their environment, a more passive role.

Research Question 4: What are some of the issues/demands participants have encountered when teaching young children overall and by respondent group?

Preschool teachers in Truro seemed to feel that lack of resources and time to get to know each child individually were their greatest challenges. They felt it was difficult to really gain an understanding of children’s varying abilities due to the busyness of the preschool classroom, which they viewed as an injustice for the children. As one Truro preschool teacher put it:

“I think in a daycare setting, and in schools as well, it’s hard to give the kids the individual time they need. Sometimes there’s just not enough of us to go around. There is often a lack of resources and people for the children to always get what they need.”

Kindergarten teachers in Truro expressed similar concerns noting a struggle to meet individual needs and lack of resources among their concerns. This group felt it was difficult to meet the required expectations given their current resources. One teacher also commented on the challenges of getting and maintaining children’s attention, while at the same time, making learning fun for all children. This appears to tie into the struggle with meeting each child’s individual needs, as previously noted.

Preschool teachers in Denmark share similar concerns. They believe that it can be very difficult to find a program which provides a balance for all children. They understand the importance of keeping programs fun and motivating, and keeping a good pace for all children participating. To quote one of the Danish preschool teachers interviewed:

“One of the most important issues I think is keeping the program and activities fun and motivating for all of the children. Because all of the children are learning in a different way and have different things that are interesting for them, we need to always be sure that we are challenging them at the right level.”

Conversely, kindergarten teachers in Denmark discussed a markedly different group of concerns. They noted that the maturity level of the children and their readiness to learn were chief among their issues and demands in teaching young children. They believe that some children lack empathy, focus and an ability to sit still suggesting that there is often a lack of respect for others demonstrated by their students which makes teaching them quite difficult. This point of view is evident in the following comment:

“Sometimes you come across children who are just not ready for instruction. They are not mature enough to understand the concepts of the kindergarten or keep focused long enough to take in what is around them. Sometimes, this is okay because

they will eventually become interested in the things other children their age are interested in, but it can be challenging to try to motivate children when they just aren't ready for the challenge. You can always tell the ones who are eager learners from the one's who aren't quite there yet."

Overall, teachers in Truro noted things like lack of time and resources, and difficulty in meeting the individual needs of the children. The fact that children were at different levels of development proved to be a concern for this group of teachers. In Denmark, however, the issues seemed to focus largely around keeping things motivating and challenging for the children so that they would be able to concentrate and remain focused. While they did note difficulty in meeting individual needs of children as well, the larger issue seemed to be getting children to focus and concentrate, and to stay interested in what was presented as not all children might be interested in what was being offered.

When looking at overall differences between the preschool responses and the kindergarten responses, it appears that preschool teachers' greatest challenge is finding a program that will meet the needs of all children while kindergarten teachers' biggest issue is the maturity of the children and their readiness to learn. This distinction can be seen by looking at the following comments. A preschool teacher in Truro notes:

“Each child is so individual that you really do have to take it on their basis. I mean some aren’t very articulate yet so you have to find other ways to communicate with them. Sometimes their background comes into play so you have to know some information about their family, about the structure in their family. Because they’re all at different levels of learning, it can be very challenging to pick up where they are and try to bring them forward. We have a number of children at our centre where something is stopping them from learning with a certain method. Some kids are more visual. It can be challenging to find a method that works for each child because they are all so unique. And what you think would work with one child may not always work with another...or sometimes it takes so long for it to work and for you to see some change.”

Conversely, a kindergarten teacher in Denmark mentions the following as being her biggest concern:

“A lot of times, when teaching young children (kindergarten) my experience is that they have a hard time sitting still and listening to one another. That’s one thing we spend some time trying to teach them in the beginning of a school year. Also, that if they are told to do something, then it can be hard to keep them focused and concentrating about that one thing and that’s also hard sometimes to teach them.”

When comparing overall responses between Denmark and Truro, it is also evident that the answers from the Danish population seemed more to reflect the belief that it is the responsibility of the teacher to make sure the child's interest is maintained and activities modified so that all children participate and are interested and involved, and therefore learn.

Research Question 5: How did participants define the term “school readiness”?

For preschool teachers in Truro, social skills, academic readiness and emotional readiness were felt to encompass their beliefs around the term “school readiness”. This group of respondents noted things like children's ability to interact with their peers, their cognitive abilities, self-help skills and social and emotional skills as all contributing to a child's readiness for school. Preschool teachers in Truro believed a child should have the ability to get along with peers as well as basic knowledge of numbers and letters and other academic abilities. They commented on the fact that children really need a broad range of skills in order to be considered “ready for school.” As one respondent in this group puts it:

“I think usually when parents are registering their children; to them it means sitting down at the table, knowing your colors and letters, you know that kind of thing. I guess it's not really that to me. Yes, it includes that, but the kids are doing that all day long...just maybe not sitting down with their pencil at a desk in that

sort of forced learning way where kids can't learn in their individual ways. I find that everything is school readiness, you know, whether you're learning to tie your shoe, to dress yourself properly, to interact socially with other kids...obviously you're going to need that when you go to school and also as an adult so I guess it's all encompassing. It's academic, it's social, it's emotional, and it's everything so that you're ready in the full sense of the word."

Kindergarten teachers in Truro talked about social skills as well, along with emotional readiness and independence. Attentiveness, maturity, co-operation and a good attitude were believed to be essential for school readiness as teachers made comments such as:

"...it's most important that they have social skills...that they be comfortable to leave the family unit and be able to transition into and out of the classroom. All other skills will follow then from being able to be social. If they come into the classroom with a good attitude and feeling happy, they can go a long way!"

In Silkeborg, Denmark, preschool teachers introduced empathy to the concept of school readiness. They felt that a sense of self, including seeing oneself as part of a group and good self-expression, was essential for school readiness, along with the ability to be social. To quote one respondent:

“It’s a social thing for us. We see the child as a person who shall be ready for school socially and have good language, be able to express themselves and what they feel...be able to say no when they need to. The social part is very important, even more than the intellectual. The intellectual part is important but even more important is being able to play and speak for yourself and be a good person. You must be able to understand another person’s needs and have empathy.”

Preschool teachers in Silkeborg valued the importance of children’s ability to work together and possess practical skills as well such skills as being able to put on your own clothes and cut with scissors.

Kindergarten teachers in Silkeborg highlighted emotional readiness, good communication and self-control within their perceptions of the term “school readiness”. They note that it is important that children feel that they belong, that they have a good understanding of who they are and an ability to not only express themselves but also be able to understand what is being said to them. For a child to be ready for school, he or she must see themselves as being a “big kid” who is ready to learn new and challenging things, has a good understanding of general concepts and the ability to concentrate and be patient.

In general, nearly all respondents noted social skills as being part of what it means to be ready for school. A couple of teachers both in Denmark and Truro

mentioned academic skills as being important, however in Denmark it was the *interest* in academics that was more important at this stage than the knowledge of things like letters and numbers. Self help skills were fairly dominant as well, with three interviewees noting the importance of being independent in things like toileting and dressing. The skill emerging as being most critical among respondents, however, seemed to be emotional readiness. All but one mentioned emotional well-being or intelligence through labels such as “good attitude” and “happy”. Noted by all four teachers in Denmark was “empathy for others” and while this skill was alluded to by teachers in Truro, it seemed to be of utmost importance to teachers in Denmark.

Research Question 6: What are some of the skills respondents felt most important for children to have as they enter the school system? B) Which skills emerged as essential for a successful transition into public school and why? C) How did participants feel early childhood educators could ensure children had these skills?

A myriad of categories emerged when preschool teachers in Truro provided answers to this question. Nearly all domains of development were mentioned including, social, self-help, communication, academics/literacy and fine motor. Some specific skills noted in the social and self-help domain were having good manners, dressing skills such as tying shoes and dressing independently and going to the washroom without assistance. Cognitive skills such as an ability to recognize letters, numbers, shapes and colors, along with a child’s knowledge of his or her name and how to spell it were noted by participants. Showing an understanding of books was also felt to be a

valuable skill needed prior to formal schooling. One Truro preschool teacher commented:

“I guess when the kids get to big school it’s very different for them in that at daycare, they’re used to having an adult with them for every step of the way. You don’t have to go to the bathroom by yourself or get dressed by yourself. But when you get to school it’s quite different. You may even have to walk to school by yourself. So I guess the self-help thing would be one of the biggest things. If you don’t have those skills, it’s either going to cause you great anguish, you know, you need someone to help and you can’t find anybody to help you or the kids could make fun of you which could end up meaning a lot more. Also your basic academic skills, knowing your ABC’s, knowing your name, how to spell your name, being able to put it on a piece of paper would help meet the expectations that a lot of teachers at that level would have.”

At the kindergarten level in Truro, teachers believed that emotional maturity, communication, fine motor skill and readiness to learn were all important skills for children to have as they enter the school system. Social and academic skills were also noted as essential for formal schooling. In terms of emotional maturity, kindergarten teachers indicated that it was crucial that a child have a good knowledge of self and a desire to please others. A child should also be a good communicator in the sense that they are able to interact with peers, speak clearly and have a good vocabulary. Fine

motor skills such as using pencils and crayons, cutting with scissors and an ability to make lines and circles were also valued skills. A child should be social, according to this group, and be able to engage in play independently. Cognitive ability and readiness to learn could not be ignored for this group as they indicated that both being able to sit and listen and having a good attention span were important attributes for a child to possess. Traditional academic skills were also noted, including letter and number knowledge, as well as sorting ability.

Danish preschool teachers felt children should possess social skills upon entrance to kindergarten, along with good communication, fine motor skills and emotional maturity. Elaborating on emotional maturity, this group stated that children should have empathy, good behaviour, and a sense of belonging as well as the ability to see themselves as being part of the group. Specifically, Danish preschool teachers indicated that there is importance in a child's ability to see their behaviour in relation to others, be able to speak nicely to others and not be selfish. It was felt that children should understand that when a message is given, that it applies to everyone. To be ready for kindergarten, children should be able to concentrate as well and be willing to reason and share ideas. In terms of fine motor ability, it was felt that children should be able to draw "more than just scribbles" and attempt to print their name. Self-confidence was a major factor for this respondent group with teachers commenting that for children to feel successful, they need opportunities to feel competent. According to one Danish preschool teacher:

“I think all of them are very important. The social skills I feel would be most important. You also have a certain kind of behavior but it is more like a behavior where you have an understanding for other people in relation to yourself. Empathy is very important. With social skills, the most important is learning all the ways of behavior. You cannot have a social relationship if you are not speaking nicely to another person or if you are being selfish. In that way all of these things should be involved in the community of being social. And I think that if you see a child play socially, you can see if the child can concentrate, use his language, reason, have empathy and have ideas, if the child is able to compromise, listen to everybody and their ideas....if you can do these things it will help you to be ready for school.”

Once again, several skills were listed when this same question was posed to kindergarten teachers in Denmark. Overall, skills which fell into the emotional maturity, self-help and motor skills categories were highlighted most often. It was felt that when entering kindergarten, children should have respect for others and show empathy. Self care and independence were reflected when teachers talked about the need for children to be responsible for their own belongings, dress themselves, use the washroom independently, blow their own nose and pour their own milk. Both fine and gross motor skills were also cited as important, specifically being able to write their own name and

cut with scissors for fine motor skills and do things like skip, stand on one leg and ride a bike for gross motor ability.

As can be seen, respondents mentioned a fairly wide variety of skills deemed as being important for kindergarten entry. Noted by nearly all was the ability to be social, and the attainment of self-confidence. All but one respondent mentioned skills which fell into the cognitive/ readiness to learn domain. However, most skills referred to were in the “readiness to learn” category such as listening, concentrating and reasoning ability as opposed to possession of actual academic knowledge. Motor skills were touched on a bit as well with respondents bringing up things like scissor skills and ability to hold a pencil in a tripod grasp. Skills in the self-help, adaptive and emotional domains emerged as being most dominant with the majority of all skills mentioned falling within these categories.

Truro preschool teachers isolated self-help, communication and social skills as being most essential for transition into the public school system. More specifically, being able to use the washroom independently, communicate with others, deal with aggressiveness, speak out and make friends were among the skills isolated. One teacher highlights the importance of being social in saying:

“...it all comes back to being social. It isn’t something innate, you have to learn it. You have to learn how to interact with people. There may be one child that is

more aggressive, you have to know how to deal with that if you're not. If you don't have the social piece, it becomes more difficult to learn to get along with people in the later years."

This group felt these skills were most important because a child would have a more difficult time in life if they were not independent and social. Independence helps children feel confident. These early childhood educators can ensure that children have these skills by incorporating opportunities to learn them throughout the day, modeling, prompting and facilitation. Although these preschool teachers did not mention academics as being among their essential skills in the above question, academics made its way back when respondents were answering this question:

"...certainly the basic readiness we do everyday. We do informal counting, singing the alphabet and reinforcing it with visuals. We also do a little bit of the sitting down, 'this-is-what-it's-kind-of-like-at-school' stuff. We try to introduce that it's not going to be all day just playing so it's not such a shock to the system. That type of thing we do in a formal and informal way everyday."

It appears, therefore, in general, that preschool teachers believe in formally and informally giving children opportunities to gain various readiness skills throughout their day. It is interesting to note that while academics may not appear on this respondent

group's list of essential skills, cognitive skills and abilities are still obviously essential for them and evident in the majority of comments they made throughout the interviews.

For kindergarten teachers in Truro, communication, fine motor abilities, social skills, self-help and independence were isolated as being essential for a successful transition. Children should be able to communicate their wants and interact effectively with peers and adults. Along the communication lines, it was noted that children should also be good listeners and be able to listen to stories when read. Holding a pencil properly was also felt to be valuable in terms of aiding a successful transition. The ability to look after their own needs was also an important one for this respondent group. It was felt by kindergarten teachers in Truro that a child who is independent will be better able to learn and have more confidence. Although *one* respondent felt traditional readiness skills were less important than social and self-help skills when she commented:

“Early childhood educators can ensure children have these skills by putting the academic stuff aside until the other important skills are in place.”

Another respondent noted that it was important for early childhood educators to have reading time, encourage listening behaviours and model and demonstrate fine motor skills effectively, correcting children when necessary. Again, due to the fact that

this seems to contradict the idea that academics should come second to social skills, we note the possibility that what is spoken may not always go along with what is practiced.

In Denmark, preschool teachers felt that readiness centered on social skills, communication skills and emotional maturity. Relationships with peers and adults emerged as being very relevant as did the ability to use language effectively and share information. Emotional awareness and regulation also seem to play a large role for this group of respondents. According to one preschool teacher, emotional readiness and confidence provide a child with a sense of belonging:

“I would say the emotional...knowing themselves as part of society. Does this child feel big and capable? Do I belong to the group? It is so important. Some children feel small, lack confidence. It is good to be a ‘big kid’ and feel like you are really ready.”

These preschool teachers feel these skills are essential because they see social ability as preceding learning. If you cannot get along with others, you are not able to listen to other people’s ideas and compromise; therefore you are unable to be taught. Early Childhood Educators can help ensure children have these skills by playing games and encouraging the children to gain social skills. Opportunities are provided for children to problem solve and cooperate so these skills will develop.

Kindergarten teachers in Denmark narrowed the skills they felt to be important into three main categories; emotional intelligence, ability to see themselves as part of a group and having a good sense of self. Under this umbrella, one Danish kindergarten teacher reflected on the importance of having good being accepting in saying:

“Everything that you can put under the (category of) emotional intelligence, I think is very important that you teach young children, because with so many individuals, I think its important how children in their very early years learn how to accept other personalities. If you already start in day-care to show them, teach them, explain and act like you want, then I think you’re doing the best you can to ensure them these skills.”

Research Question 7: What strategies and methods did participants feel were the most effective in enhancing children’s growth and development and preparing them for future learning?

Responses for this question seemed to reflect a great deal of difference between Danish and Canadian respondents. Teachers from Truro noted things like positive reinforcement, praise and structure as being most effective strategies. Alternatively, all four teachers in Silkeborg cited finding out what each child is good at and helping them to learn in a way that is best for them as the most effective method to enhance children’s growth and prepare them for future learning. Truro teachers stated that the best way to enhance children’s growth and development was to make them feel successful and let them know rules and boundaries. Comments made by the Danish group of teachers

included keeping things new and exciting for the children, allowing them to always be involved in the planning process and expanding on the children's natural curiosity. For this question, the polarity in opinion can be seen when comparing one country to another as opposed to comparing preschool teachers' responses to those of kindergarten teachers.

More specifically, preschool teachers in Truro highlighted the use of positive reinforcement, appropriate curriculum, rules and structure and consistency as being among the most effective strategies used to enhance children's growth and development and prepare them for future learning. One Truro preschool teacher notes that:

“Physical contact and encouragement makes kids feel comfortable and warm. I'm also big on hugs and high fives. Even a smile or a wink, acknowledging when they are doing something good can go a long way.”

Another preschool teacher in Truro acknowledged the value in positive reinforcement but also indicated that structure and rules within a preschool setting were very helpful:

“I should add that whether I'm with the eighteen month olds right up to the twelve year olds, there are rules wherever I am. There is structure. There is certainly flexibility within that structure but the kids always know what they can do and what they shouldn't do and what the consequences will be if they do something they know they shouldn't. I think all kids need to know where those boundaries

are and I think they feel much more secure knowing they're there and that the boundaries don't change. So I think that kind of structure has certainly helped my kids. You can see the growth. We stay consistent and then I think they feel free to learn. They feel comfortable and safe. Sometimes stability is missing in other parts of their life. Rules can be effective."

Kindergarten teachers in Truro share the belief that positive reinforcement and routine are beneficial when setting up learning environments for children. They also talked about things like the importance of parent-teacher relations, modeling behaviours for the children and being able to both challenge children and keep them engaged. One teacher in Truro summarized the effective strategies she used in her classroom as follows:

"Routine- everything is established at the beginning of the year. Kids will do well when they know what to expect. I also believe that if you set up a positive learning environment where they are encouraged to think and explore is very important. They need to be pushed to a certain extent and challenged appropriately but given positive praise and reward for all the little things they do well. It is also important to ensure effective communication between the parents and the school."

In Denmark, some very different strategies were employed. Danish preschool teachers emphasized the importance of listening to the children and allowing child participation. The need for curriculum to be based on the child's interests was

mentioned several times within their responses to this question. One Danish preschool teacher summarizes her thinking nicely by emphasizing the importance of listening to children. She said:

“(what I find important is)... really listening to the children and seeing what it is they are interested in. And being able to help them find ways to expand their curiosity because when they care about what they are learning, it doesn't seem hard. If you think of the child as a whole child and look at what they like and what interests them, they will want to continue to learn because it is all about what they find motivating and interesting.”

It is easy to see how this democratic philosophy is really a part of Danish culture when we see the response of another preschool teacher from Silkeborg when she states:

“I like to allow children to decide things for themselves. Allow them to be part of the process at all times. I have noticed that when you have this attitude with children, the negative behavior you sometimes see is often drastically reduced because they feel like they are understood and like they are being listened to. And it makes the work with children much more fun! And when you do see negative behaviour, it is usually because they are feeling frustrated and not listened to. Sometimes in kindergarten, they may look more at what the child is not so good at. We are very aware of building the child up to be as strong as possible before they start school. And that they believe in themselves, this is so important.”

This was echoed by kindergarten teachers in Silkeborg where responses continued to demonstrate the value in keeping children interested and taking time to see each child as an individual who learns in their own unique way. One Danish teacher notes:

“Always keeping things new and interesting is helpful. Digging deep into the subjects that really interest the children because it is when they are deep into something that they learn the most. We want to keep learning fun for the children so they will always want to learn and it never becomes boring for them.”

Research Question 8: What were participants’ perceptions of the roles of play and academics in designing programs for young children?

While all respondents alluded to the notion that both play and academics were important and not mutually exclusive, the idea that academics should somehow be incorporated into play seemed more important for preschool and kindergarten teachers in Truro than for their counterparts in Denmark. Preschool teachers in both locations, along with kindergarten teachers in Denmark, believe that children learn best through play. Kindergarten teachers in both locations feel that academics follow naturally through play.

In Truro, preschool teachers felt that play and academics could be easily combined. They noted that young children learn better through play and indicated that if

they had to choose between play and academics which was more important, they would choose play:

“You can combine the two. I think for younger children, they learn better through play. The two don’t have to be apart. If I had to, I’d say play is more important. While academics is important, playing and being social is more of the focus for me. Play is where they start. They’re learning from day one through their play activities. If we have a plan set out and the children happen to be playing really well with something, we never take them away from their play because they’re learning, they’re playing together and they’re having fun.”

As can be seen, while play does seem to be of value for preschool teachers in Truro, academics still remain present on the periphery as is evident in this response from a Truro preschool teacher:

“My opinion is that children really do learn through play. I think you can implement the academics into the play. They don’t have to be separate. Whatever helps the child to learn the easiest is your best method. If you have to tie the child to the chair to learn, well, they’re not learning anyway, it’s not going to stick with them. If you can teach them in a playful and a happy and an inspiring way, they will learn a lot more. You may feel like you’re playing a game which has no merit to it at all, but that’s the way we want it to be. You’re still reinforcing all those basic skills.”

The views of kindergarten teachers in Truro were actually very similar to preschool teachers in Truro. They too feel that both play and academics are important and that there should be a balance between the two. They indicate that learning can take place in different environments through various activities and that play is an opportunity to practice skills and knowledge. This philosophy reiterates that of Truro preschool teachers, while play is important, it should be used as a way of incorporating and/or solidifying things they have already learned. This view is supported in the following comments:

“I feel they are both important. The kids gotta be happy so I think play is first important. If they can play in a co-operative, explorative environment before they go to school, they will be so much more eager to learn. To make sure you have a balance, both play and academics should be integrated. Learning can take place in lots of different environments and through different activities, using the body and the brain together, making learning fun” and

“Both are essential. Children need to be active and love to play. Social skills are learned through sharing and play. When the play also teaches a concept or gives them time to practice a certain skill – they improve immensely. They need to have time for self discovery and play does not have to be 100% directed. However if the play doesn’t extend their learning, then they can often learn from the teacher or other children to move on to other concepts.”

Preschool teachers in Denmark were the only participants who did not comment that both play and academics were important. Instead, they indicate that each child should learn in the way that is best for them. They emphasized the importance of democracy in planning for young children and stated that because the children are involved in the planning process, they will learn better because they are interested in what is going on around them. As can be seen in the following comments, academics need not necessarily be incorporated into play but rather that learning takes place naturally in every environment in which the child has played a role in setting up:

“Children learn in all different ways. A child will naturally be interested. Then, the child learns the way it wants to learn. It could be out in nature. A lot of boys don’t sit there and count beads, they would much rather collect snails and see how many they have. And then I can tell they can count up to a lot of numbers. We also have gymnastics and we jump and we count and they don’t even think about it. Or we can play a game where they roll a dice and if it lands on red, they have to take a turn...so they are learning their colors....we encourage them to think and reflect, make choices and what they want to do, what they really like. Everything is always very democratic. We want them to learn how to think for themselves. And that way they are so completely 100% interested.”

Another Danish preschool teacher states:

“Of course children need to learn some things like how to know their letters and colors from each other and have an interest in reading but all of these things will come naturally as they explore other things. When they are playing, they are learning about math and when they are in a play they are seeing letters in signs they make for props and in their name so it is all there, it’s just not placed in front of them for them to take in when we say they have to take it in. It is a part of their everyday life and they are learning in everything they do.”

A child who does not know how to play will not learn very much, according to Danish kindergarten teachers. Their opinion is very similar to that of Danish preschool teachers. Play is where you learn the fundamentals, and from it, academic knowledge will automatically follow.

Research Question 9: What types of curriculum guidelines did participants indicate were available at their settings? Did participants indicate these guidelines were helpful and followed?

All respondent groups indicated they have guidelines to follow from their respective governments with the exception of preschool teachers in Truro. Preschool teachers in Truro noted the Daycare Act and provided little or no information in terms of curriculum guidelines. Preschool teachers in both locations revealed the most flexibility in terms of how guidelines are interpreted and implemented. Kindergarten teachers (especially those in Truro) seemed to indicate that their curriculum guidelines were fairly firm and that they were closely followed.

Preschool teachers in Truro indicated that they use planning sheets and worked as a team to develop themes and daily activities. They are followed because everyone has had a hand in planning what will be included in each plan. They said that this process helped them remember to keep a balance in what learning experiences they have provided for children. They cautioned that there often is no feedback or follow-up on what they are planning or teaching within their childcare settings and that it is up to them to be aware of when plans become stagnant and when change is needed.

Kindergarten teachers in Truro follow curriculum and outcome guidelines as set out by the Department of Education. They use them all the time and feel that the outline and outcomes are helpful in programming and in making sure they are accountable for what they are teaching. Their only complaints seemed to revolve around the lack of resources (time and support) to ensure the curriculum is followed as well as it should be for all children. Also, these participants felt that while some of the guidelines were good, others, such as language arts, needed improvement.

In Denmark, preschool teachers commented on the fact that they have been given new learning plans that they are now responsible for implementing and the reaction to them seems to be fairly consistent:

“...the latest thing is that the government wants us to do what they call ‘learning plans’. They want us to actually describe what it is we do in the daycare. And what it is we are developing. And we’ve never done that before, not really. We have the plan of course but now we have to do it a little bit deeper. We have six subjects we should describe and this is the same all over the country, it is for the politicians to look at and decide that it is okay. You have to make an extra effort. We have just started this and we have not described it perfectly yet but it is starting. The government has made the decision and with it, there has come more money so we can go to training to learn the new way and that is great. So it is really not difficult at all.”

Another Danish preschool echoes this response in her comment:

“There are new learning plans we have now which really break down the skills more than we use to. I guess in a way it is meant to show others why we do what we do with the children. They help us to really look closely as well into why we do the things we do and this helps us to know that what we are doing is working and where we can make some change. We are happy with the suggestions and we are using them.”

For the most part, they feel fairly comfortable with the curriculum guidelines they have been given but agree that they may take a little getting used to.

Kindergarten teachers tell us that since government, teachers, parents and policy makers in Denmark have the same hopes and values regarding children, the curriculum guidelines are fairly reflective of these beliefs and therefore easy to follow. They showed some concern around the new “learning plan” strategy being implemented by government, which also involves children beginning school at an increasingly younger age. They feel that it will be pressuring preschool teachers and children into academics too early, which will only hurt them in the long run:

“Now the government is trying to get more and more children into the schools at an early age, which will probably puts too much pressure on the children before they are ready for it. And in the end, if you demand too much of the children, it would probably not give the result you want anyway, so maybe we should just let the children grow up in the tempo or speed that they are ready for.”

Another kindergarten teacher in Denmark expresses concern over the idea of children potentially starting school at too early an age, increased amounts of academics and that the government guidelines are not helpful when facilities are short-staffed and underfunded.

“When I think of how the preschools are right now; of course it would be nice to see some changes.... and that’s things like having enough resources to help the children that really need help, getting more money so they can have a better

staffing and surroundings. The guidelines can be really good, but what's the point if there is not enough staff to make it happen? And right now there's a lot of talking about getting more academics/tests into preschools. Of course that's the politicians that want that because if they compare Denmark to some other countries, Denmark might have third place in how good a grade 4 is in reading...this is not a fact. But most teachers and pedagogs think badly about this idea, cause when you look closer into the young children's future, you know that there's a lot less crime here than in the United States and my belief is that it is because the children over there hasn't learned enough about emotional intelligence and more about academics, then they get more bored in the early school years and then go out and don't know how to act in society!"

Research Question 10: What role did respondents feel preschool experiences outside of the home play in getting children ready for school?

In response to this question, all teachers indicated that preschool experiences were important in helping children to develop social skills. Kindergarten teachers in both locations mentioned that when a child has attended preschool, it is much easier for them to become independent from their parents once they go to kindergarten. Both preschool and kindergarten teachers in Truro made note of preschool being a good opportunity for children to practice skills and gain some academic experience. In Denmark, preschool teachers and kindergarten teachers mentioned that preschool gives

children practice in how to act as part of a group and see themselves as part of a larger society.

In looking at each respondent group individually, we can see that preschool teachers in Truro noted issues which fell into three main categories: social skills, development and practice. They noted that preschool experiences are helpful because children have an opportunity to learn and watch others. They believed that the quality of programming in a preschool could be more beneficial than that at home as children have a chance to interact with peers at preschool. Social development played a large role in responses given by this group- how to act socially with other children, how to cope and an opportunity to practice skills all emerged as being relevant. One preschool teacher in Truro said:

“As far as friends, interacting with other children is helpful. And they do learn, as far as watching others. Maybe at home they walk around with their food but at preschool they see that we sit at a table. Maybe at home, they eat with their hands and at preschool they see other children eating with utensils. They learn from watching others. If they don’t have anyone else to watch at home, then they may not have as much opportunity to see how things are done.”

Another Truro preschool teacher discussed the value of preschool experiences in saying;

“I think preschool plays a large role. You have to look at things like the quality of the programming they can receive in preschool as opposed to home. In preschool, children have so many more opportunities to interact with their peers. They have a chance to practice their skills and be able to learn how to cope. It helps them to practice how to learn to be socially in relation to other children. So I think it is very important.”

Kindergarten teachers in Truro shared similar opinions on the importance of preschool experiences prior to entering the school system. While the value of social experiences was still present, this respondent group added that preschool allowed children a chance separate from their parents as well as an opportunity to be immersed in a rich, educational environment. As one Truro kindergarten teacher put it;

“Preschool experiences are very important. They set up the social interaction for so many children who may not have it otherwise. It helps them to make the transition away from home. It is much harder for children who have not had that experience away from home.”

Another Truro school teacher highlighted the importance of preschool and how it provides children with an opportunity to experience things socially and educationally. This teacher seems to believe that because the environment at preschool is so rich, a child will benefit from being enrolled. She notes;

“Preschool experiences are terribly important. Of course there is the social aspect where they learn that some actions that might be acceptable at home are not accepted by the outside world. Some children have major speech delays or little vocabulary to build on. If a child comes from a home where a “rock” is never called a boulder, pebble, stone or any other word, they miss out on many literacy concepts. Children learn by using what they have previously learned or experienced so the richer the preschool and home activities the better.”

Looking at preschool teachers in Denmark, we are once again reminded of the importance this group places on social experiences and opportunities for play. One teacher felt that a rich environment at home can be beneficial but that only a certain type of parent could provide a home experience equal to that of the preschool. She stated;

“I have to say (preschool plays) a very important role because nearly all the children in Denmark are taken care of in the daycare centres so if you are at home with your mother the whole day then you’re home alone on the whole street and for a child it is very important to go out and play with other children so therefore I would have to say yes. It is important they learn how to be social and learn how to play. Being in daycare gives them more opportunity. They learn so much. If the child has a parent who really listens to them and does things with them and not just doing adult things then maybe (it would be okay). They have to have adults not to show them the way but to follow their way.”

It seems that giving children an opportunity to be around other children is appreciated within the Danish preschool teacher group. While home experiences can be beneficial, preschool experiences are unique in that they provide children the occasion to mingle with others and see themselves as part of a larger group. One Danish preschool teacher puts this very nicely when she says;

“It depends on the child and the family. For most children, it is good for them to come to preschool because it gives them a change to be around other kids and see what other kids are doing. Some families are very social and have their children out and with other children all the time so for them it is not so important. But most of the time I would say yes, it is very important because it helps the child to see himself as part of a group and a larger society.”

Kindergarten teachers in Denmark also seemed to really understand the significance of preschool experiences for young children. They also saw preschool as an opportunity for children to be social, independent and learn how to act in a group. Emotional readiness was noted to be important for this group and they saw preschool as an opportunity to gain some emotional maturity. In discussing the role of preschool, one teacher in Silkeborg says;

“... it is here that they learn to become independent individuals, learn how to be social, how to respect each other, and that life is often very much about being a

social being with other peers. Children learn that to succeed, you need to know how to cooperate and get along with others. And I think they can learn this better in a preschool social setting than at home sometimes.”

It appears that all respondents value preschool experiences in one way or another, especially for their ability to assist children in developing social skills they will need upon entrance into kindergarten.

Research Question 11: Did participants indicate that a majority of children entering kindergarten today ready for school? Where there specific skills that participants felt children had or were missing?

According to the majority of teachers interviewed in this study, most children are ready when they enter kindergarten. While teachers in Truro seemed to respond that some children were ready and others not, teachers in Denmark highlighted the fact that preschool teachers work with parents and schools to ensure that children transitioning into school as ready as they can be. They went on to note that the decision to send a child to school is really made very thoughtfully with input from all members of the team. One teacher in Silkeborg commented;

“Because of the cooperation with the preschool teachers and that we have the same goal for our children or concept of what’s important before they start school, and then we think that the majority of children are ready for school. We also have meetings with the parents and the preschool teachers, so we can hand

out any important things and information to know about this certain child and be aware of.”

Another teacher in Denmark echoes this belief in saying;

“Umm...well...we have a big responsibility in daycare to tell parents if we feel they are not ready. We meet with parents and discuss the results of progress reports we do with the children. We talk about areas that may need development. If they are behind in certain areas, then we look at why they are falling behind...we want to know that they are able to wait their turn and participate in a group. We look at helping them get where they need to be.”

As we can see, teachers in Denmark see it as their responsibility to work with the other's involved in the child's life to help make sure the transition into kindergarten is smooth.

While teachers in Truro indicated that some children seemed to enter kindergarten ready and others did not, they also commented on the high expectations for children at the primary level. For example, one kindergarten teacher in Truro said;

“Yes for the most part – the expectations of the parents and community are quite high in the area in which I teach. Children that have a lot of difficulty in kindergarten are either not exposed to learning opportunities or just simply not

ready. Often when they see the other children engaging in learning – they come along nicely.”

It seemed as though preschool teachers both in Denmark and Truro, felt that children leaving their program were nearly always ready for school. According to one preschool teacher in Truro;

“We certainly try to give our kids the best start possible, but for some kids, they may not have had that opportunity to socialize or be part of a group. So it really depends on their past experience up to that point. But for the kids we have who will be going to school this year, I would say a definite yes. They have been ready for quite some time.”

Preschool teachers in Denmark felt equally as confident that children entering kindergarten from their centre would be well equipped as evident from this comment by one preschool teacher;

“Well here in this preschool, we do what we can to see that children go to school feeling ready. There is often a difference between what parents and teachers feel makes the child ready. But I would say that the children who leave here are ready. We may have one or two in a year that are not ready, but then they know they can always wait a year until they see themselves as being ready and wanting

to go. Until they see that they are one of the big kids and have confidence, they will not be ready to learn.”

It is interesting to note that in Denmark, the teachers seem to circle a lot around the notion that it is not just the parents who help make the decision on whether or not a child is ready to transition to school. It seems to be made as a team decision to ensure that everyone, including the child, feels ready to make the transition.

Research Question 12: What role did respondents feel the following groups played in preparing a child for school transition: a) preschool teachers b) kindergarten teachers c) schools and d) community?

In looking at how participants answered this question, we can again note that it is in fact the location of the teacher, and not their professional designation, that seems to determine their response. Both preschool and school teachers in Truro talked about things like a hierarchy of responsibility- in particular how the preschool teacher had the biggest role in aiding a smooth transition and that the onus of responsibility floated downward from them to the kindergarten teachers, schools and the larger community. One teacher did however feel that there should be more effective communication between all of the aforementioned groups;

“I don’t see that there is as much of a role for kindergarten teachers and schools as there is for preschool teachers. Unfortunately, there is not much communication between schools and preschools at time of transition unless there are children with special needs involved. We might get a little bit of information

from the preschools now and then but otherwise there isn't much contact. The role of the teachers and the schools is more to be accepting of the fact that all children will enter at a different level and work with them from the point at which they arrive. And in terms of community, I see that as being more what they are exposed to from their parents. And the support provided to families through the community."

In Denmark, all teachers saw the importance in working together to prepare the child for school. Because preschool teacher and kindergarten teachers in Denmark receive the same education, one teacher commented that they hold the same values and wishes for children;

"The kindergarten and preschool teachers have the same education so we have a lot of the same values in what's important and what it means for a child to be ready for school! And the schools and communities as well. We all want the children to be independent thinkers and helpful members of society. With the big cooperation with the preschool teachers, we feel that we are together, preparing the child for a good transition into the schools. The preschool teacher and the parent are the ones who know the child best, so cooperating together with them; we make the most out of giving the child a good transition."

Teachers in Truro, conversely, viewed schools and communities holding a role of support as opposed to being actively involved. It appears that teachers in this area are more likely to view members of each of the groups noted as working in relative isolation;

“Well, I think a lot of it has to do with the way a family interacts with their community. It is all a system of hierarchy. The child starts at the preschool level and the preschool becomes the kindergarten and then of course the larger school system and community. It is important for the child to be able to see themselves as a part of an increasingly larger community.”

This seems to differ substantially from responses of participants who reflected more of a team based approach. This can be seen in looking at the response from a preschool, teacher in Denmark who said;

“I think we work very well together....we see the child as a whole.... we have co-operation with the teachers and the school. We go there with the children and the teachers and schools come to daycare as well. It is good for us to know how to best prepare the children and also important for the teachers to know what we are doing here. Maybe they think the children have a “free life” here....well, of course they have a free life, they’re children. They are so surprised that we teach them so much. After they start school we go to school to visit them again and we

also invite the old kids to come back and visit daycare for an afternoon. These connections are so important for children. As for the government, we all have the same intentions for children, wanting a smooth transition for them.”

Research Question 13: Did respondents feel that the skills valued and passed onto young children by their teachers related in any way to the skills we value as adults in society?

In response to this question, all respondents agreed that the skills valued and passed onto children by their teachers relate very much to the skills we value as adults in society. All respondent groups, with the exception of Truro Primary teachers, felt that one of the biggest roles for teachers was to help instill emotional understanding and social skills in our youth. A preschool teacher in Truro, summarizing what seems to be the belief of the majority of respondents, said:

“We always want to pass on the skills that will help children to be functional in society. Values like the importance of getting along with others are the ones we want to instill in children so they will be cooperative members of society and live a happy life.”

Both preschool and kindergarten teachers in Truro talked about how children remember much of their childhood and the values that were passed onto them, both positive and negative ones as well. Kindergarten teachers in Truro discussed the importance of teachers instilling a love of learning in young children so that they may

continue to be enthusiastic learners throughout life. Examples of such comments include:

“If they are successful, they will want to continue to learn. We can instill in them a love of learning and an appreciation for a job well done. And these skills will follow them into adulthood” and

“If a child has a good starting year, it will help them be enthusiastic learners throughout their life.”

While kindergarten teachers in Denmark noted how values passed onto children by adults should include those which support social functioning, they emphasized that a big responsibility still lies in the hands of the parents:

“...society today runs faster than teachers can follow up on I’m afraid and because their job is to teach so many at one time, I think its very important to remember that there is a difference in being a teacher teaching a whole class and being a parent/adult to a child. The biggest responsibility is hopefully still in the hands of the parents to pass on the skills we value as adults.”

Preschool teachers in Denmark had fairly emotional responses to this question, as if it had hit into the heart of their experience as preschool teachers. The value in

passing on ideals and standards that enable children to become cooperative members of society seemed extremely important to this respondent group as can be seen in some of their responses:

“The things I think are most important are relationships and respect for yourself and for other people. And that you are able to think for yourself and reflect over many things. And these of course are the values we try to teach all of the young children so they will become good citizens in society” and

“...social and emotional skills will be important in their whole life. They will always need to know that they can’t think only of themselves. They will have to know how to compromise. A strong foundation of these skills and values will make the child a better person for the rest of their life.”

It seems that all respondents were cognizant of the impact that adults have in the lives of our very young. The hope that our children will become cooperative and social members of society was evident in all responses and seemed a fitting closure to the interviews.

Chapter 5

In this chapter, a brief summary of the results of this research will be given. A discussion is also included, linking the findings with literature and personal experience. Recommendations for future research are noted as well.

A. Summary of Results

Quantitative Summary

To summarize data found in the quantitative section of this research we can note that while there were not many differences noted between the preschool population and the kindergarten population, there were definite differences between the responses from Danish teachers and Truro teachers. Danish teachers' responses indicated they valued skills such as independence and expected children to be empathetic, well adjusted and respectful. Skills requiring children to attend to work for a set amount of time and other skills typically seen as academic in nature were not seen as imperative among this group of participants.

Like the majority of participants, Truro teachers valued self help skills such as the ability to use washroom and dress independently. However, a clearly higher value was placed on skills requiring the child to possess a particular academic skill set as well as a set of skills enabling them to participate in cognitively challenging activities.

Responses from Truro however did reflect the importance of children being able to ask for help and follow curriculum and directions. Skills also emerging as more important among these respondents were fine motor skills typically associated with school tasks such as ability to use writing instruments, scissors and glue. These skills were relatively unimportant to Danish teachers.

Looking at the overall difference in responses between and among groups of participants, we can see that the biggest difference seemed to be between respondents in Denmark and Truro as opposed to preschool & kindergarten. Several skills, such as the ability to count to ten, were obviously more valued in Truro than in Denmark. Other skills which seemed to be of higher significance in Truro were the ability to tell similarities and difference between objects and the children's ability to tell their age, telephone number and address. The ability to recognize and print some letters of the alphabet was a skill more valued in Truro than in Denmark. Evidently, teachers' responses reflected that traditional early academic tasks were the means to ready children for school in Truro but not in Denmark.

However, more teachers in Denmark felt that children should be able to hold and use writing instruments properly, participate in games and sports, and walk and wait in line prior to transitioning into school, than teachers in Truro. When noting this finding, it is important to keep in mind that children begin formal schooling in Denmark at a

later age than in Nova Scotia, so expectations would be different. However, it is interesting to note that there was no emphasis on traditional academics.

Qualitative Summary

Comparing the responses of preschool teachers overall to those of kindergarten teachers, very few distinctions were noted. Mainly, both of these respondent groups felt that children learn through experience and being actively involved in their environment. Most respondents felt that children learn best through observation, imitation and through play. In contrast, when comparing responses of participants from Denmark to those of Truro, teachers in Denmark added to the notion of learning by experience by saying that children learn by doing and being deeply involved in something. Truro teachers generally seemed to feel children were primarily “absorbers” of their environment while teachers in Denmark saw them as active participants who could initiate and at times, control their own learning.

In discussing their greatest challenges, teachers in Truro noted things like lack of time and resources, and difficulty in meeting the individual needs of the children. The fact that children were at different levels of development proved to be difficult for this population. In Denmark, however, the issues seemed to focus largely around keeping things motivating and challenging for the children so that they would be able to concentrate and remain focused. When looking at overall differences between the preschool responses and the kindergarten responses, it appears that preschool teachers’

greatest challenge is finding a program that will meet the needs of all children while kindergarten teachers' biggest issue is the maturity of the children and their readiness to learn. Overall it appears that the Danish teachers' responses reflected the belief that it is the responsibility of the teacher to make sure the children's interests are maintained and that activities are modified so that all children are interested and involved, and therefore learning. The responses of teachers from Truro seem to indicate a reliance on resources and curriculum to meet individual needs.

Nearly all respondents noted that social skills were important when transitioning into school. Self help skills such as dressing and using the washroom independently were also frequently noted. Most respondents mentioned attention and behavioural skills that indicated the child was ready to learn, such as listening, concentrating and reasoning as opposed to possession of actual academic knowledge. However, teachers from Truro more frequently cited the importance of early academics as being important for transitioning into public school. The skill emerging as being most critical among all respondents, however, seemed to be emotional readiness. Having empathy for others seemed to be of utmost importance for teachers in Denmark as was the ability to see themselves as part of a group and having a good sense of self.

In looking at responses given when participants were asked which strategies were used to ensure an effective learning environment for children, responses for this question seemed to reflect a great deal of difference between Danish and Canadian

respondents. Teachers from Truro noted things like positive reinforcement, praise and structure as being most effective strategies. Teachers in Silkeborg alternatively focused on keeping things new and exciting for the children, allowing them to always be involved in the planning process and expanding on the children's natural curiosity.

Both preschool and kindergarten teachers in Truro made note of preschool being a good opportunity for children to practice skills and gain some academic experience. In Denmark, preschool teachers and kindergarten teachers mentioned that preschool gives children practice in how to act as part of a group and see themselves as part of a larger society. It appears that all respondents value preschool experiences in one way or another, especially for their ability to assist children in developing social skills they will need upon entrance into kindergarten.

According to the majority of teachers interviewed in this study, most children are ready when they enter kindergarten. While teachers in Truro seemed to respond more on the end of some being ready and some not, teachers in Denmark highlighted the fact that preschool teachers work with parents and schools to ensure that the children transitioning are as ready as they can be and that the decision to send a child to school is really made very thoughtfully with input from all members of the team.

In terms of responsibilities of various members of the community in transitioning children smoothly into the public school system it seemed that while

Teachers in Truro viewed schools and communities holding a role of support as opposed to being actively involved in the process. Truro teachers seemed more likely to view teachers, parents, schools and larger community members as working in relative isolation as opposed to teachers in Denmark who reflected upon the importance in all members of a community working together as a team.

It seems that all respondents were well aware of the impact that adults have in the lives of our very young. The hope that children will become cooperative and social members of society was evident in all responses.

B. Emergent Issues

This research presents with many views similar to those found in previous research, but also some divergent views as well. This discussion will look at some salient issues and beliefs that were consistent themes throughout both the interview component of this study and in the questionnaire as well.

In looking at the results provided here it appears that our beliefs on what it means for a child to be ready for school will vary according to the society in which we live. While certain commonalities can be found from one culture to the next, there will always be differences in the way each society views its' youngest members and therefore a difference in what skills and values are passed onto those children from the adults in their lives.

The intent of this research was to look at two towns within two countries which, in looking at past research, have held differing views on school readiness, with an attempt at understanding whether or not the views held by preschool and kindergarten teachers in each location still differs and if so, why the views are opposing. Such information is useful in gaining a better understanding of why early childhood educators and teachers employ different teaching strategies within their environments and how what it means to be ready for kindergarten can hold two somewhat different meanings depending on where you are. It may be useful for those involved in making decisions around the education of young children to take a look at which skills each of the respondent groups in this study felt can aid a smooth transition into school and therefore set-up and plan their curriculums and environments accordingly.

As in past research (Lally, 2005, Keeley, 2007), the topic of leadership from Government emerged as relevant within this research as well. Participants in this study noted varying levels of support provided to them from their respective governing bodies. There were also a variety of feelings expressed in terms of the amount of support that is being provided. Danish teachers seemed to feel quite supported by their government, noting that teachers, parents and member of government all held similar views on childhood. While they were given some guidelines, they still felt sufficient freedom to plan their days with the children as they saw fit. None of the participants indicated that they wished for more support in terms of curriculum; however they did

allude to the wish for more funding in some cases. The Danish governments' newly initiated learning plans have been met with mixed feelings by Danish teachers, some feeling that they would work out fine, and others feeling that they will be difficult to employ and may in fact take away from the spontaneity of a child's early learning experiences.

Teachers in Truro repeatedly indicated a very low level of support is given to them, preschool teachers in particular. As previously noted, the lack of a Federal childcare system and very little direction from government in terms of curriculum is certainly impacting preschool teachers' ability to feel that they can adequately meet the needs of children in their care. A lack of funding impacts the childcare system in several different ways including the ability to hire and maintain qualified staff within regulated childcare programs. The lack of a federal program also forces many parents to opt for unregulated childcare options in their communities. Teachers in this study indicated that regulated, developmentally appropriate childcare is helpful and beneficial for children and their families, yet many parents in Nova Scotia are unable to access quality care due to waitlists, high fees and lack of available spaces.

In looking at preschool teachers and kindergarten teachers' responses to the questions throughout this research, it seems that very few saw a need for pushing academics onto increasingly younger children. All teachers recognized the importance of play and felt overall that play was the work of children. Consistent with research

implying that a curriculum which is too academic in nature will have a damaging impact on a child's ability to be social, solve problems and maintain a love of learning (Bergen (2001), Riihela (2002), Pianta et. al. (2000), Katz (1999), Clark (1996) and Stipek et. al.(1998), the majority of teachers in this research indicated that they too worry about negative consequences of programs which are not play-based.

Perspectives on Readiness

Given the complexity of school readiness, it was important to take a closer look at just what preschool and kindergarten teachers in two differing locations felt to be most helpful skills for children to possess upon entrance into kindergarten. As previously noted, the biggest differences noted in the responses given throughout this research emerge when comparing teachers in Truro to teachers in Silkeborg, as opposed to when comparing preschool teachers to kindergarten teachers. Quantitatively, there was no significant difference between professional designations, but there were definite differences between locations, both overall and at the item level. Qualitatively, larger difference is evident as well when comparing locations more so than professional designations.

Perhaps we see a difference between Denmark and Truro responses as a result of our perspective views on children and childhood. Based on the interviews I conducted, it seemed apparent to me that there was a greater level of respect and trust placed in childhood among Danish respondents. Participants in Silkeborg seemed to truly believe

that children should be full and active participants in their world. Children's opinions are valued and in fact imperative for what the Danes would consider a high-functioning, democratic society. This would explain why the majority of their responses reflected beliefs such as co-operation, empathy, and children's ability to see themselves as part of a larger society. This is consistent with research to date which tends to portray Danish culture as being one in which children are given a level of autonomy higher than many North American children would be, and are very much treated as equals in society (Haddad, 2002, Woolston and Dickie, 1995).

In discussions with teachers in Truro, I felt that they really *wanted* to give children this level of autonomy and independence, but there was still an over-riding feeling that adults should be in charge of children, and children therefore somehow take on the role as passive recipients of knowledge passed down to them by adults. Several times throughout this research, I was struck with the feeling that overall, teachers in Truro really do have the best interest of the children at heart and are very knowledgeable as to what is (and is not) considered to be developmentally appropriate for young children.

Yet for some reason, there seems to be some sort of disconnect between what they believe and value in terms of education, and what they practice in their day-to-day lives. Readiness for teachers in Truro reflected such things as being social, independent, confident and able to make friends, but there was within nearly every response a

reference to academic readiness skills as well. We appear to be a society which promotes developmental appropriateness and play-based learning for young children, but ultimately feel the need to still encompass academic skills in practice. This may be because the majority of individuals in society, parents often included, apply some pressure on teachers to instill more academically based skills in children so they will succeed in later life.

Consistent with past research (Daniels, 1995), all teachers participating in this research seemed to value preschool experiences for children prior to transitioning into kindergarten. Preschool was seen to be important in providing children the opportunity to learn to co-operate, be social, and experience things they may otherwise not experience in a home environment. It appears that regardless of program philosophies and methods of teaching, some preschool experience is considered to be better than none.

Perhaps the biggest difference could be found between preschool teachers in Truro and kindergarten teachers in Denmark. It is possible that we see a big difference because preschool teachers in Truro feel the need to “make children ready”, whereas in Denmark, especially at the primary level, teachers are already aware of skills which they feel are important or not important for success in the primary classroom.

Societal Difference- Silkeborg and Truro

When reflecting on the interviews I conducted in Silkeborg and looking at field notes taken at that time, it is apparent that there was a real sense of calm and pride within Danish preschool classrooms/ centres. I witnessed no episodes of negative or challenging behaviour from the children at all; they all appeared to be very happily occupied in projects or activities of interest to them under warm and accepting guidance of the adults who were present. There appeared to be a real sense of team work and community in the centers I visited, a shared philosophy among staff. I saw children occupying themselves by working at workbenches using real hammers and nails, sitting around real campfires and dumping water in one end of a long tunnel surrounding the playground, then running to the other end to see what would happen to it. They were given very little supervision, but it didn't seem necessary because they all seemed to be occupied doing things they wanted to do. They felt trusted and responsible enough to make good decisions (most of the time!). Teachers seemed relaxed, reflective and happy in their line of work; viewing themselves as facilitators in the spontaneous learning process of the children with whom they worked.

Teachers in Truro conversely seemed to feel very conflicted and somewhat stressed. I got the feeling that they knew what was developmentally appropriate and which experiences are valuable for young children, but due to expectations and outcomes which are expected of them from the larger society, they felt they had to implement a curriculum that differs significantly from what their own beliefs are and what their plans would be for the children in their care. Pre-packaged knowledge, as

alluded to by some teachers in this study, was not looked upon favorably by Danish teachers participating in this study. This is also consistent with past research highlighting the Danish aversion to this type of teaching and learning (Bjerg et. al., 1995, Vedel-Petersen, 1989). Some teachers in Truro at the kindergarten level, however, noted feeling that the curriculum they were provided and were using within their classrooms was very appropriate and working well for them.

Preschool teachers in Truro however, seemed to indicate that they would like to have more guidance and input from government in terms of curriculum. The teachers participating in this study noted feeling unsupported and left on their own when it comes to programming and planning for young children. While preschool teachers in Denmark viewed curriculum freedom positively, teachers in Truro viewed it negatively. This could be due to the fact that parents feel that children should be learning certain academic skills at the preschool level prior to transitioning into kindergarten, and preschool teachers therefore feel the need to meet this demand. Support from government in term of curriculum could potentially take some of the pressure off of teachers to meet the needs and expectation placed upon them by parents and other community members.

It appears that teachers in this area are still somehow holding onto the notion of “survival of the fittest”. North America, at the bottom of it all, is still very much a competitive society and we are instilling the belief in our children that they need to do

their individual best in order to get ahead in life. Although schools try to implement group learning and projects, it is still the individual with the highest marks who gets put on the honor roll and eventually gets accepted into college or university. It seems as though we have not yet embraced the concept of the child as a whole being and instead, still see children as a composite of individual strengths and needs.

It is interesting however, that Danish primary teachers *did* in fact note the difficulty they have in keeping children focused and concentrating on what is being taught. Is this because of the lack of routine and structure in their younger years? As noted in the literature review, several studies have previously noted this to be a possibility (Jacobson, 2000, Schmitt, 1986). Maybe the new learning plans set out by the government (as noted by teachers in Demark interviews) are being implemented to address this issue so that when Danish children enter kindergarten, they will have a more well-balanced background. Does this suggest that Danish teachers are in fact veering further and further away from their child-centered way of teaching? Perhaps. Or perhaps it is a way of maintaining the Danish way of education- taking a good look at what is working and what isn't and making the appropriate changes.

Past research has shown that Danes do not feel children are ready for formalized education in their younger years (Morrill, 2003, Moore et. al., 1976). The age of entry into kindergarten for Danish children has been, and continues to be, a few years older than the age of children entering formal schooling in North America. Danes have

historically held the belief that children need time to just be allowed to be children.

This is reflective of the beliefs of Danish teachers in this research as well. Teachers in this study's interviews emphasized the notion that children should be allowed freedom to enjoy exploratory playtime and imagination for as long as possible. According to teachers participating in this research and echoing the Piagetian way of thinking, children are not ready for formal schooling until they have reached a certain level of developmental maturity.

Responses in Denmark and Truro also suggested that the larger societal beliefs on early education in each location were fairly different. In speaking to teachers in Silkeborg, I got the sense that they felt well supported by their government and others in their town. They made comments around the notion that nearly everyone in their community held the same views on childhood and therefore they seemed to have very little frustration around not feeling valued or understood.

Teachers in Truro, however, seemed to feel just the opposite. They noted feeling relatively unsupported and commented on lack of funding through government agencies, a societal lack of understanding of the importance of the early years and an overall frustration with the level of support they are given. This difference in feelings of support is understandable considering how remarkably different childcare and education systems are when comparing Denmark to Canada. According to the OECD report summary (2006), Denmark spends the most on early education and care for children

from birth to age six out of the eight participating OECD countries (2% of their public expenditure) and Canada spends the least (less than 0.5%).

The fact that teachers at the preschool level in Denmark receive the same training and education as teachers at the kindergarten level is noteworthy in looking at the results of this research as well. Beliefs around childcare and education were more likely to be consistent across the two groups in Denmark, co-operation occurred more frequently and both groups seemed to understand and appreciate the role of play in learning. Contrary to past research (Espinosa et. al., 1997), preschool teachers in Denmark did not seem to reflect the pressure to send children into public school with a specific skill set, nor did kindergarten teachers feel that children should come with certain knowledge. Both groups of teachers in Denmark receive a three and a half year pedagogical education and are taught to see and teach the child as a whole child.

Because preschool teachers in Truro often have extremely different backgrounds, there are varied opinions about childhood even within a center, not to mention within the larger early childhood community. Some preschool teachers may have had a four year university degree training and education, while others may have little or no experience or training in working with young children. With varying levels of education come varying beliefs about how and what children should learn. In Nova Scotia, and likely all across Canada, a preschool teacher's view on children and the teaching methods they will then choose to employ will often vary from that of a

kindergarten teacher because of the fact that they often come from very different educational and philosophical backgrounds.

According to previous research, the role of the teacher in an academic preschool setting will vary substantially from a play-based program. A program that stresses academic preparedness will typically involve the teacher teaching a large group, lots of busy work, a great deal of structure and a high level of expectation placed upon the children to meet certain outcomes. A play-based approach will usually involve children playing independently in groups, participating in decision making and learning in various ways (French et al, 1998, Katz, 1999). While teachers in this research repeatedly talked about the importance of play, responses from teachers in Truro often circled around academics, structure and following rules and directions.

Supporting Readiness

How then can we best support children's transition into school? We can start by considering that the skills which will help children be successful will vary according to where they live and which attributes are valued in any particular society. For example, if a particular society values independence, intelligence and the ability to get along with others, then a preschool or early childhood experience should provide children an opportunity to do independent work as well as a chance to be social and spend some time away from their caregiver(s). If a society places more emphasis on co-operation,

emotional intelligence and cohesiveness, more opportunity should be given in the early years for children to work together on projects which will draw out these skills. Group work, problem-solving and being given time to really reflect on what it is you like and are good at would all be a part of such a society as well, as opposed to the assumption that those with greater academic ability will be most successful.

For children to be successful, teachers need to feel supported. This support can come in many ways including parents who are respectful and understanding of teaching philosophies, administration which honors and values the importance of meeting needs of their staff, and a government which is able to back-up programs in terms of both policy and economics.

Good communication at various stakeholder levels cannot be underestimated. One thing which seems to ease transition in Silkeborg is the high level of communication teachers report occurring between preschool and kindergarten levels. There also appears to be good communication between centers/schools and the larger community as well due to the fact that a large majority of programs are community based, non-profit and run by a board of directors. This way, all of those with a vested interest in the children in each centre are working together to ensure that children are being offered a high-quality program, and that teachers are feeling listened to and empowered.

C. Recommendations

- 1) A relatively small number of participants participated in this study. It would be beneficial to repeat this study with a larger number of participants.

- 2) It would be interesting to include both urban and rural societies. Thought and beliefs surrounding primary readiness may vary depending on whether a participant lives in a larger city or in a small town such as those in this study. Information and education provided to teachers may vary with location of participant as well.

- 3) Further research on school readiness should consider looking at other provinces within Canada. Views of participants within Nova Scotia may not represent Canadian provinces overall.

- 4) Expanding the research to include other countries could yield interesting findings as well. This research looked specifically at Truro, Nova Scotia and Silkeborg, Denmark. It would be interesting to include other European countries, as well as countries outside of Europe.

- 5) A developmentally appropriate curriculum is needed in all preschool programs to ensure optimal child development. Research has shown that children learn best when actively engaged in their environment. Pressures to push academics onto children at increasingly younger ages will lead to failure as young children have shown to thrive best in play-based environments.

6) It is important that education opportunities are provided for teachers, parents, government and communities on developmentally appropriate practice and optimal learning environments for preschool-aged children. Preschool teachers in particular should have an opportunity to obtain some professional development around developmentally appropriate practice and how to convey its value to parents and other community members.

7) It is recommended that the Nova Scotia provincial government review its policies and legislation around early childhood education. Preschool teachers have expressed a need for more support, especially in terms of early learning curriculum and guidelines. It appears that Danish curriculum benefits from knowledgeable, qualified staff able to plan and implement developmentally appropriate practices within daycare settings. Developmentally appropriate practice should be further promoted and modeled for staff within Nova Scotia's daycare settings.

8) Working conditions in childcare settings should be reexamined. Teachers report struggling to find time and energy to adequately plan for, and meet the needs of, children in their care. Perhaps ratios need to be reevaluated, along with salaries, benefits and staff incentives.

9) In making decisions on a national childcare system, Canadian government should consider lack of support Canadian teachers reflected in this study. Financial support was noted to be lacking, along with lack of recognition of the role of early childhood educators in the lives of young children. Canadians need and deserve a federally funded childcare system to ensure the spaces will be available when they are needed, that a quality program will be provided, and early childhood educators are given the support they need to fulfill a valuable role in the lives of the children with whom they work. The fact that teachers report that children entering kindergarten do better if they have had some sort of preschool experience should also encourage policy makers to develop an effective, national childcare system in which all children are given the opportunity to participate.

10) Teachers in Truro noted a lack of smoothness and communication between the preschool and kindergarten level which makes for a more difficult transition for children and their families. It is recommended that preschool teachers, parents, teachers and schools open up the lines of communication before, during and after transition so that all are involved in facilitating a planned transition. Preschool teachers, parents and kindergarten teachers in Canada should make more effort to communicate information about children who will be transitioning into kindergarten. At this point in time, information is shared about children with exceptional learning needs but not those who are considered to be typically developing. This is unfortunate as everyone can benefit

when the school is given the opportunity to get to know the children and have a feel for their strengths and areas of need, likes and dislikes, before the transition is made.

11) Only teachers and preschool teachers were included in this study. Because parents play such a large role on the lives of their children; future research should include the parent's perspectives as well.

D. Limitations

1) This study involved a relatively small number of participants, most of which were female. It was a concern that generalization to a larger society may be an issue. However, 90% of those working with children in their early years are female so this sample may be a relatively accurate representation of the larger society. Although this research cannot generalize to all, it does provide a snapshot of a large rural community.

2) Participation in this study was voluntary. While this study did have a high response rate for the survey (53%), there were a number of potential respondents who did not respond (47%). Sometimes, those who agree to participate in research such as this are likely to have different views than the larger population of teachers which they are meant to represent. Their views may not reflect those of all early childhood educators or

kindergarten teachers. If responses were received from all teachers to whom surveys were issued, result may have been different.

3) While a great deal of time was spent on establishing rapport and asking questions in a non-threatening way, it is possible that respondents felt the need to answer in a way that did not reflect their true beliefs. Some teachers may have felt the need to please or be right in their response so they may have responded differently than what they normally would in a different context.

4) All interviews were conducted in English. Although a translator was available during the interviews, it is possible that due to the language differences, some questions may not have been correctly interpreted. The same would apply for the survey responses. Because participants answered them privately, their interpretation of the survey may not have been 100% accurate.

5) Only teachers and preschool teachers were included in this study. Because parents play such a large role on the lives of their children; future research should include the parent's perspectives as well.

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Appendix A
Demographic Surveys

Demographic Information
Kindergarten Teacher Form

Please complete the following:

1. Gender: Male ____
Female ____

2. Age: Under 25 ____
25-35 ____
36-45 ____
46-55 ____
Over 55 ____

3. Years of Teaching Experience: ____

4. Teaching Certification Level: ____

5. Highest Level of Education Obtained:
Teacher's College Certificate ____
Bachelor of Education Degree ____
Master's Degree ____
Other (please specify)

Demographic Information
Preschool Teacher Form

Please complete the following:

1. Gender: Male ____
Female ____

2. Age: Under 25 ____
25-35 ____
36-45 ____
46-55 ____
Over 55 ____

3. Years of Teaching Experience: ____

4. Highest Level of Education Obtained

High School Diploma ____
Early Childhood Education Diploma/ Certificate ____
University Degree ____
Other (please specify)

5. In which type of centre do you work:

Private ____
Non-Profit ____

Appendix B
School Readiness Survey

School Readiness Survey

Please indicate with a check mark the response to each statement that best represents your opinion:

When children begin school, I feel they should be ready to.....	Less Important	Important	More Important
1) sit and listen to others for at least 30 minutes			
2) count to ten using one-to-one ratio			
3) dress themselves			
4) play cooperatively and independently without adult supervision			
5) work cooperatively as part of a group			
6) use the washroom independently			
7) resolve conflict independently			
8) tell similarities and differences among objects			
9) recognize letters of the alphabet			
10) print and spell their own name			
11) participate in organized games and sports			
12) identify shapes and colors			
13) use scissors and glue independently			
14) have a good sense of self and be an active listener			
15) attend to work quality and finish work			
16) separate easily from parents/ caregivers			
17) hold and use writing instruments properly			
18) work independently in seat until work is completed			
19) be a good problem solver			
20) label and print some letters			
21) walk in line and wait in line			
22) follow school routine/ curriculum			
23) tell their age, telephone number and address			
24) ask questions when necessary			
25) follow two-step directions			

Appendix C
Interview Schedule

Interview Schedule

- 1) Could you share with me your overall belief regarding how children learn and develop during their early years?
- 2) When working with young children, teachers must consider many things. What are some of the issues/demands you have encountered when teaching young children?
- 3) People often discuss and use the term “school readiness”. What does this term mean to you?
- 4) Could you share with me some of the skills that you feel are important for children to have as they enter the school system?
- 5) If you had to isolate 2 or 3 of these skills, which ones would you consider essential for a successful transition into the public school system? 5b) Why do you consider these essential? 5c) How could early childhood educators ensure that children have these skills?
- 6) Based on your experiences, what do you think are the most effective strategies and methods to use to enhance children’s growth and development and prepare them for future learning?
- 7) In your opinion, what roles do play and academics have in designing programs for young children?
- 8) Are there curriculum guidelines that you must follow at your setting? Who set these guidelines? To what extent do you follow them? Tell me how they have helped your program for the children with whom you work? Are you satisfied with your current curriculum guidelines/programs or would you like to see change. If yes, what type of changes?
- 9) What role do preschool experiences outside of the home play in getting children ready for school?
- 10) In your opinion, are the majority of children entering kindergarten today ready for school? Are their specific skills you feel they have or are missing?
- 11) It has been said that “It takes a nation to raise a child”. What role do you feel the following groups have in preparing a child for school transition:
 - a) preschool teachers
 - i. kindergarten teachers
 - ii. schools
 - iii. community

12) I would like to thank you for the time you have shared with me today. In closing, I have one last question for you: Do you feel that the skills valued and passed onto young children by their teachers relate in any way to the skills we value as adults in society?

Appendix D
Letters to School and Daycare Boards

Letter for School Board Chairs in Silkeborg and Truro
(MSVU Letterhead)

Dear _____,

My name is Jenny Gillis and I am a graduate student in the Master of Arts Child and Youth Study Program at Mount Saint Vincent University. Recently we spoke on the telephone regarding a research study for my graduate thesis entitled "Preschool and Public School Teachers' Perceptions of School Readiness: Comparisons between Denmark and Nova Scotia". This research will investigate the perceptions of preschool teachers and kindergarten teachers in Truro, Nova Scotia and in Silkeborg, Denmark regarding school readiness. Information gained can be used to better understand the beliefs guiding those involved in transitioning children into kindergarten and to gain insight into what skills participants feel are most important for early school success.

I am requesting permission to:

- a) carry out this study at elementary schools in Silkeborg/Truro;
- b) contact school principals to discuss the study, to ascertain the number of kindergarten/primary teachers at their school and to obtain permission to drop off research packages to these teachers;
- c) allow the researchers to collect the completed research packages at the school office;
- d) permit the researchers to conduct one-on-one interviews at the school if participants request.

As noted during our telephone conversation, each package will contain: 1) a letter explaining the purpose of the study, responsibilities of participants and researchers, and outlining participants' rights; 2) a demographic survey seeking information such as participants' gender, age range, education, and teaching experience; 3) a brief survey on participants' perceptions of school readiness skills; 4) an informed consent form; and 5) a return envelope.

All participants are being asked to complete the enclosed Demographic and School Readiness Surveys, which should take approximately twenty 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 School Readiness requires participants to read a number of statements and indicate whether they consider the skill noted in each important or not. The interview session will be audio-taped, take approximately one hour, and should provide greater insight into educators' beliefs regarding preparing children for formal schooling.

Participants can choose to only complete the surveys, place them in the enclosed envelope, seal it, and return the complete forms to the drop-off box located in the school office. If participants are also willing to be interviewed, they must complete the enclosed consent form and place it in the envelope with the completed forms. Teachers 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.

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. When the sealed envelopes are collected by the researcher, consent forms will be separated from the completed surveys. The surveys will then be numerically coded so that they will contain no identifying information. Similarly, audio-tapes of interviews will be numerically coded and destroyed after they are transcribed. All data will be stored in a locked file cabinet in one of the researchers' offices. The results of this study will be presented as group data and no individual participants will be identified. Quotes from questionnaires or 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.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me at 902-446-7566 or my thesis supervisor Dr. Carmel French at 457-6187 (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 e-mail at research@msvu.ca.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jenny Gillis
Graduate Student
Child and Youth Study
Mount Saint Vincent University

Dr. Carmel French
Thesis Supervisor
Dept. of Child & Youth Studies
Mount Saint Vincent University

Daycare Board of Directors Chairs in Silkeborg and Truro
(MSVU Letterhead)

Dear _____,

My name is Jenny Gillis and I am a graduate student in the Master of Arts Child and Youth Study Program at Mount Saint Vincent University. Recently we spoke on the telephone regarding a research study for my graduate thesis entitled "Preschool and Public School Teachers' Perceptions of School Readiness: Comparisons between Denmark and Nova Scotia". This research will investigate the perceptions of preschool teachers and kindergarten teachers in Truro, Nova Scotia and in Silkeborg, Denmark regarding school readiness. Information gained can be used to better understand the beliefs guiding those involved in transitioning children into kindergarten and to gain insight into what skills participants feel are most important for early school success.

I am requesting permission to:

- a) carry out this study at preschools in Silkeborg/Truro;
- b) contact preschool directors to discuss the study, to ascertain the number of preschool teachers at their daycare and to obtain permission to drop off research packages to these teachers;
- c) allow the researchers to collect the completed research packages at the daycare office;
- d) permit the researchers to conduct one-on-one interviews at the daycare if participants request.

As noted during our telephone conversation, each package will contain: 1) a letter explaining the purpose of the study, responsibilities of participants and researchers, and outlining participants' rights; 2) a demographic survey seeking information such as participants' gender, age range, education, and teaching experience; 3) a brief survey on participants' perceptions of school readiness skills; 4) an informed consent form; and 5) a return envelope.

All participants are being asked to complete the enclosed Demographic and School Readiness Surveys, which should take approximately twenty 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 School Readiness requires participants to read a number of statements and indicate whether they consider the skill noted in each important or not. The interview session will be audio-taped, take approximately one hour, and should provide greater insight into educators' beliefs regarding preparing children for formal schooling.

Participants can choose to only complete the surveys, place them in the enclosed envelope, seal it, and return the complete forms to the drop-off box located in the daycare office. If participants are also willing to be interviewed, they must complete the enclosed consent form and place it in the envelope with the completed forms. Preschool teachers 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.

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. When the sealed envelopes are collected by the researcher, consent forms will be separated from the completed surveys. The surveys will then be numerically coded so that they will contain no identifying information. Similarly, audio-tapes of interviews will be numerically coded and destroyed after they are transcribed. All data will be stored in a locked file cabinet in one of the researchers' offices. The results of this study will be presented as group data and no individual participants will be identified. Quotes from questionnaires or 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.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me at 902-446-7566 or my thesis supervisor Dr. Carmel French at 457-6187 (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 e-mail at research@msvu.ca.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jenny Gillis
Graduate Student
Child and Youth Study
Mount Saint Vincent University

Dr. Carmel French
Thesis Supervisor
Dept. of Child & Youth Studies
Mount Saint Vincent University

Appendix E
Letter to School and Daycare Administrators

Dear Daycare Administrator,

My name is Jenny Gillis and I am a graduate student in the Master of Arts Child and Youth Study Program at Mount Saint Vincent University. I am conducting a research project entitled “Preschool and Public School Teachers’ Perceptions of School Readiness: Comparisons between Denmark and Nova Scotia” for my Master’s thesis. This research will investigate the perceptions of preschool teachers and kindergarten teachers in Truro, Nova Scotia and in Silkeborg, Denmark, regarding school readiness. Information gained can be used to better understand the beliefs guiding those involved in transitioning children into kindergarten and to gain insight into what skills participants feel are most important for early school success.

You are being asked to:

- a) distribute research packages to all early childhood educators at your center;
- b) allow the researcher to collect the completed research packages at the daycare office;
- c) permit the researchers to conduct one-on-one interviews at the daycare if participants request.

Each research package will contain: 1) a letter explaining the purpose of the study, responsibilities of participants and researchers, and outlining participants’ rights; 2) a demographic survey seeking information such as participants’ gender, age range, education, and work experience; 3) a brief survey on participants’ perceptions of school readiness skills; 4) an informed consent form; and 5) a return envelope.

All participants are being asked to complete the enclosed Demographic and School Readiness Surveys, which should take approximately twenty 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 School Readiness Survey requires participants to read a number of statements and indicate whether they consider the skill noted in each important or not. The interview session will be audio-taped, take approximately one hour, and should provide greater insight into educators’ beliefs regarding preparing children for formal schooling.

Participants can choose to only complete the surveys, place them in the enclosed envelope, seal it, and return the complete forms to the drop-off envelope located in the preschool office. If participants are also willing to be interviewed, they must complete the enclosed consent form and place it in the envelope with the completed forms. 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.

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. When the sealed envelopes are collected by the researcher, consent forms will be separated from the completed surveys. The surveys will then be numerically coded so that they will contain no identifying information. Similarly, audio-tapes of interviews will be numerically coded and destroyed after they are transcribed. 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 questionnaires or 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.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact me at 902-446-7566 or my thesis supervisor Dr. Carmel French at 457-6187 (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 e-mail at research@msvu.ca.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jenny Gillis
Graduate Student
Child and Youth Study
Mount Saint Vincent University

Dr. Carmel French
Thesis Supervisor
Dept. of Child & Youth Studies
Mount Saint Vincent University

Dear School Principal,

My name is Jenny Gillis and I am a graduate student in the Master of Arts Child and Youth Study Program at Mount Saint Vincent University. I am conducting a research project entitled “Preschool and Public School Teachers’ Perceptions of School Readiness: Comparisons between Denmark and Nova Scotia” for my Master’s thesis. This research will investigate the perceptions of preschool teachers and kindergarten teachers in Truro, Nova Scotia and in Silkeborg, Denmark regarding school readiness. Information gained can be used to better understand the beliefs guiding those involved in transitioning children into kindergarten and to gain insight into what skills participants feel are most important for early school success.

You are being asked to:

- a) distribute research packages to all primary/kindergarten teachers in your school;
- b) allow the researcher to collect the completed research packages at the school office;
- c) permit the researchers to conduct one-on-one interviews at the school if participants request.

Each research package will contain: 1) a letter explaining the purpose of the study, responsibilities of participants and researchers, and outlining participants’ rights; 2) a demographic survey seeking information such as participants’ gender, age range, education, and work experience; 3) a brief survey on participants’ perceptions of school readiness skills; 4) an informed consent form; and 5) a return envelope.

All participants are being asked to complete the enclosed Demographic and School Readiness Surveys, which should take approximately twenty 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 School Readiness Survey requires participants to read a number of statements and indicate whether they consider the skill noted in each important or not. The interview session will be audio-taped, take approximately one hour, and should provide greater insight into educators’ beliefs regarding preparing children for formal schooling.

Participants can choose to only complete the surveys, place them in the enclosed envelope, seal it, and return the complete forms to the drop-off envelope located in the envelope office. If participants are also willing to be interviewed, they must complete the enclosed consent form and place it in the envelope with the completed forms. Teachers 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.

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. When the sealed envelopes are collected by the researcher, consent forms will be separated from the completed surveys. The surveys will then be numerically coded so that they will contain no identifying information. Similarly, audio-tapes of interviews will be numerically coded and destroyed after they are transcribed. 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 questionnaires or 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.

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Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Jenny Gillis
Graduate Student
Child and Youth Study
Mount Saint Vincent University

Dr. Carmel French
Thesis Supervisor
Dept. of Child & Youth Studies
Mount Saint Vincent University

Appendix F
Letters to Early Childhood Educators and Teachers

Dear Early Childhood Educator,

My name is Jenny Gillis and I am a graduate student in the Master of Arts Child and Youth Study Program at Mount Saint Vincent University. I am conducting a research project entitled “Preschool and Public School Teachers’ Perceptions of School Readiness: Comparisons between Denmark and Nova Scotia” for my Master’s thesis. You are invited to participate in this research on the perceptions of early childhood educators and school teachers regarding school readiness. Information gained can be used to better understand the beliefs guiding those involved in transitioning children into kindergarten and to gain insight into what skills participants feel are most important for early school success.

You are being asked to complete the enclosed Demographic and School Readiness Surveys, which should take approximately twenty minutes. The 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 School Readiness Survey requires participants to read a number of statements and indicate whether they consider the skill noted in each important or not. The interview session will be audio-taped, take approximately one hour, and should provide greater insight into educators’ beliefs regarding preparing children for formal schooling.

You can choose to only complete the surveys, place them in the enclosed envelope, seal it, and return the complete forms to the drop-off envelope provided. However, if you are willing to be interviewed, please complete the enclosed consent form and place it in the envelope with the completed forms. Teachers randomly selected for an interview will be contacted by one of the researchers to arrange a time and place for the interview that is convenient for them. All other teachers will be contacted and thanked for their willingness to participate.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you 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. When the sealed envelopes are collected by the researchers, we will separate the consent forms for interviews from the completed surveys. The surveys and questionnaires will then be numerically coded so that they will contain no identifying information. Similarly, audio-tapes of interviews will be numerically coded and destroyed after they are transcribed. All data will be stored in a locked file cabinet in one of the researchers’ offices. The

results of this study will be presented as group data and no individual participants will be identified. Quotes from questionnaires or 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.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Dr. Carmel French at 457-6187 (carmel.french@msvu.ca) or Dr. Joan Turner at 457-6750 (joan.turner@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 e-mail at research@msvu.ca.

Thank you

Sincerely,

Jenny Gillis
Graduate Student
Child and Youth Study
Mount Saint Vincent University

Dr. Carmel French
Thesis Supervisor
Dept. of Child & Youth Studies
Mount Saint Vincent University

Dear Teacher,

My name is Jenny Gillis and I am a graduate student in the Master of Arts Child and Youth Study Program at Mount Saint Vincent University. I am conducting a research project entitled “Preschool and Public School Teachers’ Perceptions of School Readiness: Comparisons between Denmark and Nova Scotia” for my Master’s thesis. You are invited to participate in this research on the perceptions of early childhood educators and school teachers regarding school readiness. Information gained can be used to better understand the beliefs guiding those involved in transitioning children into kindergarten and to gain insight into what skills participants feel are most important for early school success.

You are being asked to complete the enclosed Demographic and School Readiness Surveys, which should take approximately twenty minutes. The 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 School Readiness Survey requires participants to read a number of statements and indicate whether they consider the skill noted in each important or not. The interview session will be audio-taped, take approximately one hour, and should provide greater insight into educators’ beliefs regarding preparing children for formal schooling.

You can choose to only complete the surveys, place them in the enclosed envelope, seal it, and return the complete forms to the drop-off envelope located in the school office. However, if you are willing to be interviewed, please complete the enclosed consent form and place it in the envelope with the completed forms. Teachers randomly selected for an interview will be contacted by one of the researchers to arrange a time and place for the interview that is convenient for them. All other teachers will be contacted and thanked for their willingness to participate.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and you 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. When the sealed envelopes are collected by the researchers, we will separate the consent forms for interviews from the completed surveys. The surveys and questionnaires will then be numerically coded so that they will contain no identifying information. Similarly, audio-tapes of interviews will be numerically coded and destroyed after they are transcribed. All data will be stored in a locked file cabinet in one of the researchers’ offices. The results of this study will be presented as group data and no individual participants will be identified. Quotes from questionnaires or 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.

If you have any questions about this study, please contact Dr. Carmel French at 457-6187 (carmel.french@msvu.ca) or Dr. Joan Turner at 457-6750 (joan.turner@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 e-mail at research@msvu.ca.

Thank you

Sincerely,

Jenny Gillis
Graduate Student
Child and Youth Study
Mount Saint Vincent University

Dr. Carmel French
Thesis Supervisor
Dept. of Child & Youth Studies
Mount Saint Vincent University

Appendix G
Informed Consent

INFORMED CONSENT

I, _____, am willing to participate in a study by Jenny Gillis, a graduate student in the Master of Arts Child and Youth Study Program at Mount Saint Vincent University. The research project is entitled “Preschool and Public School Teachers’ Perceptions of School Readiness: Comparisons between Denmark and Nova Scotia” for my Master’s thesis. Information gained from this study can be used to better understand the beliefs guiding those involved in transitioning children into kindergarten and to gain insight into what skills participants feel are most important for early school success.

I have been informed that my time commitment for the individual interview will be approximately one hour.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time without consequence to me.

I am aware that the interview will be audio-taped and that the tapes will be destroyed once they have been transcribed.

I understand that all information obtained in this study will be kept strictly confidential and anonymous as no participant will be identified.

I am aware that I may review the transcripts of the interview and suggest modifications and that all data will be stored in a locked cabinet in one of the researcher’s offices.

I understand that I may be directly quoted from the interview, but that my identity will not be revealed in any way.

I have been informed that a summary of the findings will be provided to me.

If I have any questions about this study, I know I can contact Dr. Carmel French at 457-6187 (carmel.french@msvu.ca). If I have any questions or concerns about this study and wish to speak with someone who is not directly involved with this study, I can contact the University Research Ethics Board by phone at 902-457-6350 or by e-mail at research@msvu.ca.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Phone number(s) I may be reached at: _____

Times I may be reached: _____

Researcher’s Signature: _____

Address or e-mail for summary of the results:

Appendix H
Complete Interview Transcript

Interview Schedule- Preschool Teacher #1- Silkeborg

- 1) Could you share with me your overall belief regarding how children learn and develop during their early years?**

Children learn by doing and experimenting for themselves. They want to learn and they don't all learn in the same way. They learn when they are very interested in what is going on around them and when they take part in planning what they will do. If they are not interested, they will not be ready to learn but if they are part of the process, they will learn much more.

- 2) When working with young children, teachers must consider many things. What are some of the issues/demands you have encountered when teaching young children?**

One of the most important issues I think is keeping the programs and activities fun and motivating for all of the children. Because all of the children are learning in a different way and have different things that are interesting for them, we need to always be sure that we are challenging the children at the right level.

- 3) People often discuss and use the term "school readiness". What does this term mean to you?**

I think it means that a child has to know how to work together with other children. It means that they have intellectual skills as well as social and also very practical skills. You have to be able to do things with your hands, small muscles- hold pencil right, cut with scissors maybe....put on your own clothes. Uh, things like that is also very important.

Like self help skills?

Yes, self-help skills. Very, very important. And I think, uh, you have to understand before you go to school that you have to be able to understand common instructions. The instructions given are not just for everybody else, they are for me too. They have to be able to understand that. It is very important in understanding yourself as part of a majority.

- So you think it's important that they have a sense of who they are in relationship to other people?**

Exactly. That is very, very, important.

A sense of self.

Yes. If you don't feel that you are a member of a community and have a good relationship with other kids, then it's very, very difficult to learn anything at the level you are supposed to. So um, it's also part of the preschool's opportunity to look at these things.

4) Could you share with me some of the skills that you feel are important for children to have as they enter the school system?

I think uh, all of them are very important. The social skills I feel would be most important. You also have a certain kind of behavior but it is more like a behavior where you uh have like an understanding for other people in relation to yourself. Empathy is very important. With social skills, the most important is learning all the ways of behavior. You cannot have a social relationship if you are not speaking nicely to another person or if you are being selfish. In that way all of these things should be involved in the community of being social. And I think that if you see a child play socially, you can see if the child can concentrate, use his language, reason, have empathy and have ideas, if the child is able to compromise, listen to everybody and their ideas. If you can do these things it will help you to be ready for school.

5) If you had to isolate 2 or 3 of these skills, which ones would you consider essential for a successful transition into the public school system? 5b) Why do you consider these essential? 5c) How could early childhood educators ensure that children have these skills?

The relationship component. Relationships with other children and also adults. Adults also have to be very aware of their relationship with the children and able to understand what the child might want even though they may not have the language. One sentence can mean a whole lot to a child. And no matter how the child behaves or where the child comes from, it is very important that the adult understand that they are so important. For a child to have good relationships, it means that they are able to learn a whole lot. This means that they learn what it means to be a human being. What is important for me when I'm an adult, what kind of values am I supposed to have? And if I go back and look at their play at things like can they concentrate, can they listen, use their language, share information...these are things that they'll carry with them.

So in a way you feel it prepares them for their future life. Those are the things that may become important to them as adults?

Yes.

6) Based on your experiences, what do you think are the most effective strategies and methods to use to enhance children's growth and development and prepare them for future learning?

I like to allow children to decide things for themselves. Allow them to be part of the process at all times. I have noticed that when you have this attitude with children, the negative behavior you sometimes see is often drastically reduced because they feel like they are understood and like they are being listened to. And it makes the work with children much more fun! And when you do see negative behaviour, it is usually because they are feeling frustrated and not listened to. Sometimes in kindergarten, they may look more at what the child is not so good at. We are very aware of building the child up to be as strong as possible before they start school. And that they believe in themselves, this is so important. But we all love the children. But we are aware of some of the differences between boys and girls as well. In the last 2 years we've made a project about how to look at the boys skills and the girls skills and how we can help each group in their school readiness. Sometimes the boys are slower to mature....how do we make them more aware of themselves so they are more ready for school. And the government is of course interested because we are such a small society here, we want the children to grow up to be clever and productive. So the government needs to help with making the transition easy as well.

From what you've said to me, you want the children to be able to understand themselves and their behaviour and have a good sense of who they are.

Exactly.

7) In your opinion, what roles do play and academics have in designing programs for young children?

Children learn in all different ways. A child will naturally be interested. Then, the child learns the way it wants to learn. It could be out in nature. A lot of boys don't sit there and count beads, they would much rather collect snails and see how many they have. And then I can tell they can count up to a lot of numbers. We also have gymnastics and we jump and we count and they don't even think about it. Or we can play a game where they roll a dice and if it lands on red, they have to take a turn...so they are learning their colors. We always help the children learn in a variety of ways. But the last year the big kids are with us, we collect them once a week and do a preschool thing with them, but it is always with things they are interested in. But we are always aware that they are learning something. It could be through things like art and nature. We encourage them to think and reflect, make choices and what they want to do, what they really like. Everything is always very democratic. We want them to learn how to think for themselves. And that way they are so completely 100% interested.

8) Are there curriculum guidelines that you must follow at your setting? Who set these guidelines? To what extent do you follow them? Tell me how they have helped you program for the children with whom you work? Are you satisfied with your current curriculum guidelines/programs or would you like to see change. If yes, what type of changes?

We have a little bit of information we should follow but it is very wide. You can put a lot of things in yourself so you are not limited. It is not difficult at all. But the latest thing is that the government wants us to do what they call "learning plans". They want us to actually describe what it is we do in the daycare. And what it is we are developing. And we've never done that before, not really. We have the plan of course but now we have to do it a little bit deeper. We have six subjects we should describe and this is the same all over the country, it is for the politicians to look at and decide that it is okay. You have to make an extra effort. We have just started this and we have not described it perfectly yet but it is starting. The government has made the decision and with it, there has come more money so we can go to training to learn the new way and that is great. So it is really not difficult at all.

So when they want this information from you, do they come back at some later point to check in on you and make sure that you are following through and doing things the way they are supposed to be done?

Well we have to do that already within the community but we have to do it ourselves also- making our own goals and evaluating them with our parents. We have a parent board. And in the community we discuss what the focus will be for each year and also for the next year. We all have the same way of looking at the children. We think it is unique. Even though the changes are being implemented, we will not become like a mini school, we still want to look at the whole child and work that way. So it's okay to follow that.

9) What role do preschool experiences outside of the home play in getting children ready for school?

I have to say a very important role because nearly all the children in Denmark are taken care of in the daycare centres so if you are at home with your mother the whole day then you're home alone on the whole street and for a child it is very important to go out and play with other children so there fore I would have to say yes. It is important they learn how to be social and learn how to play. Being in daycare gives them more opportunity. They learn so much.

If a child had 3 or 4 brother or sisters at home, do you think they could have the same social experiences as they would at daycare?

If the child has a parent who really listens to them and does things with them and not just doing adult things then maybe. They have to have adults not to show them the way but to follow their way.

Are most of the children in preschool in Denmark?

Yes, I think 95% because women are working. They are mostly all public daycare systems and are very good. They aren't making money with them, we all just want children as qualified as possible.

10) In your opinion, are the majority of children entering kindergarten today ready for school? Are their specific skills you feel they have or are missing?

Umm...well...we have a big responsibility in daycare to tell parents if we feel they are not ready. We meet with parents and discuss the results of progress reports we do with the children. We talk about areas that may need development. If they are behind in certain areas, then we look at why they are falling behind. As I said, we don't say all the time they must learn their numbers or their colors or their letters, but they do learn them in lots of different ways. It is very difficult for children if they go to school without knowing these things.

How would that be incorporated into the day?

We call the children aside one by one and gather information to help parents decide whether or not they feel the child is ready. We also check to see if they know things like their name, where they live, more knowledge about who they are in society. We want to know that they are able to wait their turn and participate in a group. We look at helping them get where they need to be.

11) It has been said that "It takes a nation to raise a child". What role do you feel the following groups have in preparing a child for school transition:

- a) preschool teachers
- b) kindergarten teachers
- c) schools
- d) community

I think we work very well together. In kindergarten, we see the child as a whole. Not intellectual, fine motor and so on....we don't divide it up. I think that is one of the very important things we do. We always look at the successful. What are they good at and give them more of what they're good at instead of looking at the difficulties. We do it the other way around. We build on the strengths. We do a lot of things that give the children experiences. And we don't have classes, it's more like experiencing things in all different kinds of ways where they learn by doing and experiencing for themselves, instead of us teachers telling them. Learning by doing. That is the whole idea of the Dansih daycare system. The dialogue goes both ways. The children use their own initiative and we listen to

what they are interested in. and this is how we do our planning...based on what the child is interested in, that is what we will make a project on. So if you want the child to be able to think for themselves and use their own initiative, and carry it to when they are adults, then you start here. When they have being valued and listened to as part of their lives, being respected, they feel valued and they develop and believe in themselves.

We have co-operation with the teachers and the school. We go there with the children and the teachers and schools come to daycare as well. It is good for us to know how to best prepare the children and also important for the teachers to know what we are doing here. Maybe they think the children have a "free life" here....well, of course they have a free life, they're children. They are so surprised that we teach them so much. After they start school we go to school to visit them again and we also invite the old kids to come back and visit daycare for an afternoon. These connections are so important for children. As for the government, we all have the same intentions for children, wanting a smooth transition for them.

Do you think it is the governments' responsibility to ensure that there is enough money invested into preschool programs to make sure adequate resources are available when they're needed?

Of course. But we could always use a bit more money. There is a limit now and we are getting a little bit scared about the future. Communities are getting bigger and we worry sometimes that there will not be enough money to go around.

12) I would like to thank you for the time you have shared with me today. In closing, I have one last question for you: Do you feel that the skills valued and passed onto young children by their teachers relate in any way to the skills we value as adults in society?

The things I think are most important are relationships and respect for yourself and for other people. And that you are able to think for yourself and reflect over many things. And these of course are the values we try to teach all of the young children so they will become good citizens in society.

Appendix I
Interview Coding Sample

Interview Coding Sample
Responses to Interview Question #1

	Level 1	Level 2	Level
Truro Preschool	Social Friends Watching Play What they see "little sponges" Watch others imitate Adult aids along the way Environment People	Watching others Playing Observation Environment Imitation Adult guides	Social Environment (Observation & Imitation) External influences
Truro Primary	"little sponges" Modeling Environment Experience Imitation Modeling	Environment Modeling Experience Imitation Modeling Experience	Environment Modeling Experience
Denmark Preschool	Learn by doing Experiencing for themselves Taking part Planning By doing Experience	Involvement Participation Learn by doing	Being involved Independent learning
Denmark Primary	What they're exposed to Learn by doing Keep interested Challenging Through play Other children Watching	By doing When challenged Through play/ peers Watching, copying, experimenting	Being involved Independent Learning Imitation (peers)