A Discourse Analysis of Parents' and Teachers' Social Constructions of School Readiness and Transition to Kindergarten for Children With Disabilities

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A Discourse Analysis of Parents’ and Teachers’ Social Constructions of School Readiness and Transition to Kindergarten for Children With Disabilities

A Dissertation by

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Chapman University
Orange, CA
Attallah College of Educational Studies

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy in Education
May 2023

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August 2022
A Discourse Analysis of Parents’ and Teachers’ Social Constructions of School Readiness and Transition to Kindergarten for Children With Disabilities

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I would first like to thank the parents and teachers who volunteered their time to participate in this study. I learned a great deal from their personal stories, and I hope their messages inspire positive change in education for all children.

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ABSTRACT

A Discourse Analysis of Parents’ and Teachers’ Social Constructions of School Readiness and Transition to Kindergarten for Children With Disabilities

by Ronica Señores Toyota

This study examined parents’ and teachers’ social constructions of disability, school readiness, and the transition to kindergarten process for children with disabilities who participated in a self-contained preschool special education (SPED) class, called a special day class (SDC). The 12 participants included parents of children with disabilities (i.e., three with autism and one with Down syndrome), four preschool SDC teachers, two kindergarten SDC teachers, and two general education kindergarten teachers. They were recruited from a large urban school district in Southern California. Semistructured interviews were conducted to invite participants to share their experiences working with students with disabilities and their roles in these students’ transitions to kindergarten. A dialectical–relational approach to discourse analysis, with a focus on subject positioning, was applied when coding the interview transcripts for themes.

Consistent with an ecological framework of school transition (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000), themes in the transcripts identified contextual factors that influenced the early school experiences of students with disabilities. These factors included classroom structure, availability of resources for mainstreaming, and collaboration among parents and teachers. Participants also identified important child-focused factors, emphasizing social–emotional and behavioral skills over academic skills as important for school readiness.
Parents’ and teachers’ accounts of their experiences in the transition process revealed their different roles and perceived levels of authority in the decision-making process (e.g., decisions to continue students’ placement in a SDC or transition into general education). The methodology and findings of this study added to the scant literature on school readiness among children with disabilities and had several implications for practice and future research.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

School readiness is generally defined as a child’s readiness to learn and successfully participate in a typical classroom and school (Carlton & Winsler, 1999). Traditional measures of school readiness are child focused and primarily concerned with the child’s cognitive and language skills and social–emotional and behavioral functioning (La Paro & Pianta, 2000). However, a child-focused definition of school readiness overlooks important contextual factors (e.g., parent–teacher communication, classroom structure) influencing children’s successful school entry and transition. Although more recent definitions of school readiness recognize the shared responsibility of parents, teachers, and the community in promoting children’s early school success, transition to kindergarten practices for children with disabilities remain child focused. It is essential to investigate how notions of school readiness influence educational decision making for young children, especially for children with disabilities who are at risk for school problems as they transition to kindergarten.

Background

Research studies on school readiness in the general population appear to be plentiful, but there are clear differences in the literature on how school readiness has been defined and measured. For example, numerous studies have examined school readiness using data from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Survey, selecting different variables as primary indicators of school readiness, including approaches to learning (Buek, 2019), cognitive skills (Raver et al., 2007), math and reading scores (Coley et al., 2016), social–emotional functioning (Gottfried & Ansari, 2019), and health risk factors (Hair et al., 2006). Executive functioning has become a variable of interest in more recent studies, but its role in school readiness remains unclear. Studies have examined executive functioning as both a correlate (Greenfader, 2019; McClelland & Cameron, 2019; Micalizzi et al., 2019; Son et al., 2019) and an indicator of school readiness.
(Suntheimer & Wolf, 2020). Although many of these child-focused variables (e.g., approaches to learning, cognitive skills, academic scores, social–emotional functioning) have correlations with each other and other selected indicators of school readiness, researchers have still questioned whether or not these variables reliably predict school readiness.

A meta-analysis of 70 studies demonstrated young children’s scores on tests of academic and cognitive skills explained a moderate portion of the variance in school success during the early school years, but scores on measures of social and behavioral skills only explained a small part of the variance (La Paro & Pianta, 2000). The moderate predictability of school competence from within-child variables (e.g., preacademic and cognitive skills), though significant, would not reliably predict the overall school competence of individual children. Researchers of the studies included in La Paro and Pianta’s meta-analysis, who focused on within-child variables, lacked consideration of the “ecological or interactive aspects of early school transitions” (La Paro & Pianta, 2000, p. 473).

A more recent meta-analysis of child-focused assessments to determine school readiness has not been conducted, perhaps due to a decline in quantitative studies because school readiness is being reconceptualized. For example, Head Start (i.e., a nationwide federally funded preschool program serving low-income families) has adopted an approach to school readiness as a shared responsibility, describing school readiness as “children are ready for school, families are ready to support their children’s learning, and schools are ready for children” (Head Start – Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center, 2022, para. 1).

School readiness is often considered when making decisions about a child’s transition to kindergarten. Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) described an ecological perspective on the transition to kindergarten to guide future research on this topic. Their ecological model, shown in Figure 1, illustrates how interactions between a child and their microsystem (i.e., teachers, peers,
neighborhood, and family), and interactions between microsystem settings, create a combined
dynamic effect on a child’s transition to kindergarten and emphasizes the development of these
relationships across time.

**Figure 1**

*Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta’s Ecological and Dynamic Model of School Transition*

![Diagram of Preschool and Kindergarten settings with arrows indicating interactions between child, teachers, peers, neighborhood, and family](image)

*Note.* From “An Ecological Perspective on the Transition to Kindergarten: A Theoretical

A contextually informed perspective has been recognized in other academic sources
challenging traditional, child-focused perspectives of school readiness (Carlton & Winsler, 1999;
Snow, 2006). An ecological model of school readiness suggests the transition to kindergarten
experience may vary across different populations and settings. The current study focused on
school readiness and transition, specifically among young children with disabilities, which has been a group generally considered at risk for having early school problems.

**Definitions of Terms**

This study examined perspectives on school readiness, disability, and transition to kindergarten. General definitions are provided for clarity when referencing these terms. More precise definitions are not provided at this point because the study aimed to examine how parents and teachers defined these terms for themselves, and how these definitions may have influenced their decision making for children with disabilities as they transition to kindergarten.

A *child with a disability* is a child who has been identified with a disability or developmental delay under Part B or Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education (IDEA) Act of 2004. The most prevalent disabilities in early childhood are autism, speech-language impairment, and intellectual disability. *School readiness* is generally defined as a child’s readiness to learn and successfully participate in a typical school environment (Carlton & Winsler, 1999). *Transition to kindergarten*, sometimes referred to as transition to school (TTS), is the period or process of a child preparing to enter kindergarten (McIntyre et al., 2006; Pears et al., 2016). The TTS process for children with disabilities usually involves a set of procedures carried out by the child’s individualized education plan (IEP) team, including a transition to kindergarten IEP meeting to determine the child’s educational placement and services when they start kindergarten. *Mainstreaming* was a term discussed by several participants in this study used to describe the inclusion of children with disabilities in general education settings.

**Statement of the Problem**

Children with disabilities have unique experiences shaped by society’s attitudes toward disabilities and the support made available to them, especially in schools. Inclusive education provides children with disabilities equal opportunities for learning, social relationships, and
participation in educational settings alongside their peers without disabilities (Odom et al., 2011). Whether or not inclusive education is locally available, the unique needs of children with disabilities should be identified and addressed to provide them with an appropriate educational experience.

Infants and toddlers identified with or at risk for developmental delays are eligible to receive early intervention services through statewide disability programs under Part C of the IDEA (2004). As young children identified with or at risk for development delays approach school age (i.e., age 3), families participate in a transition meeting that includes a change in services and supports from Part C to Part B, and this meeting includes a full evaluation to determine eligibility for IDEA services. Eligibility criteria for Part B services generally require the child’s disability adversely impacts their educational performance (IDEA, 2004).

Determining adverse effects of disability on school performance among 3- to 5-year-old children is challenging because many of these children do not have current or prior school experience. Although some of these children attend early childhood programs, such as Head Start, state preschools, Montessori schools, private preschools, or childcare centers, these programs vary in structure and pedagogical philosophies (Clements, 2007). Therefore, a child’s success or failure in one of these programs may not reliably predict the child’s success when entering the K–12 public school setting.

For young children with disabilities not enrolled in school, determining adverse effects on school performance often relies on educators’ assumptions about the child’s school readiness (La Paro & Pianta, 2000). Therefore, evaluators may be led to rely more on child-focused assessments of school readiness for these students. However, determining school readiness based solely on these scores is not reliable in determining the future school success of an individual child, as demonstrated in La Paro and Pianta’s (2000) meta-analysis. Prioritizing child-focused
assessments may also diminish the roles of other stakeholders (e.g., parents) in IEP team decision making, conflicting with the adoption of ecological models of school readiness and transition to kindergarten (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000).

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine the social constructions of school readiness and transition to kindergarten for children with disabilities held by parents and teachers working together in a single school district in Southern California.

**Research Questions**

This study was guided by the following research questions and subquestions:

1) What child-focused variables do parents and teachers emphasize when discussing school readiness and the transition to kindergarten for students with disabilities?

2) What contextual factors do parents and teachers emphasize when discussing school readiness and the transition to kindergarten for students with disabilities?

3) How do parents and teachers experience and participate in the transition to kindergarten for students with disabilities?
   a) How do parents and teachers view their roles, and the limitations of their roles, in the transition to kindergarten process?
   b) How do parents and teachers seek to improve the transition to kindergarten process?

**Significance of the Study**

This study contributed to the body of literature on school readiness because it was the first in-depth examination of how parents and teachers coconstructed their knowledge and practices surrounding school readiness, disability, and transition to kindergarten among young
children with disabilities. The selected methodological approaches of discourse analysis of subject positioning and dialectical–relational events addressed important questions about how parent–teacher interactions contributed to shared knowledge about school readiness, which may guide decision making for young students with disabilities entering kindergarten. This study also sought potential ways shared knowledge surrounding school readiness and school transition could be transformed to better serve students with disabilities.
Chapter 2: Theoretical Underpinnings and Review of Literature

This chapter reviews the empirical literature on school readiness and transition to kindergarten among young children with disabilities. Research on this topic appears limited and calls for qualitative methods, guided by social constructivist theory of inquiry, to better understand how decisions are made (e.g., determining a child’s school readiness) during the transition to kindergarten for children with disabilities.

In the researcher’s opinion, discourse analysis, compared to other qualitative approaches, is a valuable methodological approach to examine the complex ecological nature of school readiness and transition to kindergarten for children with disabilities. It is important to gather data from stakeholders (e.g., parents, teachers) in the decision-making process. This chapter concludes with a review of studies in early childhood education that used discourse analysis to examine the perspectives of parents and teachers. This review demonstrates the utility of discourse analysis, which was the methodological approach taken in this study.

Review of Literature on School Readiness Among Children With Disabilities

The purpose of this literature review was to examine the empirical literature on school readiness and transition to kindergarten practices for young children with disabilities. Children with disabilities are often considered at risk of school failure and should be a population receiving more attention in research on school readiness (Jeon et al., 2011). This review was guided by the following questions and subquestions:

a) How has school readiness of children with disabilities been defined and conceptualized in the empirical literature?

i) How do these definitions compare to the ecological perspective of school readiness and transition to kindergarten?
b) What is the current state of empirical research on school readiness and the transition to kindergarten process for children with disabilities?

i) What are frequent study topics and variables of interest among these studies?
What are the findings of these studies and how supported are they?

ii) What is the demographic of study participants including geographic location and identified disability?

An initial search for studies for this review began with a search of abstracts through the Academic Search Premier and ERIC research databases. The following search terms and their variations were used to identify abstracts or peer-reviewed studies relevant to topics of school readiness at the preschool and kindergarten level: (a) school readiness or ready for school, (b) school preparedness or prepared for school, (c) beginning school or school entry, (d) transition to school (TTS) or starting school, and (e) transition to kindergarten. The initial search for abstracts did not have restrictions on the year of publication. A total of 611 abstracts were identified after removing duplicate results and studies that did not include participants from the United States. The review of literature was limited to studies conducted in the United States, assuming cultural differences in perceptions of school readiness and disability were present across countries. The following additional search terms and their variations were used to identify abstracts relevant to children with disabilities: (a) disability or developmental delay; (b) special needs or disorder; (c) at risk or handicapped; (d) autism or speech-language impairment; and (e) intellectual disability, visual impairment, hearing impairment, traumatic brain injury, orthopaedic impairment, other health impairment, deaf, or blind. The additional search terms narrowed the initial list of abstracts down to 54. The following inclusion criteria were used for the final selection of studies to be reviewed: (a) The children investigated were preschool- or
kindergarten-aged (i.e., 3–5 years old), and (b) the study’s purpose was relevant to understanding school readiness for young children with disabilities. Because children with disabilities may be underdiagnosed until they are school aged (i.e., at least 5 years old), studies were included in this review if the children involved had a diagnosed, suspected, or clinically significant risk of disability, developmental delay, or disorder.

A total of 12 studies met the inclusion criteria for this review. Publication dates of these studies ranged from 1998 to 2019, with the majority (i.e., 11 studies) published after 2009. Each article was initially coded by the type of disability (e.g., developmental delay, autism) that was studied, number and demographic of sample participants, study design and variables of interests, measurement tools, and study findings. Then, the researcher examined the coded data and identified themes that addressed the guiding questions posed for this review.

How School Readiness of Children With Disabilities Has Been Defined and Conceptualized in the Empirical Literature

Only a few articles in the literature review (Jeon et al., 2011; Pears et al., 2016; Pentimonti et al., 2016) included a definition of school readiness in the background of their study. Definitions of school readiness frequently cited Snow’s (2006) work. Snow concluded, from a brief review of school readiness literature, that school readiness describes multiple domains of competency linked to later school success. Snow recognized a wide range of perspectives about which domains are important. Duncan et al. (2007) was also frequently cited across five studies in this review (Jeon et al., 2011; Pears et al. 2016; Pentimonti et al., 2016; Phillips & Meloy, 2012; Weiland, 2016). Duncan et al. conducted an analysis of six longitudinal data sets and found mathematics, reading, and attention skills at school entry predicted later performance in reading and mathematics. Researchers who referenced Snow and Duncan et al.
conducted their studies using multiple indicators of school readiness, reflecting the notion that school readiness has multiple components.

Seven studies on TTS (Graziano & Hart, 2016; Jeon et al., 2011; McIntyre et al., 2006; Pentimonti et al., 2016; Quintero & McIntyre, 2011; Welchons & McIntyre, 2015; Welchons & McIntyre, 2017) referenced the ecological perspective on the transition to kindergarten (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000), which emphasizes the role of relational processes and proposes the design of programs that improve school readiness through strengthening relationships between children, parents, and educators. A few studies in this review assessed ecological factors of TTS, measuring family involvement in transition planning (Quintero & McIntyre, 2011; Welchons & McIntyre, 2015; 2017), teacher perceptions of transitions (Quintero & McIntyre, 2011; Welchons & McIntyre, 2015; 2017), and student–teacher relationships (Welchons & McIntyre, 2017). Tools used to measure these ecological factors were the Family Experiences and Involvement in Transition (FEIT; McIntyre et al., 2007), Teacher Perceptions on Transitions (TPOT; Quintero & McIntyre, 2011), and Student–Teacher Relationship Scale (Pianta et al., 2001), which are discussed further in subsequent sections of this review.

Measurement tools for selected variables related to school readiness were used in 10 studies (Barton et al., 2012; Graziano & Hart, 2016; Hart et al., 2019; Jeon et al., 2011; McCarthy, 1972; Pentimonti et al., 2016; Quintero & McIntyre, 2011; Weiland, 2016; Welchons & McIntyre, 2015, 2017). The selected tools and variables may reflect the researchers’ perceptions of school readiness. It was beyond the scope of this paper to review each of these tools in depth, but there were some important patterns noted when reviewing the types of tools that were used.

Aligned with a traditional, child-focused perspective of school readiness (La Paro & Pianta, 2000), the majority of measurement tools included across the studies in this review
assessed within-child variables. The within-child variables included children’s academic skills (Barton et al., 2012; Graziano & Hart, 2016; Hart et al., 2019; Jeon et al., 2011; McCarthy, 1972; Weiland, 2016) and nonacademic skills (Barton et al., 2012; Graziano & Hart, 2016; Hart et al., 2019; Jeon et al., 2011; Pentimonti et al., 2016; Quintero & McIntyre, 2011; Weiland, 2016; Welchons & McIntyre, 2015, 2017).

**Academic Skills**

Nine studies with eight teams of researchers in this literature review included measures of children’s academic skills, primarily measured through direct child assessment (see Table 1). All research teams measuring academic skills included a measure of literacy. Four research teams (Barton et al., 2012; Graziano & Hart, 2016; Hart et al., 2019; Weiland, 2016) also assessed mathematics, and four teams (Barton et al., 2012; Graziano & Hart, 2016; Hart et al., 2019; Jeon et al., 2011; McCarthy, 1972) assessed writing skills.
### Table 1

**Academic Skills Measurement Tools Used in Studies About School Readiness and Young Children With Disabilities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measurement tool</th>
<th>Studies that included the tool</th>
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<tr>
<td>Bracken School Readiness Assessment (Bracken, 2002)</td>
<td>Graziano and Hart (2016); Hart et al. (2019)</td>
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<td>Clinical Evaluation of Language Fundamentals-Preschool: Pre-Literacy Rating Scale (Wiig et al., 2004)</td>
<td>Pentimonti et al. (2016)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Concepts About Print Task (Clay, 2000)</td>
<td>Pears et al. (2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills: letter naming fluency, initial sound fluency (Good &amp; Kaminski, 2002)</td>
<td>Pears et al. (2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kindergarten Behavior and Academics Competencies Scale (Graziano &amp; Hart, 2016; Hart et al., 2019)</td>
<td>Graziano and Hart (2016); Hart et al. (2019)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McCarthy Draw-A-Design task (McCarthy, 1972)</td>
<td>Barton et al. (2012); Jeon et al. (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (Invernizzi et al., 2004)</td>
<td>Pentimonti et al. (2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Preschool Word and Print Awareness Test (Justice et al., 2006)</td>
<td>Pentimonti et al. (2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research-Based Elementary Mathematics Assessment-Short Form (REMAS-S; Weiland et al., 2012)</td>
<td>Weiland (2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Story and Print Concepts Tasks (Mason &amp; Stewart, 1989)</td>
<td>Barton et al. (2012); Jeon et al. (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Test of Language Development, Third: Phonemic Analysis Task (Newcomer &amp; Hamill, 1977)</td>
<td>Barton et al. (2012); Jeon et al. (2011); Pentimonti et al. (2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodcock–Johnson (WJ) Letter–Word Identification (Woodcock et al., 2001)</td>
<td>Barton et al. (2012); Graziano and Hart (2016); Hart et al. (2019); Jeon et al. (2011); Pentimonti et al. (2016); Philipps and Meloy (2012); Weiland (2016)</td>
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</table>

The Woodcock–Johnson (WJ) Letter–Word Identification, Spelling, and Applied Problems subtests (Woodcock et al., 2001) were the most widely used tools to assess children’s skills across studies. The WJ subtests were not only widely used across the studies in this review,
but have also been very widely used tools in academic research in general. There were two other academic tools used that covered multiple domains: the Bracken School Readiness Assessment (Bracken, 2002) and the Kindergarten Behavior and Academic Competencies Scale (Graziano & Hart, 2016; Hart et al., 2019). The Bracken School Readiness Assessment includes items that measure children’s knowledge of colors, shapes, letters, numbers/counting, and sizes/comparisons (Bracken, 2002). The Kindergarten Behavior and Academic Competencies Scale, developed by the primary researchers of the Summer Treatment Program for Pre-Kindergarteners (STP-PreK; Graziano & Hart, 2016; Hart et al., 2019), includes 23 items across domains (e.g., following directions, work completion) and demonstrates excellent internal consistency (Graziano & Hart, 2016).

Four out of seven teams of researchers (Barton et al., 2012; Graziano & Hart, 2016; Hart et al., 2019; Weiland, 2016) who measured academic skills measured mathematics. The WJ Applied Problems was the single measure used by most of these teams (Barton et al., 2012; Weiland, 2016). There was one researcher-developed tool specific to mathematics, which was the Research-Based Elementary Mathematics Assessment-Short Form (REMAS-S; Weiland, 2016). The author noted this tool to have good reliability and validity. Items on the REMAS-S include inquiry on knowledge of numbers, counting, and basic calculations (e.g., adding, subtracting objects).

Literacy was the area most frequently measured in studies that measured academic readiness (see Table 1). Although literacy was measured by the WJ Letter Identification subtest in many studies (Graziano & Hart, 2016; Hart et al., 2019; Phillips & Meloy, 2012; Weiland, 2016), researchers frequently added multiple tools to include measures of children’s knowledge about print and phonological awareness (Barton et al., 2012; Pears et al., 2016; Pentimonti et al.,
Additionally, Pentimonti et al. (2016) included multiple measures of phonological awareness in their study that included children with language impairment.

Writing was not frequently measured across studies. Large scale research with the Head Start population included the McCarthy Draw-A-Design task (Barton et al., 2012; Jeon et al., 2011; McCarthy, 1972). Two studies measured writing skills using scales from the WJ (Graziano & Hart, 2016; Hart et al., 2019).

**Nonacademic Skills**

Nine studies with seven teams of researchers in this literature review included measures of children’s nonacademic skills (see Table 2). The nonacademic variables of interest primarily consisted of social–emotional and behavioral skills (Barton et al., 2012; Graziano & Hart, 2016; Hart et al., 2019; Jeon et al., 2011; Pentimonti et al., 2016; Quintero & McIntyre, 2011; Weiland, 2016; Welchons & McIntyre, 2015, 2017). One research team conducted two studies (Welchons & McIntyre, 2015, 2017) that measured adaptive skills in addition to social-emotional and behavioral skills.

**Table 2**

*Nonacademic Skills Measurement Tools Used in Studies About School Readiness and Young Children With Disabilities*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measurement tool</th>
<th>Studies that included the tool</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Behavior Problems Index (Zill, 1990)</td>
<td>Barton et al. (2012)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measurement tool</td>
<td>Studies that included the tool</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Behavior Rating Inventory of Executive Function (Gioia et al., 2000)</td>
<td>Graziano and Hart (2016); Hart et al. (2019)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenging Situation Task (Denham et al., 1994)</td>
<td>Graziano and Hart (2016); Hart et al. (2019)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child Behavior Checklist for Preschool-Aged Children, Teacher Report (Behavior Problems Index, Aggressive Behavior subscale; Achenbach et al., 1987)</td>
<td>Barton et al. (2012); Jeon et al. (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Descriptive Pragmatics Profile (Wiig et al., 2004)</td>
<td>Pentimonti et al. (2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dimensional Change Card Sort (Frye et al., 1995)</td>
<td>Weiland (2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotion Recognition Questionnaire (Ribordy et al., 1988)</td>
<td>Hart et al. (2019); Weiland (2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head-Toes-Knees-Shoulders Task (Ponitz et al., 2008)</td>
<td>Graziano and Hart (2016); Hart et al. (2019)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Impairment Rating Scale (Fabiano et al., 2006)</td>
<td>Graziano and Hart (2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laboratory Temperament Assessment Battery (Goldsmith &amp; Rothbart, 1996)</td>
<td>Graziano and Hart (2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leiter-R: Attention Sustained (Roid &amp; Miller, 1997)</td>
<td>Barton et al. (2012); Jeon et al. (2011)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pencil Tapping (Diamond &amp; Taylor, 1996; Frye et al., 1995)</td>
<td>Weiland (2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Skills Rating System (SSRS; Elliott et al., 1988)</td>
<td>Barton et al. (2012); Jeon et al. (2011); Pentimonti et al. (2016)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Skills Improvement System-Teacher Form (Gresham &amp; Elliott, 2007), Problem Behavior Scale</td>
<td>Welchons and McIntyre (2015, 2017)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Task Orientation Questionnaire (Smith-Donald et al., 2007)</td>
<td>Weiland (2016)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The majority of social-emotional and behavioral measurement tools were parent- or teacher-reported rating scales, such as the Social Skills Rating System (SSRS; Elliott et al., 1988). Replaced by the Social Skills Improvement System (Gresham & Elliot, 2007), the SSRS was the most frequently used measure of social-emotional and behavioral skills and included multiple scales measuring cooperation, empathy, assertion, self-control, and responsibility.

Five out of eight studies that measured social–emotional functioning used the SSRS or Social Skills Improvement System (Barton et al., 2012; Jeon et al., 2011; Pentimonti et al., 2016; Welchons & McIntyre, 2015, 2017). The remaining three studies (Graziano & Hart, 2016; Hart et al., 2019; Weiland, 2016) appeared to focus on more specific nonacademic skills, such as social problem solving, emotion recognition, and self-regulation. In addition to rating scales, these studies (Graziano & Hart, 2016; Hart et al., 2019; Weiland, 2016) used direct child assessment tools, such as the Challenging Situation Task, where children are presented with different scenarios and asked how they would respond, and the Emotion Knowledge Task, where children are shown pictures of different emotions and asked to identify the emotions pictured (Denham, 1986; Denham et al., 1994). Tools measuring self-regulation (Graziano & Hart, 2016; Hart et al., 2019) had many features in common, many of them assessing attention (e.g., Head-Shoulders-Knees Toes) and working memory (e.g., Automated Working Memory Assessment; Alloway, 2007; Ponitz et al., 2008).

Behavioral skills were measured using comprehensive, standardized parent and teacher rating scales such as the SSRS, Behavior Assessment System for Children (Reynolds & Kamphaus, 2004), and Child Behavior Checklist (Achenbach et al., 1987). Researchers appeared most interested in measuring behavioral compliance and externalizing behavior problems, such as aggression and hyperactivity (Barton et al., 2012; Graziano & Hart, 2016; Hart et al., 2019; Jeon et al., 2011; Pentimonti et al., 2016; Welchons & McIntyre, 2015, 2017).
In summary, some studies in this review (Jeon et al., 2011; Pears et al., 2016; Pentimonti et al., 2016) cited definitions of school readiness to frame their study, but other studies selected particular academic and nonacademic skills important to measure as indicators of school readiness. Academic measures were primarily direct child assessments (Barton et al., 2012; Graziano & Hart, 2016; Hart et al., 2019; Weiland, 2016); however, nonacademic tools included both direct child assessments and parent- or teacher-reported scales (Barton et al., 2012; Graziano & Hart, 2016; Hart et al., 2019; Pentimonti et al., 2016; Quintero & McIntyre, 2011; Weiland, 2016; Welchons & McIntyre, 2015, 2017). Academic measures prioritized literacy and appeared to be more congruent compared to nonacademic measures. A greater variety of tools were used to measure social–emotional, self-regulation, and behavioral skills. A few studies assessed contextual factors, measuring family involvement in transition planning (Quintero & McIntyre, 2011; Welchons & McIntyre, 2015; 2017), teacher perceptions of transitions (2011; 2015; 2017), and student–teacher relationships (Welchons & McIntyre, 2017).


Studies in this review were grouped by primary topic of investigation, covering three general topics: (a) predicting school readiness from individual characteristics of children with disabilities, (b) examining the effects of early intervention and quality instruction on school readiness among children with disabilities, and (c) perspectives on school readiness and transition to kindergarten for children with disabilities.

Predicting School Readiness From Individual Characteristics of Children With Disabilities

Four studies were found (Barton et al., 2012; Jeon et al., 2011; McIntyre et al., 2006; Pentimonti et al., 2016) that investigated whether or not child-focused variables (i.e., disability status, early preacademic, social–emotional, adaptive, cognitive, and self-regulation skills) could
predict school readiness and successful transition to kindergarten for children with disabilities. Predicting children’s readiness skills based on their disability status was not supported by the literature for two main reasons. First, studies have demonstrated frequent misidentification of disabilities in young children, especially among ethnic minorities (Barton et al., 2012; Jeon et al., 2011). Among a nationally representative sample of children ($n = 1,898$) enrolled in Head Start, 33% were identified with a disability based on alternative criteria, placing them into three subgroups based on (a) low language scores (14% of children), (b) parent report of the child having an individualized education plan (IEP; 8% of children), and (c) parent report of a professional expressing concern that the child had a disability (23% of children; Barton et al., 2012). Fewer Black or African American children were identified to have an IEP than the general population, but they were more likely to fall under the low language subgroup. The opposite pattern was found among White students (Barton et al., 2012). Similarly, in another nationally representative sample of children ($n = 2,183$) enrolled in Head Start, Jeon et al. (2011) found a significant number of 3-year-old children with suspected developmental delay had a parent reporting the child did not receive Part C services.

A second reason disability status was deemed an unreliable predictor of children’s readiness skills in the literature was that contextual factors may significantly moderate a relationship between disability and readiness skills. Jeon et al. (2011) examined whether children’s readiness skills at Head Start or kindergarten entry could be predicted based on their identification as a child with suspected delay, a recipient of Part C or Part B services, a child with biological risk(s), or a combination of these factors. Although there appeared to be significant differences in readiness skills between the identified groups at Head Start entry, many gaps in readiness skills were closed by the beginning of kindergarten (e.g., scores were similar between groups on the WJ Letter–Word Identification and Applied Problems subtests). Jeon et
al. suggested receipt of Part C services may have influenced readiness skills over the preschool year. Biological risks, either alone or combined with suspected or known developmental delays, did not appear reliable in predicting readiness skills in this study.

Disability status may be a poor predictor of school readiness because children with disabilities are heterogeneous, presenting a wide range of skills and severity of impairment, even among children identified with the same disability (Barton et al., 2012; Jeon et al., 2011). On the other hand, research on direct child assessments has showed some evidence of the predictability of kindergarten readiness based on skills assessed early at age 3 (McIntyre et al., 2006; Pentimonti et al., 2016).

Among a sample of children with language impairment (n = 136) living in a midwestern state, Pentimonti et al. (2016) identified a two-factor model of preliteracy and social–emotional factors as the best and most parsimonious model in predicting kindergarten literacy skills. Unidimensional models using preliteracy, social–emotional, or behavioral skills as potential single predictors were very poor in predicting kindergarten literacy. Although three-factor models (i.e., preliteracy, social–emotional, and behavioral skills) were a good fit, Pentimonti et al. noted social–emotional and behavioral skills were highly correlated. The authors suggested social–emotional skills, instead of behavioral skills, should be considered in the two-factor model because behavioral skills could vary significantly by context, as demonstrated by a poor correlation between parent and teacher ratings in their study.

McIntyre et al. (2006) examined the predictability of school readiness of young children with (n = 24) and without (n = 43) intellectual disability based on their cognitive behavior, adaptive behavior, self-regulation, and social skills in Southern California. School outcome variables included scores reflecting teacher-rated behavioral skills and student–teacher relationships, which combined to yield a z score McIntyre et al. (2006) referred to as the
Adaptation to School Composite (ASC). Although children with an intellectual disability had lower scores than typically developing children across all study measures, cognition and adaptive skills were highly correlated and had significant positive correlations with the ASC. Similar correlations were found between self-regulation and the ASC in the total sample of students.

In summary, the research on predicting school readiness of children with disabilities based on their individual characteristics was limited in number. Disability status correlates with poorer outcomes at Head Start entry, but gaps in readiness skills may close by kindergarten entry (Jeon et al., 2011). Young children are also frequently under identified as having a disability, making disability status an unreliable variable to predict school competence (Barton et al., 2012; Jeon et al., 2011). There is some evidence that kindergarten readiness among children with disabilities could be predicted by direct assessments (McIntyre et al., 2006; Pentimonti et al., 2016); however, a limited number of studies supported this idea and only studied children with language impairment and intellectual disability (McIntyre et al., 2006; Pentimonti et al., 2016). The limited number of studies may be an indicator that perspectives of school readiness have shifted away from child-focused assessment to predict future school success.

**Effects of Early Intervention and Quality Instruction on School Readiness Among Children With Disabilities**

Five studies were included for review (Graziano & Hart, 2016; Hart et al., 2019; Pears et al., 2016; Philips & Meloy, 2012; Weiland, 2016) that examined the effects of inclusive preschool and summer transition preparation programs designed to improve kindergarten readiness among children with disabilities.

A regression discontinuity design was used in two studies examining the effects on inclusive, school-based preschool programs in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and Boston, Massachusetts with sample sizes of between 240 and 300 students (Philips & Meloy, 2012; Weiland, 2016). Children
with disabilities who participated in school-based preschool programs had significantly higher readiness scores overall compared to children who had not yet attended preschool. The specific outcomes measured varied by program. Tulsa’s program devoted more time to literacy, about 33% of classroom time, compared to 17% dedicated to mathematics (Philips & Meloy, 2012). Therefore, Tulsa’s program had a greater effect on children’s literacy scores and no effects on their early mathematics scores. Weiland (2016) noted special features of Tulsa’s program that may have contributed to students’ success, including high indicators of classroom quality (e.g., time management, instructional techniques to build student engagement), evidence-based curricula (e.g., opening the world of learning literacy curriculum, building blocks mathematics curriculum), and individualized support (e.g., regular coaching to assist with integration and access to classroom materials). Weiland (2016) also noted studies on Tulsa’s program were limited in examining the effectiveness of individual components of the program in improving school readiness.

Two summer transition programs were identified in the empirical literature: (a) the Kids in Transition to School (KITS) program from Oregon (Pears et al., 2016) and (b) the STP-PreK from Florida (Graziano & Hart, 2016). Both programs were similar in general program components, consisting of parent training to foster parent involvement, positive parent–child relationships, and improve parents’ behavior management skills and student curricula to address literacy, social–emotional functioning, and self-regulation. Both programs also used preintervention, postintervention, and follow-up data collection for analysis of program effectiveness. These studies (Graziano & Hart, 2016; Hart et al., 2019; Pears et al., 2016) demonstrated overall effectiveness of summer transition programs in increasing children’s readiness skills.
The KITS study involved children with a variety of disabilities (Pears et al., 2016). In the study, 61% of participants had developmental delay, 29% had a communication delay, 9% had autism, and 1% had orthopaedic impairment \((n = 225)\). They were randomly assigned to an intervention group and control group. Participating students met for 2 hours twice per week for 16 total sessions. Parent groups met for 2 hours every other week for four total sessions. Overall results of the KITS study demonstrated a significant positive effect on children’s literacy skills based on multiple tests of language, literacy, and phonological skills from the start of intervention, and at 2-month kindergarten follow up. Pears et al. (2016) also noted the change in percentage of students classified as low risk for reading difficulties. The percentage of low-risk students increased in the KITS group from the beginning to the end of the program, but the percentage decreased in the control group.

The STP-PreK was specifically designed to prepare children with externalizing behavior problems, including students with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder and oppositional defiant disorder, for the transition to kindergarten (Graziano & Hart, 2016). Children attended the STP-PreK for 40 sessions, 9 hours daily, Monday through Friday. The STP-PreK ran concurrently with the School Readiness Parenting Program (SRPP) and involved parent training sessions that lasted 1.5 to 2 hours and occurred on a weekly basis for eight total sessions.

One STP-PreK study compared the effects of (a) the parenting component of SRPP alone \((n = 15)\), (b) SRPP with standard curricula for academics and behavior modification (STP-PreK Standard; \(n = 15\)), and (c) the SRPP and standard curricula with additional curricula addressing social–emotional self-regulation skills (STP-PreK Enhanced; \(n = 15\); Graziano & Hart, 2016). Outcome variables included behavioral functioning, academic functioning, adaptive functioning, social–emotional skills, and self-regulation. Using linear mixed models, analyses demonstrated
all groups of children significantly improved in their behavioral functioning. However, children in the STP-PreK Enhanced group better maintained their improvements over time.

Hart et al. (2019) compared the effects of the full-length, 8-week STP-PreK \((n = 15)\) with a version shortened to 4 weeks \((n = 15)\) and found both dosages of the program were equally effective. The effects were also compared to the effects of standard, school-based consultation \((n = 15)\). Although children who participated in STP-PreK, both 4 weeks and 8 weeks, had better readiness scores at the start of kindergarten compared to children receiving school-based consultation, scores associated with STP-PreK gradually declined over the kindergarten year. However, scores associated with school-based consultation improved. The effects of all three programs were very similar by the end of the kindergarten year. Hart et al. noted both 4-week and 8-week STP-PreK had an equal dose of parent training, which may have explained similar outcomes between the two programs. Small sample size was also noted as a significant limitation in this study.

In summary, studies examining early intervention programs to promote school readiness and transition to kindergarten among children with disabilities are few in number but provide promising evidence. All five studies demonstrated positive effects of multicomponent early intervention and quality instruction on the readiness skills of young children with disabilities (Graziano & Hart, 2016; Hart et al., 2019; Pears et al., 2016; Philips & Meloy, 2012; Weiland, 2016). Although it is unclear which intervention components had the greatest influence, there was some evidence suggesting comprehensive programs that address multiple domains (i.e., academics, social–emotional skills, self-regulation, and behavior) provide the greatest benefit and lasting effects. Parent training that promotes positive parent–child relationships and parent involvement in children’s education was also linked to positive outcomes among children with disabilities (Graziano & Hart, 2016; Hart et al., 2019; Pears et al., 2016). Individualized support
through regular coaching and school consultation may also have added benefits, particularly improved maintenance of children’s acquired skills (Hart et al., 2019).

**Perspectives on School Readiness and TTS for Children With Disabilities**

Four studies investigated parent and teacher perspectives on school readiness and TTS practices that involved children with disabilities (Jewett et al., 1998; Quintero & McIntyre, 2011; Welchons & McIntyre, 2015, 2017). Three quantitative studies from the northeastern United States examined perspectives of school readiness and used the same measurement tools, which were the FEIT and TPOT (Quintero & McIntyre, 2011; Welchons & McIntyre, 2015, 2017). The FEIT and TPOT rating scales yielded scores that reflected total involvement in the TTS process, composed of both generic (e.g., classroom tour) and individualized (e.g., meeting individually with parents) transition activities. Concerns about the TTS were also measured.

Welchons and McIntyre (2015) used the FEIT and TPOT and compared perspectives of parents, preschools, and kindergarten teachers during the transition to kindergarten for children with disabilities ($n = 57$) and without disabilities ($n = 57$), such as developmental delay, speech-language impairment, autism, and other disabilities. Results showed all three types of stakeholders (i.e., parents, preschool teachers, kindergarten teachers) held similar concerns regarding transition and expressed a desire to be involved. However, there were disparities between their involvement in TTS activities. Regardless of the child’s disability, preschool teachers engaged in a mix of individualized and generic types of transition activities, but kindergarten teachers mainly engaged in generic activities. Parents overall engaged in generic activities and were more involved if they had a child with a disability. A common barrier reported by kindergarten teachers to practice TTS activities was lack of available time. Welchons and McIntyre’s findings nearly replicated findings from Quintero and McIntyre’s (2011) study.
that compared teacher and parent perspectives on the TTS for children with autism and other developmental disabilities.

Welchons and McIntyre (2017) completed an additional study using the same tools (i.e., the FEIT and TPOT) and examined the association between TTS practices and social–behavioral outcomes for students with disabilities ($n = 52$) and without disabilities ($n = 52$), such as developmental delay, speech-language impairment, autism, and other disabilities. Outcome variables measured included social skills, problem behavior, and student–teacher relationship quality, which were also combined into a Transition Outcomes Composite (TOC). Hierarchical regression models demonstrated preschool teacher involvement in TTS was associated with children having lower TOC scores. However, kindergarten teachers indicated similar TTS practices that were not associated with children’s disability or TOC scores. Welchons and McIntyre suggested preschool teachers are able to differentiate their amount of involvement in TTS based on students’ needs, but kindergarten teachers are limited in time and resources to engage in TTS and are more likely to practice uniform TTS activities.

Though dated and including a small sample size, Jewett et al. (1998) completed a qualitative study that analyzed the journals of four female early childhood educators reflecting on their experiences helping children with disabilities transition to kindergarten. Journal entries were collected over 8 months from preschool and kindergarten teachers with general education and special education (SPED) experience, and a parent coordinator of SPED programs. Coding and analysis of interview data identified the following themes and roles in the TTS process: (a) educators experienced an overwhelming sense of responsibility during the TTS process; (b) educators frequently discussed the laws and regulations that protected students with disabilities; (c) educators reported having a developed knowledge of the child and family, including a good understanding of all of their needs; (d) educators prioritized preparing students and families for
smooth transitions; and (e) educators sensed their role as a liaison in the collaborative process of transition.

Taken together, the few studies examining perspectives on TTS converged on two points: (a) educators and parents see the importance of engaging in TTS activities to help a smooth transition for children with disabilities, and (b) not all educators have the time and resources to become more involved in more individualized TTS (Jewett et al., 1998; Quintero & McIntyre, 2011; Welchons & McIntyre, 2015, 2017). More research is necessary to better understand the effectiveness of various TTS practices and the challenges to implementing them.

**Critique of Literature on School Readiness and Children With Disabilities**

There have been many studies on school readiness, but only 12 have primarily focused on students with disabilities. It appears studies about school readiness and TTS for children with disabilities have recognized the importance of assessing nonacademic skills, including executive functioning, for young children with disabilities (Alloway, 2007; Graziano & Hart, 2016; Gresham & Elliot, 2007; Hart et al., 2019; Ponitz et al., 2008). There is a clear preference in academic measurement tools to assess early literacy, mainly letter-word identification and print concepts, using reliable measures such as the WJ. A few studies measured skills in mathematics (Barton et al., 2012; Graziano & Hart, 2016; Hart et al., 2019; Weiland, 2016) and writing (Barton et al., 2012; Graziano & Hart, 2016; Hart et al., 2019; Jeon et al., 2011; McCarthy, 1972), and often relied on subscales of broad achievement tests (e.g., WJ; Barton et al., 2012; Graziano & Hart, 2016; Hart et al., 2019) or researcher-developed scales (e.g., REMAS-S; Weiland, 2012, 2016). It was beyond the scope of this study to go into further detail regarding the psychometrics (e.g., validity, reliability) of these tools.

Prediction studies have examined whether school readiness skills could be predicted by individual child characteristics. The limited number of predictive studies demonstrated disability
status was a poor indicator of readiness skills and was often misidentified (Barton et al., 2012; Jeon et al., 2011). Variance among school readiness skills could partially be explained by early direct child assessments (McIntyre et al., 2006; Pentimonti et al., 2016). Researchers (Jeon et al., 2011; Pentimonti et al., 2016) suggested contextual variables (e.g., early intervention, preschool teachers’ level of training) likely influenced their findings in prediction studies.

Intervention studies, though also few in number, demonstrated promising results. Inclusive preschool classrooms and STP-PreKs appear to have a positive impact on students’ readiness skills as they enter kindergarten (Graziano & Hart, 2016; Hart et al., 2019; Pears et al., 2016; Philips & Meloy, 2012; Weiland, 2016). The inclusive preschool and STP-PreK programs had commonalities in procedures for parent involvement (e.g., parent training), high-quality instruction, and curricula that addressed multiple domains (e.g., academic, social, behavioral).

Parent and teacher perspectives on TTS were also investigated by a few studies (Jewett et al., 1998; Quintero & McIntyre, 2011; Welchons & McIntyre, 2015, 2017), converging on two main points: (a) educators and parents see the importance of engaging in TTS activities, and (b) not all educators have the time and resources to become more involved in TTS practices, especially to use individualized practices for children with unique needs.

An operational definition of school readiness for children with and without disabilities is not yet clear. However, some researchers have recognized the importance of parent and teacher involvement (Hart et al., 2019; Pears et al., 2016; Welchons & McIntyre, 2017), children’s nonacademic skills (e.g., social skills, self-regulation; Hart et al., 2019; Pentimonti et al., 2016; Weiland, 2016; Welchons & McIntyre, 2017), and preparation of children for entry into kindergarten (Hart et al., 2019; Pears et al., 2016; Weiland, 2016), which could become part of the definition. More research is needed to examine the value of relationships between parents, teachers, and students in promoting school readiness and various TTS practices.
Social Constructivist Theory

Although perspectives on school readiness have shifted toward ecological and contextually informed frameworks—such as Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta’s (2000) ecological and dynamic model—research on school readiness among children with disabilities has continued to be heavily focused on child-focused variables (e.g., direct child assessments). Measuring child-focused variables is questionable given child-focused assessments do not reliably predict school success in the general population. Examining school readiness among children with disabilities should also consider contextual variables.

Gergen (1982) argued traditional scientific inquiry, which emphasizes objective truth and tools for making accurate predictions, is appropriate for studying stable phenomena (e.g., the effects of gravity), but has its limitations in studying transient (i.e., changing) phenomena (e.g., school readiness). The idea that school readiness is transient is supported by its reconceptualization as a shared responsibility among parents, teachers, and community members that exists in a changing society. Members of society constantly restructure their shared knowledge through interaction with each other (Cottone, 2016; Fagan, 2010). The assumption that knowledge is a social product is a basic tenet of social constructivism (Cottone, 2016; Fagan, 2010).

The principles of social constructivism have critical implications for school readiness research. There are three main theses of social constructivism: (a) scientific truth is socially interpreted, (b) epistemic standards are value laden, and (c) scientific standards for justifying knowledge are also socially constructed (Fagan, 2010).

Scientific Truth is Socially Interpreted

The first thesis of social constructivism concerns ontology. Social constructivists do not postulate universal truths; rather, they acknowledge reality as a subjective experience. It is from
experiences that people derive meaning, which defines their truth (Fagan, 2010). The general
definition of school readiness (i.e., a child’s success in a typical classroom setting; Snow, 2006)
suggests school readiness may appear differently across different classroom experiences (Brown
& Lan, 2015; Jewett et al., 1998).

**Epistemic Standards are Value Laden**

The second thesis of social constructivism describes its epistemological position that
social knowledge (e.g., thoughts about school readiness) and rules (e.g., legal criteria for SPED
eligibility) are created and upheld in a society if they are accepted and valued by the majority
and supported by people who have power and authority (e.g., policymakers; Fagan, 2010). Social
constructivism emphasizes the relational aspects of constructing knowledge because social
interactions help create, communicate, and transform social knowledge and rules (Burchinal et
al., 2010; Mashburn, 2008). There is qualitative evidence in the literature that teachers have
sensed increasing demand on the academic performance of children, shifting the expectations of
what it means to be ready for school (Brown & Lan, 2015). Despite teachers’ willingness to
engage in meaningful instruction, they reported feeling restricted due to the high prioritization by
policymakers, or people in higher authority, of children’s academic performance.

**Standards for Justifying Scientific Knowledge Are Socially Constructed**

The third thesis of social constructivism is that there are socially constructed standards by
which researchers justify their findings (Fagan, 2010). Conducting educational or psychological
research from a social constructivist perspective may be challenging due to a preference toward
postpositivist approaches to inquiry and frequently relying on quantitative methods when
investigating topics related to education or psychology. Social constructivists argue that even the
design of quantitative research has subjective qualities (e.g., the selection of study variables may
reflect the valued interests of the scientific community). Subjectivity is evident in reviewing the
literature on school readiness, which shifted over time to include more frequent measures of nonacademic skills (e.g., emotion regulation, executive functioning; Alloway, 2007; Graziano & Hart, 2016; Gresham & Elliot, 2007; Hart et al., 2019; Ponitz et al., 2008).

Research on a social constructivist view of school readiness has lacked qualitative methods of inquiry. Through qualitative methods, researchers may uncover complex ways school readiness is socially constructed through interactions between multiple stakeholders and settings (e.g., parent–teacher relationships, home–school communication systems; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). A qualitative approach would also involve an examination of how values surrounding school readiness are created, transformed, and upheld by people in authority to make important decisions for children transitioning to kindergarten (Fagan, 2010).

**Qualitative Approaches to Inquiry on School Readiness and Disability**

Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2008) reviewed a compendium of qualitative data analysis techniques for educational researchers, particularly school psychologists. Particular qualitative approaches may be selected based on the source of qualitative data (i.e., talk, observations, images/video, and text). Qualitative research on school readiness and transition to kindergarten for children with disabilities would most likely benefit from an analysis of talk (e.g., interview) data. Adding talk data would be a benefit because decisions made during the transition process are enacted by IEP team members, including parents and teachers, and are likely influenced by their perspectives on school readiness. Although there are other important members of an IEP team (e.g., school psychologists, administrators), parents and teachers spend the most time with the child and become primary informants in the process. It may also be worthwhile to uncover how parents’ and teachers’ initial views of children may be transformed over time, perhaps through parent–teacher communication (e.g., a teacher informing a parent about the child’s progress). Through interviews, researchers may gain the greatest insight into parents’ and
teachers’ social constructions of school readiness, disability, and their roles during the transition to kindergarten process. Multiple interviews would allow researchers to ask follow-up and clarifying questions to better understand interviewees’ experiences and perspectives working with children with disabilities and determining children’s school readiness as they transition to kindergarten.

Two qualitative approaches for analyzing interview data (i.e., membership categorization analysis and discourse analysis) particularly align with social constructivism because they specifically target social interactions and social values (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008). *Membership categorization analysis* is concerned with how people regularly use terms and categories in their social interactions to define social groups and describe their members. Membership categorization analysis may be helpful in identifying how parents and teachers describe children who are ready for kindergarten and children considered at risk of school failure. The *discourse analysis* approach may include membership categorization analysis but examines more closely the processes of meaning making (e.g., forming constructions of school readiness) through language, social interaction, and social practices (e.g., assessment, IEP meetings).

*Discourse* refers to the linguistic and representational practices and social exchanges that frame and are framed by social institutions and structures (Gee, 2011; Rogers, 2011). In other words, discourses refer to the ways in which things are described and understood in a society (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008). Analyses of the discourses surrounding school readiness may reveal the prevailing discourses shaping the social construct and the overlooked, smaller discourses shaping only a small proportion of society members (e.g., children with disabilities). Because children with disabilities often receive individualized support (e.g., through an
individualized family service plan or IEP), the concept of school readiness may be constructed differently for children with disabilities compared to their typically developing peers. An analysis of discourses may potentially uncover the figured world of school readiness that exists uniquely for children with disabilities. Examining the personal accounts of multiple stakeholders (e.g., parents and teachers) may also reveal the interactive processes through which they coconstruct their knowledge about disability and school readiness that influence their decision making for young children with disabilities transitioning to kindergarten.

**Discourse Analysis of Parents’ and Teachers’ Perspectives**

The purpose of this review was to gain a better understanding of the utility of discourse analysis in examining the perspectives of parents and teachers working with young children with disabilities. The following search terms were entered on the ERIC and Academic Search Premier databases: (a) *discourse analysis* AND *early childhood* or *preschool* or *kindergarten*, and (b) *disability* or *special needs*. The initial search for abstracts yielded 102 results without restrictions on the year of publication or geographic location. Although search results included articles that used discourse analysis in studying disability and young children, none of the studies specifically examined the concept of school readiness or transition to kindergarten, which highlighted an important gap in the literature. Therefore, final inclusion criteria for this review located studies that used discourse analysis in examining the perspectives of parents and teachers of young children with disabilities. Eight studies met inclusion criteria for review.

**Discourse Analysis of Parents’ Perspectives**

Five studies on parents’ perspectives were identified and their findings illuminated parents’ unique experiences having a child with a disability and navigating the educational system for support and resources (Avdi et al., 2000; Broberg, 2010; Bruin & Nevøy, 2014; Persons, 2017; Wilhelmsen & Nilsen, 2015). These studies analyzed data collected from
semistructured interviews from participants ranging in number from 6–27. The discourse analysis approaches selected for these studies frequently involved an analysis of how parents are positioned in relation to others (i.e., subject positioning) and how parents enact or navigate around the prevailing discourses about disability. Most of the studies cited a Foucauldian discourse analysis in their methodology, which—consistent with social constructivist theory—aims to identify the prevailing discourses of truth and uncover subjugated discourses held by smaller groups with less authority (e.g., parents of one child with a disability versus SPED experts working with multiple children with disabilities; Avdi et al., 2000; Bruin & Nevøy, 2014; Wilhelmsen & Nilsen, 2015).

Discourses of normativity and deviance were present in all five studies of parents of children with Down syndrome, autism, intellectual disabilities, and other disabilities (Avdi et al., 2000; Broberg, 2010; Bruin & Nevøy, 2014; Persons, 2017; Wilhelmsen & Nilsen, 2015). In the discourses were notions of normal functioning as ensuring a better quality of life and deviance associated with tragedy. Parents sensed a separation of their child from typically developing children, either from their own normative experiences (e.g., family background and observations) or by adopting the perspectives of other professionals (e.g., medical discourse).

It was very common for parents of children with disabilities to accept the medical discourse that allowed them to obtain resources for their child and family (Avdi et al., 2000; Broberg, 2010; Wilhelmsen & Nilsen, 2015). The medical discourse positions the disability as a permanent, unchanging construction. For example, if a child with autism makes unexpected progress, they are reclassified if they no longer meet the criteria for autism (Avdi et al., 2000). The definition of autism remains stagnant. Although parents may not initially agree with the medical discourse, they are often positioned to accept this discourse to obtain resources (e.g.,
early intervention) for their child (Avdi et al., 2000; Broberg, 2010). Such discourses are often negative, and parents may be required to highlight their children’s shortcomings and inferiority (e.g., the cost of claimant discourse; Broberg, 2010). Findings such as this highlight the positions of power of diagnosis and provision of services to children, emphasizing the clinical experts’ role and dismissing parents’ hesitation to view their child differently (Wilhelmsen & Nilsen, 2015).

There were some variations in findings across studies. For example, Persons’s (2017) study of parents of children with Down syndrome in Thailand showed parents held a preconceived notion that their child would become a lifelong dependent and continue to have difficulties in the future. Although Broberg’s (2010) study demonstrated a strong tragedy discourse in Sweden about parenting children with intellectual disabilities, these parents recognized the continued normalcy in their lives at times despite having a child with an intellectual disability and dismissed the tragedy.

Avdi et al. (2000) demonstrated parents of children with autism adopt multiple, and sometimes contradicting, discourses and practice them differently across contexts and through their interactions with others (e.g., educators, psychologists). The discourses include normality (i.e., personal), medical, and disability experiences, with parents emphasizing a selected discourse depending on the context or presenting social situation.

Bruin and Nevøy (2014) examined parents’ perceptions regarding cochlear implants. It was an interesting study due to two very separate discourses surrounding beliefs about deafness and communication. The authors found parents’ narratives showed their involvement in the different discourses to various degrees and faced challenges deciding how to best support their child in developing spoken language. Bruin and Nevøy (2014) stated, “The discursive power
induces the idea that there is a ‘right’ and a ‘wrong’ choice in communication modality after implantation, [valuing] normalization and ultimately [leading] to insecurity and frustration on the part of the parents” (p. 396).

Although each study (Avdi et al., 2000; Broberg, 2010; Bruin & Nevøy, 2014; Persons, 2017; Wilhelmsen & Nilsen, 2015) was able to identify and support discourses, as experienced and communicated by parents, the discourses were frequently related to contextual influences (i.e., attitudes of the larger society, trusting in experts, constraint of parents’ agency through policies and assessment/intervention practices). Findings from studies on parents’ perspectives show parents of children with disabilities experience challenges due to how their lived experiences have been constructed by other members in society.

Studies on Teachers’ Perspectives

Two discourse analysis studies on educators’ perspectives were particularly interested in educators’ perceptions of children with social–emotional difficulties and challenging behavior (Orsati & Causton, 2015; Orsati & Causton-Theoharis, 2013). A common theme of both studies was a discourse that characterized children’s social–emotional and behavioral difficulties as inherent to the child’s personality or home experience. Similar to medical discourse, this attribution positioned the children’s difficulties as stable and diminished educators’ perceived ability to influence positive behavior change.

Orsati and Causton-Theoharis (2013) applied Fairclough’s dialectical–relational approach to discourse analysis to examine data collected from interviews with teachers. Fairclough’s (2001) four steps to analyze texts, including interviews, are as follows: “(1) focus upon a social wrong, in its semiotic aspect; (2) identify obstacles to addressing the social wrong; (3) consider whether the social order ‘needs’ the social wrong; (4) identify possible ways past the obstacles”
Applying Fairclough’s steps, Orsati and Causton-Theoharis identified a labelling discourse as a social wrong, in which labels (e.g., defiant) are given to a child, rather than their behavior. The obstacle in addressing the social wrong is that labels are frequently used to define the strategies, including exclusionary practices, teachers employ in the classroom. Exclusion was found to be natural and necessary to establish order (i.e., control) in the classroom setting. With their findings, Orsati and Causton-Theoharis revealed how the labeling discourse is maintained. They also found teachers were more likely to view a child positively, employ additional techniques in managing behavior, and create a supportive learning environment when teachers developed a positive relationship with children exhibiting challenging behaviors.

Orsati and Causton (2015) conducted a 2-year ethnographic study analyzing how preschool teachers of two students with disabilities developed their constructs of these children through their interactions with them, and how they positioned these students prior to entering kindergarten. Orsati and Causton applied Gee’s (2011) approach to discourse analysis that included analyses of utterance-type or situated meaning, aiming to discover how language terms (i.e., utterances, forms) have a particular functional purpose in specific, situated contexts. Orsati and Causton revealed discourses supporting a regimented classroom environment and intensive supports (e.g., exclusion, restraint) are necessary to maintain order. The two students in the study, Dave and Scott, displayed similar behaviors of concern at the beginning of the study but experienced two different trajectories. Dave’s behaviors were more consistent and staff viewed his behaviors as having a medical cause, which led staff to recommend Dave’s parents to have him diagnosed and prescribed medication. Once Dave’s behaviors were viewed as under control, he was reconstructed as not having any more problems. Scott, on the other hand, displayed behavioral inconsistencies to which staff responded with hypersurveillance. He was constructed
as simply being naughty and became subject to increasing restraint and exclusion as time progressed. Prior to entering kindergarten, Dave was positioned as having made significant improvement and placed in an inclusion kindergarten classroom, and Scott was viewed as dysfunctional and was placed in a more restrictive educational environment.

Strengths in both studies by Orsati and Causton (Orsati & Causton, 2015; Orsati & Causton-Theoharis, 2013) include the researchers’ inquiry beyond simple identification of discourses, how such themes came to be, and consequences of enacting such discourses in practice. The researchers also sought possibilities of change in the prevailing discourses, highlighting the effects of such change.

**Critique of Discourse Analysis Studies**

The studies in this review demonstrated the value of discourse analysis as an important methodological approach. Although it is expected from a social constructivist perspective that findings may vary across studies, especially conducted in different cultural contexts, there were common themes across studies. For example, a discourse of normativity was prevalent in most studies and included the notion that being normal ensured a better quality of life, which would be harder for children with disabilities to obtain (Avdi et al., 2000; Broberg, 2010; Bruin & Nevøy, 2014; Persons, 2017; Wilhelmsen & Nilsen, 2015). Studies also demonstrated parents engage with a variety of discourses (e.g., medical discourse, cost of claimant) depending on the context, with examples of how parents must reconstruct their perceptions of their child (e.g., focus more on their deficits) to obtain additional support (e.g., early intervention) for them (Avdi et al., 2000; Broberg, 2010; Bruin & Nevøy, 2014; Persons, 2017; Wilhelmsen & Nilsen, 2015). These themes are important to consider when examining how proximal (e.g., parent–teacher
interactions) and distal (e.g., influences of policy) relationships in the ecological framework may influence parents’ perspectives on disability and school readiness.

This review revealed there were few studies that used discourse analysis in examining the perspectives of parents and teachers working with young children with disabilities. Discourse analysis studies of teachers’ perspectives were especially lacking, consistent with another review of discourse analysis in education, demonstrating that a few of these studies were conducted in early childhood education (Rogers et al., 2016).

Another limitation of these studies was the examination of perspectives of a single group, such as parents or teachers (Avdi et al., 2000; Broberg, 2010; Bruin & Nevøy, 2014; Orsati & Causton, 2015; Orsati & Causton-Theoharis, 2013; Persons, 2017; Wilhelmsen & Nilsen, 2015). These studies demonstrated perspectives of a single group or individuals are shaped by the discourses that transcend through their proximal and distal relationships to other members and groups in society. A discourse analysis of interactions between groups may provide a richer understanding of how discourses are formed and maintained, and how competing discourses may be adopted or dispelled in various social contexts.

**Literature Conclusions**

There is a need for further research to address the small number of studies on school readiness and transition to kindergarten among children with disabilities. Although there has been a shift toward conceptualizing an ecological view of school readiness (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000), studies of school readiness among children with disabilities have been child focused and have relied heavily on direct child assessments (La Paro & Pianta, 2000). This reliance is problematic given that variance among school readiness skills could partially be explained by direct child assessments (Barton et al., 2012; Jeon et al., 2011). Researchers have
suggested contextual variables (e.g., receiving early intervention, level of teacher training) likely influenced findings in prediction studies based on individual characteristics (Jeon et al., 2011; Pentimonti et al., 2016). This assertion is consistent with the shift toward an ecological view of school readiness (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000).

Research on a social constructivist view of school readiness calls for qualitative methods of inquiry. For the current study, the researcher proposed the perspectives of parents and teachers, or people most familiar with the child, were gathered through interviews, allowing in-depth inquiry of their values and beliefs about school readiness, disability, and transition to kindergarten, which may influence their practices and decision making during the transition process for children with disabilities. The researcher also proposed discourse analysis as a methodological approach, consistent with a social constructivist perspective (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008), in analyzing parents’ and teachers’ perspectives.

Despite a lack of discourse analysis studies on school readiness and TTS, a review of the literature demonstrated discourse analysis was valuable in examining parents’ perspectives of disability in early childhood (Avdi et al., 2000; Broberg, 2010; Bruin & Nevøy, 2014; Persons, 2017; Wilhelmsen & Nilsen, 2015). A discourse analysis of interactions between groups (e.g., parents, teachers) may reveal how discourses on school readiness, disability, and transition to kindergarten are coconstructed and influence decision making for children with disabilities.
Chapter 3: Methodology

In the previous chapter, the researcher provided a systematic review of studies focusing on school readiness and the transition to kindergarten among young children with disabilities. The reviewed studies predominantly took a quantitative approach and yielded inconsistent findings (Jeon et al., 2011; La Paro & Pianta, 2000; McIntyre et al., 2006; Pentimonti et al., 2016). However, studies taking qualitative approaches have been limited in number and have lacked in-depth analysis of the interactive processes through which parents and teachers coconstruct notions of school readiness that guide their decision making for students with disabilities. The researcher proposed a discourse analysis approach to further examine this topic and provided a review of studies that have used discourse analysis to examine similar topics.

Following a reiteration of the purpose and research questions of this study, this chapter begins with a discussion of social constructivism as a theoretical framework to examine school readiness. Discourse analysis is a methodological approach that aligns with social constructivism (Lee & Onwuegbuzie, 2008) and effectively addressed the research questions of the current study. The selected discourse analysis approaches (i.e., subject positioning and dialectical–relational approach) for this study are described, along with a rationale for using each approach. Then, the chapter describes the participants, population studied, study design, methods, and ethical considerations. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations and significance of this study.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this study was to examine the social constructions of school readiness and transition to kindergarten for children with disabilities held by parents and teachers working together in a single school district in Southern California.
Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1) What child-focused variables do parents and teachers emphasize when discussing school readiness and the transition to kindergarten for students with disabilities?

2) What contextual factors do parents and teachers emphasize when discussing school readiness and the transition to kindergarten for students with disabilities?

3) How do parents and teachers experience and participate in the transition to kindergarten for students with disabilities?
   a) How do parents and teachers view their roles, and limitations of their roles, in the transition to kindergarten process?
   b) How do parents and teachers seek to improve the transition to kindergarten process?

School Readiness as a Social Construct

Social constructivism as an epistemology, or theory of knowledge, considers how individuals and communities have unique and subjective experiences of the world, including its structures (e.g., educational institutions; Cottone, 2016). Social knowledge (e.g., thoughts about school readiness) and rules (e.g., legal criteria for special education [SPED] eligibility) may be created and upheld in a society if they are accepted by the majority and supported by individuals and groups with power and authority (Fagan, 2010). Social constructivism emphasizes the relational aspects of constructing knowledge because social interactions help create, communicate, and transform social knowledge and rules (Burchinal et al., 2010; Mashburn, 2008).
Perceptions of school readiness have shifted from child focused (e.g., direct child assessments) to contextually informed conceptualizations (e.g., parent–family–community engagement framework of school readiness) and have also emphasized social–emotional development as much as academic achievement (Head Start – Early Childhood Learning & Knowledge Center, 2022). The changing notions reflect the socially constructed nature of school readiness. Therefore, conducting research on school readiness would involve examining the social values or interests surrounding school success, and how the construction of school readiness is transformed through interactions between stakeholders (e.g., children, parents, teachers; Fagan, 2010). Additionally, it is important to recognize that constructions of school readiness may differ across educational contexts (e.g., SPED and general education classrooms) and have important implications in decision making for vulnerable populations (e.g., kindergarten placement for children with disabilities).

**Qualitative Approaches Aligned With Social Constructivism**

Leech and Onwuegbuzie (2008) published a review of qualitative data analysis techniques and described a compendium of approaches for educational researchers, particularly school psychologists. The approaches were organized by source of qualitative data (i.e., talk, observations, images/video, and text). Through interviews, which are considered a talk source of data, researchers may gain the greatest insight into parents’ and teachers’ social constructions of school readiness, disability, and their roles during the transition to kindergarten process. Multiple interviews would allow a researcher to ask follow-up and clarifying questions to better understand interviewees’ experiences and perspectives working with children with disabilities and determine children’s school readiness as they transition to kindergarten.
Two qualitative approaches for analyzing interview data (i.e., membership categorization analysis and discourse analysis) particularly align with social constructivism because they specifically target social interactions and social values (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008). 

**Membership categorization analysis** is concerned with how people regularly use terms and categories in their social interactions to define social groups and describe their members. Membership categorization analysis may be helpful in identifying how parents and teachers describe children who are ready for kindergarten and children considered at risk of school failure. The **discourse analysis** approach may include membership categorization analysis but examines the processes of meaning making (e.g., forming constructions of school readiness) more closely through language, social interaction, and social practices (e.g., assessment, individualized education plan [IEP] meetings).

**Discourse Analysis and Selected Approaches**

**Discourse** refers to the linguistic and representational practices and social exchanges that frame and are framed by social institutions and structures (Gee, 2011; Rogers, 2011). In other words, discourses refer to the ways by which things are described and understood in a society (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008). Although discourses can be represented in a variety of forms, such as spoken language, observed actions of individuals, and visual representations, the researcher for the current study collected data from interviews and used discourse analysis techniques that can be applied to language, specifically interview transcripts. Gee (2011) offered a multitude of tools to guide analyses of language. The selected tools for the current study are listed with their descriptions in Table 3. The tools were selected to address the research questions and align with the discourse analysis approaches used in this study.
Table 3

Selections from Gee’s Discourse Analysis Toolkit for the Current Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tool</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The Significance Building Tool</td>
<td>Ask how words and grammatical devices are used to build up or lessen significance, importance, or relevance for certain things and not others.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Connections Building Tool</td>
<td>Ask how words and grammar used in communication connect or disconnect things or ignore connections between things. Always ask how words and grammar used in communication make things relevant or irrelevant to other things or ignore their relevance to each other.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Identities Building Tool</td>
<td>Ask what socially recognizable identity or identities the speaker is trying to enact or to get others to recognize. Also, ask how the speaker’s language treats other people’s identities and what sorts of identities the speaker recognizes for others in relationship to their own. Ask how the speaker positions others and what identities the speaker invites them to take up.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Relationships Building Tool</td>
<td>Ask how words and various grammatical devices are used to build and sustain or change relationships of various sorts among the speaker, other people, social groups, cultures, and/or institutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Politics Building Tool</td>
<td>Ask how words and grammatical devices are used to build (i.e., construct, assume) what count as a social good and to distribute this good to or withhold it from listeners or others. Ask how words and grammatical devices are used to build a viewpoint on how social goods are or should be distributed in society.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Activities Building Tool</td>
<td>Ask what activities or practices this communication builds or enacts. What activity or activities is this communication seeking to get others to recognize as being accomplished? Also, ask what social groups, institutions, or cultures support and norm (i.e., set norms for) whatever activities are being built or enacted.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Gee’s (2011) significant building and connections building tools were selected to address the first two research questions, which aimed to identify the child-focused and contextual factors participants believed were important for school readiness and successful transition to kindergarten. The Significance Building Tool was applied in the current study to analyze dialogue in which participants referred to student skills and environmental (i.e., home, school, and district-level) factors perceived as important for school readiness and successful transition to kindergarten. This dialogue was primarily elicited by the following interview questions:

• What are some things children with disabilities do well in school?
What are some things in school that are challenging for children with disabilities?

In what areas have you seen children with disabilities make the most growth?

How do you know when a child with a disability is ready for kindergarten?

What do you think makes children ready for kindergarten?

What has helped prepare children with disabilities for kindergarten?

What are your hopes and goals for your child/students, and what do you think will help them achieve those goals?

See Appendices A and B for the full lists of interview questions for parent and teacher participants in this study. Examples of the application of the Significance Building Tool are provided in Table 4. Portions of the sample quotes are italicized to identify data most relevant to the application of the Significance Building Tool to address the research question(s) of this study.
Table 4

Examples of the Application of the Significance Building Tool

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample quote</th>
<th>Significance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Kelly (teacher): “Usually at the time when I share out in the meetings, it’s at a point where I don’t know if the child’s going to gen ed or special day class. So, I don’t know how specific to be because I feel like if I knew ‘Okay, this kid is gonna be in gen ed,’ then I would be a little more specific. Where[as], if the child’s going to be transitioning to an SDC class, I feel like I just wanna give a really brief overview [of gen ed] because the parents just bombarded with so much information in an IEP. I don’t feel like they necessarily need my list of things their kid needs to learn [for gen ed].”</td>
<td>Information shared about general education was more important for students transitioning into general education and less important for students transitioning into SDC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adam (parent): “They think she will be ready by this August to go to regular public school and go to kindergarten because she has her bathroom training, she could speak a lot better, she takes direction, she doesn’t have, you know, that they don’t see the kind of tantrums I’m seeing at home once in a while, you know, it’s a different environment. And [she] listens to the instructors or the teacher there.”</td>
<td>Parent shared reasons why child was determined ready for general education kindergarten, such as being toilet trained, communication skills, compliance, and minimal disruptive behavior (e.g., tantrums).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. IEP = individualized education plan. SDC = special day class.

The Connections Building Tool (Gee, 2011) was particularly useful in identifying the ways through which several discourses may operate together or influence each other. This tool was applied whenever participants described how different factors of school readiness and transition were relevant to one another, such as how students in general education were expected to be independent because of the limited attention they received in a setting with a higher student-to-teacher ratio. Participants tended to make these connections as they explained why particular factors were important, which they shared voluntarily or in response to the researcher’s follow-up questions (e.g., “Why are social skills important for kindergarten?”). Table 5 shows some examples of how the Connections Building Tool was applied in the current study.
Table 5

Examples of the Application of the Connections Building Tool

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample quote</th>
<th>Connections</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Karina (teacher): “My classroom is catered for special needs, specifically kids with autism. So, my classroom is set up for that. [The general ed] classroom isn’t. A general ed classroom is set up where kids can run the class. So, their stations, they know where things are. They can go and get it, bring it to their desk. [Whereas] my class is set up where things have to be put away, because kids [with autism], they’re not ready for that independence.”</td>
<td>Classroom setup is related to student readiness to be independent, which is different between students in general education and students with autism in SDC.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Kelly (teacher): ‘If they’ve had prior schooling experience, that helps. Not always. You know, but for the majority of the part, it does help, because they’re used to having structure. They’re used to routine; they’re used to being separated from their parents. And that’s another thing – when you start in kindergarten, it’s that emotional separation from the parents that can cause issues in the beginning because they’re crying all the time, and some of them stop crying within a week. Others, it takes a month. So, it’s learning, ‘Okay, well, I’ll bring a picture of your parents,’ so it’s like finding ways to make them feel comfortable and secure at school, reassuring them that they’re going to see their parents. But if they’ve already had a prior schooling experience, then they’re ready. They’re socially emotionally ready and hopefully they know how to behave, they know what is expected at a school.”</td>
<td>Prior schooling experience is connected to school readiness because of students’ exposure to school routines, being separated from parents, and learning how to behave according to the expectations of the school.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. SDC = special day class.

Two particular approaches to discourse analysis, subject positioning and dialectical–relational approaches, were useful in examining the third research question, which sought to examine how parents and teachers experienced and participated in the transition process. A focus on subject positioning directed the researcher in identifying how parents and teachers viewed each other’s roles and the limitations of their roles. The dialectical–relational approach was particularly useful in analyzing contextual factors that influenced participants’ decision making for students with disabilities as they transitioned to kindergarten and how participants sought to improve the transition process.
Subject Positioning

Analysis of subject positioning is part of a Foucauldian approach to discourse analysis, which aims to identify a person’s location in a particular discourse in relation to a structure of rights and duties granted to subjects in that discourse (Willig, 2013). Compatible with this approach are Gee’s (2011) Identities Building and Relationships Building tools.

Identities Building Tool

The Identities Building Tool (Gee, 2011) seeks to identify a speaker’s language that contains socially recognizable identities or roles (i.e., of the speaker themselves or of others), how language is used to treat such roles, and which identities a speaker encourages others to adopt for themselves. The researcher for the current study applied the Identities Building Tool to areas of dialogue in which participants described specific roles (e.g., “I am [my child’s] advocate”), unique influences of parents and teachers in supporting students’ school readiness (e.g., “I provide [students] with opportunities that they do not have at home”), and their influences on decision making regarding students’ transition to kindergarten (e.g., “I don’t have really have a say [in the decisions]”). Participants were asked the following questions (i.e., parents were asked the first question in each bullet and teachers were asked the second question) to describe their roles and limitations:

• What do you like most about parenting your child? What do you like most about being a teacher?

• What do you find challenging about parenting? What do you find challenging about being a teacher?
• Before having your child, have you had any prior experience or knowledge about [disability]? Tell me about your experience or knowledge about educating children with disabilities?

• What have you learned from raising your child? What have you learned through your experience working with children with disabilities?

• What has been your experience getting educational support for your child? What has been your experience supporting children with disabilities?

• How do you view your role as a parent in your child’s education? How do you view your role as a teacher in supporting children with disabilities?

• How do you view your role as a parent in making decisions about your child’s education and services? How do you view your role as a teacher in making decisions about children’s education and services, particularly for children with disabilities?

Examples of the application of the Identities Building Tool are provided in Table 6.
### Table 6

**Examples of the Application of the Identities Building Tool**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample quotes</th>
<th>Identities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Researcher: “How do you view your role in making decisions about Carla’s education and services?”</td>
<td>Parent as advocate, following the lead of professionals.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caroline (parent): “I think obviously, you know, I’m supposed to be her advocate, and I do try to support her as much as I can. But, you know, as I keep saying, I trust the professionals. I think that everyone has their field of expertise, and I don’t, there’s some parents that like to [question], ‘Wait, what are you guys doing?’ [but] I’m not that type of parent only because I know my job. I know what I do is good. So, I know that [for] other people, what they’re doing, you know, is good. So, yeah, I’m good with that. But then, when I do feel like, you know, they weren’t giving her enough time for OT [occupational therapy], I finally spoke up because I don’t really have too many things to speak up about, because I’m like, ‘Yes, you guys are giving me these services. Great.’ I wouldn’t even know what to ask. So, everything is being done for me, which I really like because, it’s not that I’m lazy, it’s just that I don’t know the process, so when you guys are telling me ‘this is a process and this is what we’re gonna do,’ I’m like, ‘Okay, good, thank you.’”</td>
<td>Professionals are experts, but parent does not consider themselves as knowledgeable about the SPED process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Gabby (teacher): ‘This role really requires to not only help the kids, but it’s a lot of parent handholding, not in a bad way. It’s really more like, because, again, like I said before, this is their first experience with just schooling in general. And for a lot of them, it’s their first experience of schooling and they’re being referred to special ed, you know. So, for parents, that’s really hard for them to accept or you know, like, process. So, you know, it’s just sad, like, you know they’re sad or they’re mad, so there’s a lot of emotions. Like, experiencing school for the first time, like, you know, like, they don’t know how to register. They don’t know when school starts, school rules, like, that’s new to them. This is the first time they’re separating from their kids, So, that’s new to them. So, there is a lot of like handholding I have to do on top of everything else.”</td>
<td>Teacher views I as a guide for parents, through handholding, who are new to the process of schooling and SPED for their child. Teacher recognizes parents need guidance as they experience the emotions associated with the new experiences of their child entering SPED.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** SPED = special education.

**Relationships Building Tool**

The Relationships Building Tool seeks to understand how language is used to construct relationships among the speaker and other people, groups, or institutions (Gee, 2011). The Relationships Building Tool was applied to participants’ descriptions of connections between...
individuals (i.e., “I worked very closely with the SPED teacher”) involved in supporting school readiness or preparing for the transition to kindergarten. Most descriptions were elicited by the following interview questions for parents and teachers. Questions asked of the parents included:

- What are some ways you and your child’s teacher communicate with each other?
- How has this communication been helpful to your child?
- Has anything about these communications been difficult?

Questions asked of the teachers included:

- What are some ways you and parents of children with disabilities communicate with each other?
- How has this communication been helpful to children with disabilities?
- Has anything about these communications been difficult?

Table 7 includes examples of how the Relationships Building Tool was applied in this study.
Table 7

Examples of the Application of the Relationships Building Tool

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample quotes</th>
<th>Relationships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bianca (parent): “You know, that [accessibility] also depends on the teacher because his preschool teacher was a lot more accessible than his kindergarten teacher. Now [with the kindergarten teacher], you know, obviously, she has a lot more students, so it’s a little more difficult for her. But his preschool teacher was very more informative of his day, and what he did, and what was successful, [what] worked, what didn’t work. Whereas, his kindergarten teacher, I didn’t see her as involved as I would like to. I think she did lean more on the aid to kind of fill me in on his day. I would have liked for her to be a little more involved.”</td>
<td>This parent–teacher relationship related to accessibility. The parent thought the preschool teacher was more accessible and involved with her son, compared to the kindergarten teacher who seemed less accessible. The parent valued direct accessibility to the teacher.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Jackie (teacher): “My favorite things [about teaching] are always just the relationships with the kids. I know it’s not, you know, everyone’s cup of tea, but it’s just like, when they hug me, when I get to love on them, when they, just any anything like that, where I can build that connection, that’s my favorite part. Just being able to laugh with each other, and just kind of letting them know that I’m a safe space for them and being able to be that safe space.</td>
<td>The teacher recognized her role in building a positive relationship with the child and being an adult they could feel comfortable around (i.e., teacher being a safe space for the child).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This study involved interviewing parents and teachers about their experiences working with children with disabilities and interacting with one another to prepare these children for their transition to kindergarten. Analysis of parents’ and teachers’ personal accounts revealed how they positioned themselves and others in the processes of supporting children with disabilities, promoting these children’s school readiness, and preparing these children for kindergarten. Analysis of subject positioning uncovered whether or not there was significant collaboration or structures of power and authority influencing construction of school readiness.

**Dialectical–Relational Approach**

Fairclough’s (2001) dialectical–relational approach is a form of critical discourse analysis that seeks to understand how meaning making (e.g., constructing definitions of school readiness) through the use of language contributes to social practices (e.g., decision making about
kindergarten placement) and how such practices maintain orders of discourse (e.g., assumptions about children with disabilities and their school readiness). The dialectical–relational approach consists of four steps: “(1) focus upon a social wrong, in its semiotic aspect, (2) identify obstacles to addressing the social wrong, (3) consider whether the social order ‘needs’ the social wrong, and (4) identify possible ways past the obstacles” (Fairclough, 2001, p. 91).

The first step in the dialectical–relational approach is to identify a social wrong, which refers to elements of social systems and structures that are oppressive (e.g., racism, ableism) and may only be transformed through significant changes in the social order (e.g., educational reform; Fairclough, 2001). Semiosis broadly refers to the symbolic language and actions involved in meaning making (Fairclough, 2001). To identify a social wrong in its “semiotic aspect” (Fairclough, 2001, p. 91), researchers need to identify discourses that have an effect on vulnerable or oppressed groups (e.g., students with disabilities). The researcher of the current study did not predetermine the social wrongs that exist in the transition to kindergarten for children with disabilities but identified them as they emerged from the interview data collected from parent and teacher participants.

The second step in Fairclough’s (2001) dialectical–relational approach brings a researcher’s attention to any resistance toward the identified social wrong and what barriers exist to transformative change. For example, some parents may disagree with evaluators’ descriptions of their child’s deficits but may not challenge the evaluator because the parents have positioned the evaluator as an expert (Avdi et al., 2000; Broberg, 2010). Perceived inferiority of parents is an example of a barrier to the social wrong of dismissing parents’ concerns in high-stakes decision making for their children.
The third step in Fairclough’s (2001) dialectical–relational approach requires researchers to investigate how the social wrong may contribute to the order (i.e., efficiency, functionality) of the society or institution. For example, deficit-focused SPED eligibility criteria serve to identify students in most need of specialized instruction and services (e.g., those with disabilities). Although parents may prefer positive descriptions of their child, they must acknowledge their child’s deficits to connect them with additional support (Avdi et al., 2000; Broberg, 2010).

The fourth step in Fairclough’s (2001) dialectical–relational approach encourages researchers to identify the ways through which transformative change may occur. Interviewing parents and teachers about their experiences with the transition to kindergarten process may uncover their beliefs about necessary changes to better support students with disabilities. Gee’s (2011) Politics Building Tool and Activities Building Tool are consistent with Fairclough’s dialectical–relational approach.

**Politics Building Tool**

Applying the Politics Building Tool (Gee, 2011) constitutes the first step in this approach, which is to identify social goods (e.g., students’ access to general education) that appear unequally distributed. In other words, the Politics Building Tool helped identify educational resources and supports that were withheld from particular students, parents, and teachers, constituting a social wrong. The Politics Building Tool also helped uncover how the speakers (i.e., parents and teachers) believed the social goods could be better distributed, which aligned with the fourth step of the dialectical–relational approach. The Politics Building Tool was mostly applied to analyze participants’ responses to the following interview questions for parents and teachers. Questions asked of the parents included:
• Tell me about your experience having (an) IEP meeting(s) last spring to discuss the transition to kindergarten for your child.

• What concerns did you have about your child transitioning to kindergarten?

• What was helpful about the transition to kindergarten IEP meeting?

• In what ways do you think the transition to kindergarten process could be improved?

Questions asked of the teachers included:

• Tell me about your experience having (an) IEP meeting(s) last spring to discuss the transition to kindergarten for your students.

• What concerns did you have about students transitioning to kindergarten?

• What was helpful about the transition to kindergarten IEP meeting?

• In what ways do you think the transition to kindergarten process could be improved?

Table 8 shows some examples of how the Politics Building tool was applied in this study.
Table 8

Examples of the Application of the Politics Building Tool

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample quotes</th>
<th>Politics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Researcher: “How do you view your role in helping make the decisions about transition?”</td>
<td>Appropriate educational placement, based on input from the preschool teacher, is a social good.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Flora (teacher): “There’s times where I feel very heard and my input is really considered, and then, there’s other times where I feel like it’s just coming down to numbers and where they live. I feel like they, special ed, will be respectful, that they appreciate my input, [but], honestly, the majority of the time, I do feel like that, now, I don’t. Because of the reality of the numbers, I feel like [educational placement] just comes down to where they fit, and that’s discouraging.”</td>
<td>This social good [educational placement] is limited by spots (i.e., numbers) available for enrollment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Gabby (teacher): “I just wish [mainstreaming] was more talked about or more readily available in our district. They say, like, mainstreaming is teacher specific, you know, or it’s, like, it’s site specific, but, like, for me like as a parent, that’s not what I want to hear, you know. I think that’s why they want receiving teachers to come [to the transition IEP meeting], but, again, even I don’t know, we’ll see what happens this year, but in the past, when receiving teachers weren’t coming, like, we have no answers for them. So, as a parent, I wouldn’t like to hear that either, you know, when this kid, like my son, will totally benefit from mainstreaming, but I don’t know if the school we’re offering will even give them mainstreaming. Then, it’s like, why would they agree? Why would they sign [the] paperwork?”</td>
<td>The teacher expressed desire for more mainstreaming opportunities for students. The teacher explained she was not aware which schools offered mainstreaming and was limited in making recommendations about mainstreaming for students who may benefit.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. IEP = individualized education plan.

Activities Building Tool

The Activities Building Tool (Gee, 2011) was used to identify the social practices, relevant to transition, described by participants and how these practices were supported and maintained by the culture and norms of the school district and community. The Activities Building Tool implements the second and third steps of the dialectical–relational approach by identifying the social barriers to transformative change. In conjunction with subject positioning (i.e., Identities Building Tool and Relationships Building Tool), the Activities Building Tool was
also useful in identifying the cultural norms influencing shared discourses between participants.

Examples of the application of the Activities Building Tool are provided in Table 9.

**Table 9**

*Examples of the Application of the Activities Building Tool*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sample quotes</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Researcher: “In what ways do you think the transition process can be improved?”</td>
<td>Transition IEPs are usually held in the last few weeks of school, resulting in limited time and availability of receiving kindergarten teachers to attend the meetings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms Hannah (teacher): “Having the other receiving teachers. That would be nice, and we all could have time and come together, and actually do a meeting like that. They come to all the meetings that they need to attend because that’s always been hard. I know after school some teachers are like, ‘Well, I’m not going to do it after school’ or [the IEP can only go] up to a certain point, ‘Oh, I’m going I have to go at [time].’ I know everyone has meetings and transitions, and so it would be nice if we could start like earlier, like in March. If we could have the list sooner. So, we can stretch out all that work [that’s usually] within the last 2 weeks of school. Yeah, that’s always the hard thing to try to squeeze everything.”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Kelly (teacher): “I feel like the majority of the parents are very unaware of the way the process works, some more so than others. Most of them are aware of their child’s disability and why they’re currently placed in special ed, but I just don’t know. Like, I think the parents understand, ‘Okay, my kid was tested. This is what they found out,’ but I don’t know how, how does the parent know that they have the opportunity to say ‘No, that’s not where I want my child’? I know in the parent rights, [it explains] the process [to parents] if they disagree, then, you know, they could go through that. [But], I mean, typically at a [meeting], or at least in the meetings that I’ve been in, we’ve tried to say at the beginning, like, ‘You have a copy of your parent rights, do you have any questions?’ but no one [does]. Maybe we don’t actively point out ‘So, if you disagree with something, [blah blah blah].’ But yeah, and then, at the end we say like, ‘Oh, if you agree to everything, everything sounds good, you could sign initial.’”</td>
<td>The teacher explains how parent rights are discussed during IEP meetings, in which the school team does not fully inform the parent of their right to disagree.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. IEP = individualized education plan.*

A dialectical–relational approach directs researchers to analyze participants’ perceptions of barriers to fair decision making for students with disabilities (Fairclough, 2001). In the current study, the dialectical–relational approach assisted the analysis of how constructions of disability,
school readiness, transition to kindergarten, and roles of stakeholders (i.e., child, parent, teacher) were created and whether they may have been more or less resistant to transformative change.

**Potential Contribution of Discourse Analysis**

Analyses of the discourses surrounding school readiness may reveal the prevailing discourses shaping this social construct and the overlooked, smaller discourses shaping only a small proportion of society members (e.g., children with disabilities). Because children with disabilities often receive individualized support through an individualized family service plan or IEP, the researcher of this study aimed to examine how the concept of school readiness may have been constructed differently for children with disabilities compared to their typically developing peers. An analysis of discourses may potentially uncover the figured world of school readiness that exists uniquely for children with disabilities. Examining the personal accounts of multiple stakeholders (e.g., parents and teachers) may also reveal the interactive processes through which they coconstruct their knowledge about disability and school readiness, which influence their decision making for young children with disabilities transitioning to kindergarten.

**Design and Methodology**

The following section describes the population from which participants were recruited and the demographics of the sample used in this study. Subsequent sections describe the data collection procedures (i.e., semistructured interviews) and analysis techniques (i.e., discourse analysis tools) that were implemented.

**Sample and Population Studied**

This study was conducted in a large, urban school district in Southern California. Families in this district were predominantly Hispanic or Latino/a. The district had several SPED classrooms, which were called special day classes (SDCs) for preschool-aged children with
disabilities. Parents and teachers from these classrooms were invited to participate in the study. Participants in this study included four different families whose children participated in a preschool SDC and transitioned to kindergarten and the children’s former preschool SDC teacher. Kindergarten SDC and general education teachers who participated in transition to kindergarten IEPs with the preschool SDC teachers were also invited to participate. Some of the kindergarten teachers may have worked with family participants at the time of the study. Participants were asked to share their demographic information, including age, gender, race/ethnicity, and years of teaching experience in general education and SPED.

Data Collection Procedures

Data were collected from transcriptions of semistructured individual interviews conducted with study participants. All participants participated in two interviews, except one mother who only participated in the first interview. The lists of interview questions for parents and teachers are provided in Appendices A and B, respectively. Each interview lasted a duration of about 45–60 minutes. This study was conducted during the COVID-19 global pandemic when there were frequently changing public health guidelines. To best ensure the safety of people involved in the study, and to maintain consistency, all interviews were conducted through online video conferences.

The first meeting between the researcher and participant consisted of the researcher sharing information about the study and gathering the interviewee’s consent to participate. The purpose of the first interview with parents was to inquire about their experiences, reactions to having a child with a disability, and beliefs about their child’s school readiness. The second interview with parents inquired about experiences interacting with their child’s teachers, school, and other educational service providers, and their experience with the transition to kindergarten
process. Parents were also asked to reflect on the transition to kindergarten process and ways they believed the process could be improved.

Interviews for teachers followed a similar format as those for parents. The first interview with teachers inquired about their experiences working with children with disabilities and their beliefs about school readiness. The second interview inquired about their experiences interacting with parents and the transition to kindergarten process. Teachers were also asked how they believed the transition to kindergarten process could be improved.

The researcher asked clarifying questions and summarized points during the interview process to ensure interviewees’ perspectives were understood. At the end of each interview, participants were given the opportunity to share any additional information they thought was important in discussing the topics of disability, school readiness, transition to kindergarten, and their unique experiences. Interviewees were sent a follow-up email after initial coding was completed for their transcripts. The follow-up email consisted of an outline of the main themes covered in the interviews and any direct quotes from their interviews that could potentially be published. Participants were given the opportunity to respond to the email or schedule a third interview if they wanted to add to, clarify, or correct any information they shared during the interviews.

Data Analysis Techniques

Interview transcripts underwent three main phases of coding: (a) thematic coding, (b) coding of subject positioning, and (c) coding of dialectical–relational events in the text. Thematic coding occurred in multiple subphases, consisting of precoding, initial coding, and second-pass coding (Saldaña, 2013). Precoding consisted of underlining and highlighting the transcripts for areas worthy of extra attention and was guided by the research questions. Following the
precoding phase, the researcher began initial coding of the transcripts. The codes used were based on themes the researcher identified in the transcripts rather than a predetermined set of codes. Then, the researcher reorganized and categorized the resulting codes by main topic or theme. Next, the researcher reread the entire text for a second pass of coding using the newly organized set of codes. The steps in thematic coding were especially helpful in addressing the first research question, which sought to understand participants’ views on school readiness, disability, and transition to kindergarten for children with disabilities.

To code subject positioning, the researcher identified areas of the transcript in which Gee’s (2011) Identities Building Tool and Relationships Building Tool could be applied. Then, the researcher applied the tools in the selected areas of text and created codes reflecting the identities and relationships described by participants.

To code dialectical–relational events, the researcher first identified social wrongs (i.e., events of control or depowering; Fairclough, 2001) that emerged from the personal accounts of parent and teacher participants. The social wrongs did not need to be overt forms of oppression and included any event that created a barrier to transformative change. Then, the researcher applied the remaining selection of Gee’s (2011) tools (i.e., Significance, Activities, Politics, and Connections Building Tools) to areas of the transcript containing evidence of the social wrong.

Research Ethics

Ethical considerations in conducting this study included the researcher’s subjectivity and potential benefits and risks to the researcher and participants. The ethical considerations are discussed in the following sections, along with procedures to minimize the potential risks.
Researcher Subjectivity

The primary researcher of this study identified as a woman, Filipino American, and a full-time school psychologist at the time of the study. The researcher specialized in early childhood education and her familiarity with the population being studied was valuable during interviews (e.g., asking follow-up questions) and data analysis (e.g., identifying relevant themes). The researcher conducted the study at her district of employment, where she had developed positive relationships with preschool teachers and families they served. The relationships seemed valuable in helping establish participants’ levels of comfort and trust with the researcher.

Benefits of the Study

The researcher and participants may have directly benefited from information gathered from this study. Interview questions may have led to self-reflection and insights about promoting children’s school readiness, building positive parent–teacher relationships, and equitable treatment of young children with disabilities. The study provided parent participants with an opportunity to share their unique perspectives on the transition to kindergarten process. Parents’ contributions may have helped improve school practices for a vulnerable population (i.e., young children with disabilities and their families). Another benefit of the study was the researcher’s increased understanding and sympathy toward teacher participants’ experiences working with students and families, which may have enhanced the working relationship between the teachers and researcher because the researcher had conducted initial evaluations of many students that became enrolled in the teachers’ classrooms.

Potential Risks of the Study

The researcher was aware her relationships with participants may have influenced their responses to interview questions. For example, the preschool teachers may have shared more or
less information about a topic if they believed sharing such information may have influenced their working relationship with the researcher or perceptions of their teaching practices. The researcher addressed this potential threat to validity by communicating the purpose of the study and ensuring personally identifiable information was removed from the transcripts. Participants were encouraged to share as much information as they felt comfortable with and were reminded of their right to request certain information not be shared. Participants were also allowed to withdraw from the study at any time.

**Chapter Conclusion**

The researcher considered several limitations, primarily regarding generalizability, prior to conducting this study. First, the researcher considered findings from this study would be specific to the population of interest, which was preschool SDC teachers, kindergarten teachers, and parents of children with disabilities who transitioned to kindergarten in a single urban school district in Southern California. Another limitation of this study was generalizability across time due to the extended school closures in the United States because of the COVID-19 global pandemic. Participants in this study discussed students who did not physically attend school in the previous 2020–2021 school year. Additionally, recent legislative changes were initiated toward providing universal preschool in the United States, which may have implications for early childhood curriculum and instruction in the future. The researcher addresses these and other limitations in the final chapter of this paper.

This study uniquely contributed to the body of literature on school readiness because it was the first to attempt an in-depth examination of the coconstructions of parents and teachers, school readiness, disability, and transition to kindergarten. The selected approaches of analysis of subject positioning and dialectical–relational events addressed important questions about how
parent–teacher interactions contributed to shared knowledge about school readiness that may have guided decision making for young students with disabilities entering kindergarten. The dialectical–relational approach sought to discover potential ways the discourse on school readiness and school transition could be transformed to better serve students with disabilities.
Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to examine parents’ and teachers’ social constructions of discourses surrounding school readiness, disability, and transition to kindergarten among young children with disabilities in one school district. Semistructured interviews were conducted with preschool and kindergarten special education (SPED) teachers, kindergarten general education teachers, and parents of young children with disabilities. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed qualitatively, with a focus on subject positioning (Willig, 2013) and applying a dialectical–relational approach to discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2001).

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1) What child-focused variables do parents and teachers emphasize when discussing school readiness and the transition to kindergarten for students with disabilities?

2) What contextual factors do parents and teachers emphasize when discussing school readiness and the transition to kindergarten for students with disabilities?

3) How do parents and teachers experience and participate in the transition to kindergarten for students with disabilities?

   a) How do parents and teachers view their roles, and limitations of their roles, in the transition to kindergarten process?

   b) How do parents and teachers seek to improve the transition to kindergarten process?

Description of Participants

A total of 12 participants were recruited from a large, urban school district in Southern California. Participants included four preschool special day class (SDC) teachers, two
kindergarten SDC teachers, two kindergarten general education teachers, and four parents of young children with disabilities.

All teacher participants were women between 27–55 years old. Teacher participants had between 4–35 years of teaching experience. Three teachers identified as White, two teachers identified as Hispanic, one teacher identified as Asian, and one teacher identified as Black. The pseudonyms for each teacher participant and their respective grade level and program taught are listed in Table 10.

Table 10

Teacher Participant Pseudonyms With Grade Level and Program Taught

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Program Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Erin</td>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td>SDC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Flora</td>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td>SDC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Gabby</td>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td>SDC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Hanna</td>
<td>Preschool</td>
<td>SDC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Joanna</td>
<td>TK–first</td>
<td>SDC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Jackie</td>
<td>TK–second</td>
<td>SDC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Karina</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>General education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ms. Kelly</td>
<td>Kindergarten</td>
<td>General education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. SDC = special day class. TK = transitional kindergarten.

Parent participants included one father and three mothers. One of the mothers could not be reached for a second interview. Parent participants ranged in age from 29–48 years old. Two parents identified as Hispanic, one parent identified as Asian, and one parent identified as White. The participating parents had young children with disabilities who were enrolled in a preschool SDC and continued to be eligible for SPED in kindergarten. These children included one girl and one boy with autism who transitioned into a SDC for kindergarten, one boy with an intellectual disability (i.e., Down syndrome) who transitioned into general education kindergarten for at least
75% of the school day, and one girl with autism who transitioned into general education transitional kindergarten (TK) for at least 75% of the school day. Pseudonyms for each parent participant are listed in Table 11, along with the pseudonym used for their child and their child’s disability.

Table 11

Parent Participant and Child Pseudonyms With Child’s Disability

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent</th>
<th>Child</th>
<th>Child’s disability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adam</td>
<td>Ana</td>
<td>Autism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bianca</td>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>Down syndrome, sensory processing disorder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caroline</td>
<td>Carla</td>
<td>Autism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diane</td>
<td>David</td>
<td>Autism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results

The results of this study are presented in three main sections, with each section corresponding to one of the research questions. Each section contains relevant themes identified from the interviews. Table 12 contains an outline of the sections and themes, reflecting the overall results of this study.
Table 12

*Resulting Themes From a Discourse Analysis of Parents’ and Teachers’ Social Constructions of Disability, School Readiness, and Transition to Kindergarten for Students With Disabilities*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Child-Focused Variables That Are Important for School Readiness and the Transition to Kindergarten for Students With Disabilities | • The importance of social–emotional and behavioral skills over academics  
• Safety and comfort being around others  
• Communication skills  
• Classroom engagement  
• General education expectations of students to comply with minimal redirection  
• Early handwriting skills  
• The unique needs of students with disabilities |
| Contextual Factors That Are Important for School Readiness and the Transition to Kindergarten for Students With Disabilities | • Lower student-to-teacher ratios in SDCs allow for increased supervision and flexible instruction  
• General education is set up for students who are independent  
• General education teachers’ lack of training and resources to support students with disabilities  
• Benefits of mainstreaming  
• Collaboration between preschool SDC and kindergarten teachers  
• Collaboration between general and SPED staff  
• Parent–teacher communication and collaboration |
| How Parents and Teachers Experience and Participate in the Transition to Kindergarten for Students With Disabilities | • Parents generally trust educational staff  
• Parents may not act as equal members of the IEP team if they are not fully aware of the process  
• Kindergarten teachers do not have a say in placement decisions and focus on learning about their incoming students  
• The informing role of kindergarten SDC teachers during transition IEP meetings for incoming students  
• The role of the general education teacher is sometimes unclear because they attend IEP meetings for students who may not transition to their class  
• Transparency and options for educational placement can improve placement decisions  
• Preschool SDC teachers’ placement decisions are limited by administrative authority and space for enrollment  
• Teachers need more time and staffing to prepare for transition |

*Note.* IEP = individualized education plan. SDC = special day class. SPED = special education.
Child-Focused Variables That Are Important for School Readiness and the Transition to Kindergarten for Students With Disabilities

This first section includes themes representing the child-focused variables, identified by parent and teacher participants, that were important when considering students’ school readiness. In general, participants frequently discussed the importance of social–emotional and behavioral skills over academics, and they emphasized students’ safety and comfort being around others, communication skills, and classroom engagement. Participants also discussed the general education expectations of students to comply with minimal redirection. Although participants discussed a variety of academic skills to some degree, early handwriting was the sole academic area discussed by all participants.

This section concludes with participants’ recognition of the unique needs of children with disabilities. Addressing these unique needs invites discussion about the educational environment, which is covered in the second section on contextual factors relevant to school readiness.

The Importance of Social–Emotional and Behavioral Skills Over Academics

Every participant emphasized social–emotional or behavioral skills over academics when discussing students’ strengths and expectations of students in school. For example, most of the SDC teachers (i.e., Ms. Erin, Ms. Flora, Ms. Gabby, Ms. Hanna, and Ms. Joanna) prioritized teaching their students how to play together and demonstrate student skills (e.g., learning to sit, follow directions). The teachers were less concerned about students’ academics, and they assumed academic skills would be acquired with continued school experience. Ms. Hannah, a preschool SDC teacher, shared:
It’d be great for these kids to just be able to function in the community and just blend in. . . For them to be able to learn to play with each other. . . Like at the park when they interact with the other kids. And I know academics; that comes with time.

Ms. Gabby, a preschool SDC teacher, shared:

Parents focus [on,] “They need to start learning their letters and numbers and colors” and all that stuff. But in the end, I feel, in the big scheme of things, academics, with exposure, it will come. In my classroom, I feel like one skill set that I could really share with them or work on with them, that they might not get at home, are those life skills . . . those student skills. . . Students go learning to sit in their chair, following directions, doing nonpreferred things, ‘cause that is gonna happen throughout their whole school life, right? . . . So, I really try to focus on those types of things rather than, “Do they know all 26 [letters],” you know. Of course, I have kids who know it. They learn it. I expose [them to] it. We have lessons on that stuff. But my main focus is trying to get them to be independent, to speak up to get their needs met, by communicating all those types of things.

Ms. Joanna, a TK–first grade SDC teacher, explained she did not expect particular skills from her new kindergarten students, but she was attentive to how well they followed directions and completed tasks to determine which students were ready to mainstream into general education.

She shared:

What I hope to see when they start, honestly . . . I don’t have an expectation at that point. I really don’t because I don’t think that way. . . . When they come from preschool, I know what they’re doing in preschool; they’re playing and that’s how they learn. In my classroom, it’s a combination of play and I’m also teaching them, “Okay, we need to sit.
You need to listen. You need to follow directions, complete tasks” because . . . I’m always thinking, “Who is a student who could go into a general [education] class?” . . . maybe not the whole day, you know . . . but let’s say for 30 minutes or let’s say for, you know, math time or reading time. . . . [I] always think about that. So, I just kind of, at the beginning, just kind of assess them informally and just see what skills they have. I really don’t have any expectations.

Similar to the SDC kindergarten teachers, the general education kindergarten teachers acknowledged students may vary in their academic skills at the beginning of the year. It was more important that students demonstrated a mature social–emotional level for school. Ms. Kelly, general education kindergarten teacher, shared:

I think, for me, because we always expect students to come in not always knowing how to write your name, or we just kind of have them start off fresh . . . so, for me it’s more of the behavior, “Are they ready for kindergarten?” To me, it’s not really what they know or what they don’t know; it’s more of their social and emotional level. “Are they mature enough?” Because sometimes they come in immature, and it could be that they just turned 5. They’re like one of those babies and they’re not ready. They’re just giggling or misbehaving a lot, having issues at home, and bringing it here and fighting, and they bring it to the playground, and then you have to resolve it and they’re not ready. And then, by the end of kindergarten, all of a sudden, they’re putting [in] effort, and they’re showing they’re interested in academics, but they have fallen so behind because of their behavior, so, it’s really the maturity and the age [that’s important].

When asked to describe their child’s areas of growth in school, parent participants often referred to social skills and school behavior. Only one parent, Adam, whose daughter was
recommended by the school team to transition into general education, discussed his daughter’s growth in academics but also shared how his daughter learned to socialize with peers and become a model citizen. Overall, parents recognized the importance of their child developing skills that allowed them to become more engaged (e.g., sitting, focusing on tasks, following along with classroom activities) in the classroom. Bianca, parent of a child with Down syndrome, shared:

[Regarding academics,] I can’t think of any particular area where he’s excelling. . . . He’s talking a lot more now, so sometimes he surprises us. . . . He is singing a lot more also. Like, actually singing along to the songs. So, those are different [things] that he wasn’t doing before. . . . I know at school they do more morning songs. . . . The first time I saw [him standing] in line was pretty funny, because when I was first [picking] him up at school he [was] just like, “Mom mom mom mom mom.” He just wouldn’t wait in line and he would just keep going. But now, he’s patient and he says “Hi” to me from the line. [He] is a whole other kiddo.

Diane, parent of a child with autism, shared:

I feel like he was able to sit well for at least a good 15 minutes and try to focus on an assignment. Whether it was matching puzzles or something like that. So, I was like super excited that he was doing so well.

In general, both parent and teacher participants recognized the importance of students’ cooperativeness and active participation in the classroom. The next several themes reflected participants’ emphases on specific social–emotional and behavioral skills that would support students having a positive school experience.
Safety and Comfort Around Others

Being safe and comfortable around others in the school setting was a concern shared by most parent participants (i.e., Bianca, Caroline, and Diane). The parents often discussed safety in terms of their child’s tendencies to engage in unsafe behavior. Bianca described having an aide for her son, Ben, to ensure his safety in the general education class, saying, “We had to have an aid for him because he does not measure danger. He’s still, you know, he needs potty training, he just needs a constant companion because he’s all over the place, really.”

Diane shared she was thankful that her son, David, who had a history of intense tantrums, got along well with his classmates. She shared:

I feel like he was the one that was the most shy, because the teacher would always tell me he’s the one that needs to be held, you know, his handholding when we’re walking, or he needs to be reassured. But [the teacher] said, you know, once he’s on the playground, then he’s okay with, you know, going over to the other kids, kind of touching them, doing what they’re doing. So, I was really surprised that, socially, he was adjusting well.

Diane appeared to have held an assumption that her son would be uncomfortable around other children and she was surprised he behaved more calmly than expected.

Teacher participants also discussed the importance of students learning to cope with being around other children and learning to play cooperatively. Ms. Flora, a preschool SDC teacher, shared:

That’s always exciting and when we see kids play together. It’s, you know, into their level of comfort, sometimes that it’s a huge thing just to get into parallel play. We’re already kind of comfortable being near others. But now, they’re actually making eye contact, or you know, sharing materials or working together in play. [That’s] exciting.
Teachers saw students’ safety and comfort around larger groups as indicators of readiness to participate in general education. Ms. Joanna, a TK–first grade SDC teacher, shared:

It’s then, also social, that’s kind of part of it, too. Do they like being around other kids? Some of my students at the beginning of the year, they want to be alone. When other kids try to play, they’re like walking away, or they’re hitting or pushing. So, do they even like to be around other kids? If I see, like, a social student, then that’s also an indicator that okay, they could benefit from being in a [general education] class that has, you know, triple the kids.

Some participants (i.e., Caroline and Ms. Flora) related students’ safety and comfort around others to their communication skills, which included the ability to express feelings in an appropriate way.

**Communication Skills**

Each participant discussed the importance of communication skills and how these skills ensured safety and helped children express themselves, socialize with peers, and engage in the classroom. Caroline explained her daughter improved in expressing her emotions by improving her speaking ability. Carla was able to tell her mother, “Carla angry, mommy,” rather than having a meltdown or becoming aggressive. Caroline shared:

The most growth [she had was] speech, and her being able to . . . lately, instead of hitting me, she went “Carla angry, mommy,” like saying that [she] is angry at mommy, and she’s been doing that a lot. The other day, her dad took the tablet away from her and, usually, when you take her tablet away, she has a meltdown, and she cries, and she hits everyone. But this time, she just stared at him, and she made it a point to make an angry face and then, she said, “Carla angry.”
Teachers explained communication was important for students to be able to communicate their wants and needs so they could be addressed. Ms. Flora, a preschool SDC teacher, shared:

Communication, being able to not necessarily verbalize it, but learn ways, a lot of time it is verbal, which is exciting, but you know, learning how to express their needs, express what they know. Express appropriately that they don’t want something, you know.

Ms. Karina, a general education kindergarten teacher, shared:

I like to stress to parents [that their] child needs to be able to say their name, especially when [they] go to the cafeteria for lunch, and there’s some random adult who needs to ask [the child,] “What’s your name?” So, [for the child] to be able to [say], “I’m . . .” If they could say their first and last name, that would be awesome.

Parents and teachers also recognized students who improved their communication skills could better socialize with their peers. Adam explained Ana’s social development improved as she increased her speaking ability, saying:

The teacher even sees that Ana is more, not shy, but very active, and she’s starting to develop socially with all the other little kids that are in her class. So, it helps out that she goes there and her speaking ability, because of speech and being with other little kids, is improving greatly. So, she’s able to communicate a lot more clearly so she’s less likely to get mad at people when they ignore ‘cause they actually understand what she’s saying to them. Her temperament’s way better now. So, for going to school, that really helps her out a lot, socially and developmentally.

Parents also recognized how their children’s participation in class and awareness of others were more evident as their child learned to better communicate. Caroline, a parent of a child with autism, shared:
[In school], she does well with that, she likes to say “hi” to everyone, and then, she has to say “bye” to everyone when we’re leaving. . . . I think it’s just that she’s starting to do a lot better in her speech, like just being able to talk more and being able to answer questions and stuff like that. She’s doing better in regards to that.

All teacher participants shared communication skills were important for classroom engagement and are discussed further in the next theme.

**Classroom Engagement**

All participants had goals for students with disabilities to participate and become more engaged in the classroom. If a student with a disability did not show they were engaged in the general education setting, the teachers assumed general education was not the right fit for the student. Ms. Karina, a general education kindergarten teacher, shared:

That depended on the kid also, like some of them would come in, and they, I mean, freely participate, in everything we did. And then, I guess, that some would come in and they sit with us, but it was hard to tell, like, even, you know, they’re [not making] eye contact with me, but like, their attention on a story or something. It’s hard to tell, like, “Are they looking at this?” Or, “Are they kind of zoned into another place?”

Discussion about the appropriateness of general education for students with disabilities often occurred during discussion about mainstreaming (i.e., the inclusion of students with disabilities in general education settings). Some teachers shared anecdotes of attempting mainstreaming with a student with a disability and later discontinued it because the student was not engaged in classroom activities. Ms. Joanna, a TK–first grade SDC teacher, shared:

At the beginning [of mainstreaming], the aide goes [with them]. . . . We had another student who was mainstreaming and it didn’t work out okay for him because he was just
grabbing everything and getting up, making loud [noises and was] very disruptive. And we gave him some time to adjust to see if he adjusted [but it] didn’t work out for him. Because some parents want [mainstreaming] and I understand, so we try it, especially if they have good academic skills. So yeah, we [wanted] to try it [but] it didn’t work for that student, but it worked for the other two [students].

General education teacher, Ms. Kelly, added it may take some students, especially those with disabilities, time to adjust and feel comfortable participating in the general education classroom. She shared:

So, I’ve always seen you always have those students who come in and are very vocal and just outgoing, and those who have disabilities don’t tend to be that way in the beginning. But . . . once they feel comfortable, I feel like, then . . . they know that they’re not gonna be ridiculed or humiliated, even if they get something wrong, then they’re more willing to share. Then, they want to share, they want to participate. I’ve seen that with mostly all of my students. I’ve seen them show so much growth by the end of the school year where they’re raising their hand on their own, and I think a lot of it just has to do with . . . if you start off with equity sticks and they don’t know who’s being called on, they’re just gonna be ready to have an answer and ready to participate. If you give them all the opportunity to share, they’re going to want to participate, and I see them showing growth there.

Ms. Flora added it was important for children with autism to demonstrate their academic skills in a meaningful way, demonstrating a higher level of academic engagement. She stated:

A lot of my kids with autism, unless there’s some other need or lack of exposure, tend to come in with some of that [academics], so it’s exciting to see them use it more meaningfully. They might join [in reciting] their ABCs, but they just say it when they
want to, and, you know, don’t understand that they think of words, or that you know, there’s some other reason besides the ABCs than just [reciting them or] lining them up, you know. And so, yeah, we see them make some connections and when those thinking skills become more complex, it’s really exciting.

In addition to the themes discussed so far (i.e., Safety and Comfort Around Others, Communication Skills, and Classroom Engagement), participants highlighted the expectations of students in general education to comply with directions with minimal redirection.

**General Education Expectations of Students to Comply With Minimal Redirection**

Most teacher participants (i.e., Ms. Erin, Ms. Flora, Ms. Gabby, Ms. Joanna, Ms. Karina, and Ms. Kelly) perceived, because of the higher student-to-teacher ratio in general education settings, general education teachers were limited in the amount of extra attention they could provide to students. Therefore, the teachers thought students in the general education setting were expected to learn and follow the classroom routine rather independently. Ms. Karina, a general education kindergarten teacher, shared:

> Once you step into a [general education] room, like, the kids know. [In the SDC], they know they can get someone to do something . . . and then, you know, if they’re with me, I’m like, “Sorry man, it’s just me . . . you’re gonna have to wait.”

Ms. Erin, a preschool SDC teacher, had one student who she believed was ready to transition to a general education kindergarten. When asked to explain why this student was ready, she stated, “I was fully confident that he was going to succeed in general [education] because he needed very minimal redirection, and when he did need it, redirection is verbal.”

Other SDC teachers made statements with similar messages about independence and the general education environment. Ms. Jackie, a TK–second grade SDC teacher, shared:
So, one of the main ones [to be ready for general education] is that are they able to do work independently. So, if they need me to help them every single question, step by step, then they’re definitely not ready, because when you go into a [general education] room . . . you’re going in there with like 24 kids and then, once you move on, you’re going into 30 kids. So, the teacher definitely doesn’t have time to go around to every single person to help. So, that’s my number one thing that I look for is, can they do their work independently? And if they can, will they? ‘Cause I have students who I know can do it independently, but they’re just so distracted, they won’t do it on their own. So, that’s my number one thing is just, can they do it? Will they do it independently, without someone standing or sitting directly next to them? And the number two is, yeah, are they able to focus?

Ms. Joanna, a TK–first grade SDC teacher, emphasized independence as an indicator of readiness, stating “Okay, the student might be ready [for general education] . . . [if they are] able to accomplish a task in my classroom independently . . . [that’s] definitely is a strong indication that they can do that [task] in another [general education] classroom.”

Consistent with other teachers’ perspectives, Adam, a parent of a child with autism, shared his daughter, Ana, was ready for kindergarten because she was toilet trained, followed directions, and had improved upon her communication and academics. As discussed in other themes, these skills reflected a student’s level of independence and were important in determining readiness for a general education setting. Adam said Ana had been referred to as a “classroom helper,” “model peer,” and “model citizen” by her preschool SDC teacher and other parents. Having Ana referred to by these terms reassured Adam and his wife that Ana was ready for the transition into general education.
Early Handwriting Skills

Writing appeared to be the most frequently discussed academic skill across parent and teacher interviews. When asked about their child’s challenges and strengths in school, all parent participants mentioned writing. Adam recognized his daughter, Ana’s, preference for writing, but Bianca, Caroline, and Diane expressed their child’s aversion to writing tasks. The mothers were made aware of their child’s difficulty with writing as they assisted their child with homework.

Carla, a parent of a child with autism, shared:

She can do [writing], she just doesn’t like it and she doesn’t try to do it. She doesn’t want to do it. It’s not like she’s not interested at all [but] homework is so difficult. Like, I always have to do hand-over-hand [guidance], even if she knows how to write a certain letter. Obviously, it looks all crazy because she’s little but even if she knows how to write it, she still wants me to do hand-over-hand. So, she really dislikes writing.

Bianca, a parent of a child with Down syndrome, shared:

Writing. He doesn’t like to hold a pencil, so we’re still doing hand over hand . . . What’s the other thing? Oh, sitting. Sitting. Sitting down. Sitting down for long periods of time. So, if it’s not, if he’s not interested in the task, they’re doing it [but not interested], you know, he just starts to squirm around a lot, and just wants to leave or elope all the time, and I have the same problem here at home with homework. It just, you know, it’s almost like I have to put on the show for him to do his homework. He just, he doesn’t like to write, and we’re having a hard time getting him to write things.

Ms. Kelly, a general education kindergarten teacher, described her daily classroom routine, which consisted of multiple independent writing tasks, usually at the beginning of the day and when transitioning from recess and lunch. Ms. Karina, another general education
kindergarten teacher, expressed the importance of students having exposure to writing prior to kindergarten, sharing:

[During transition to kindergarten meetings, I tell parents], “Just let your kid hold a writing utensil before they show up to school.” That’s another thing . . . kids that, like, look at these crayons, or whatever, like, “What’s that?” No one ever just let you scribble on a piece of paper? It’s mind boggling some of the experiences that they don’t have. Yeah. So yes, I always say some experience with coloring and writing, you know. At least I can teach them how to write their name, that’s fine. But when they’re looking at the crayon like it’s a foreign object, that’s hard to work with.

Although the SDC preschool and kindergarten teachers worked with students demonstrating a variety of academic skills, they recognized writing as an area in which many of their students showed academic growth. Ms. Jackie, a TK–second grade SDC teacher, shared:

I would probably say [my students have made the most growth] in their writing, because I think, for most of them, I’m thinking about last year’s group, at the beginning of the year, it’s either they can’t trace, they can’t copy, or the writing is really illegible, and, by the end of the year, it’s having [the] kids tracing, I have the kids copying, and I have the kids writing things that are legible. I can actually read them.

Early handwriting skill appears to be significant because both parent and teacher participants discussed the frequent assignment of writing tasks (e.g., written homework and classroom worksheets). Teachers also seemed to gauge academic progress through students’ successful completion of written assignments.
The Unique Needs of Students With Disabilities

The final theme of this section reflected participants’ views about the diversity of educational needs among students with disabilities. Participants’ recognition of students’ unique needs naturally led to discussion about tailoring instruction according to students’ learning preferences and specific challenges, which is discussed further in the next section about contextual, rather than child-focused, factors.

General education kindergarten teacher, Ms. Kelly, described how she accommodated for some of her students with autism who struggled with multistep directions and working with larger amounts of text. She shared:

I have to talk to them and give them more directions, and not expect them to follow multistep directions. . . . I have to really go up to them and give them [simpler] tasks, simplify everything. . . . When they’re writing, or they’re reading, I have to cover the rest of the text, so I learned that others can copy from the board and, they can too, but if I write too much, then it would just be overwhelming [for them].

Parents and teachers acknowledged “every child is different.” Bianca stated, about children with disabilities, “It’s like they march to the sound of their own tune.” Ms. Flora, a preschool SDC teacher, described the challenges of teaching students with diverse needs, saying:

There are some strategies that tend to benefit all students, but to what degree? Every child’s unique. There are some students [with whom] we have to really think outside the box because what we’re used to doing doesn’t quite meet what they need. So, for example, we give all of our kids movement breaks, and we know that it has to be worked into the school day. But for some of our kids, they may need it every 5 minutes, every 10 minutes. . . . And so, the fact that I’ve already worked in a movement break between...
activities is sufficient. Providing sensory strategies, we think, “Okay, kids might need chewy tubes’ there, they might need a fidget toy,” but then, there’s some kids that need something totally different. They need something heavy on them or they might need to lay down for a little bit. It’s just so . . . there’s some of those kids where it’s a little bit to figure out what extra [support] they’re needing, so it’s challenging. But I think it also keeps the days different and not so monotonous, so it’s not the same thing every day.

Teachers recognized a diversity of needs even among groups of students with the same disability. Ms. Joanna, a TK–first grade SDC teacher, believed this diversity of needs was especially true for children with autism, sharing:

I think trying to meet all the students’ needs is probably the greatest challenge, because even though several kids have autism, they’re so different. And when you try something that meets maybe a few students’ needs, it might interfere with somebody else’s needs or just become distracting. . . . A lot of [the challenge] I would say, [is] just trying to figure out what these kids like. What will motivate them? And they’re also different, you know, as opposed to before [with less children with autism], I could come up with an idea, and we could all, as a class, work towards something with these kids. [With children with autism], it’s more individualized. . . . You don’t have them work together with a common goal. They do better when they have their own little motive, their own individual plans or schedules.

When planning for students’ transitions to kindergarten, teachers considered whether a student’s unique needs could be met in a SDC or general education setting. Therefore, being familiar with a student’s needs was important in making decisions about educational placement during students’ transition individualized education plans (IEPs).
Contextual Factors That Are Important for School Readiness and the Transition to Kindergarten for Students With Disabilities

This section includes themes reflecting the contextual factors that participants believed to have significant influence on school readiness. Although the interview questions did not specifically address differences between educational programs, the teachers approached the discussion on school readiness with reflection about what made children ready for continued placement in SDC or transition to general education. Consideration of which program would be more beneficial for certain students led to frequent discussion about differences between SDC and general education.

Both parents and teachers identified lower student-to-teacher ratios in SDCs, which allowed for increased supervision and flexible instruction, as a notable difference between SDCs and general education settings. Teachers believed, given the structure at the time of the study, that general education was set up for students who were independent. The expectation of independence related to previously discussed child-focused variables (e.g., general education expectations of students to comply with minimal redirection). Some participants discussed the benefits of mainstreaming, in which students with disabilities spent part of their school day alongside typically developing peers in the general education setting. However, some participants, including both general education teachers, perceived general education teachers had a lack of training and resources to support students with disabilities.

All participants discussed the importance of collaboration in supporting students’ school readiness. For example, many teachers who were practicing mainstreaming highlighted collaboration between general education and SPED staff. Some teachers also recognized the
benefit of collaboration between preschool and kindergarten teachers. Both parent and teacher participants discussed the importance of parent–teacher communication and collaboration.

**Lower Student-to-Teacher Ratios in SDCs Allow for Increased Supervision and Flexible Instruction**

Teachers generally perceived SDCs as capable of flexible instruction, due to the smaller student-to-teacher ratio. The SDCs had as few as four students to two adults and up to 15 students with three adults in the classroom, but general education kindergarten classrooms had between 24–30 students and one teacher. Most of the parents had concerns about their children’s safety—as discussed in the theme of Safety and Comfort Around Others—and were grateful for the increased supervision feasible with a smaller student-to-teacher ratio. Diane, a parent of a child with autism, shared:

> When they’re with you, you’re constantly supervising them, making sure they’re not climbing on something, putting something in their mouth. . . . I can’t even imagine how teachers do it when they have 10 other kids that they have to look at, you know, with these types of behaviors.

Caroline, a parent of a child with autism, shared, “She doesn’t know everyday dangers. So, just simply eating a sandwich. She can overfeed herself and end up throwing up. You know, so she needs that extra attention that she couldn’t get in a general education class.”

Teachers described children with disabilities as being unique learners; therefore, they would benefit from flexible instruction and a variety of learning resources. Both preschool and kindergarten SDC teachers explained their capability to tailor instruction. Ms. Jackie, a TK–second grade SDC teacher, shared:
Just being able to take the general education curriculum and changing that up a little bit here and there, and seeing, “Okay, what does this student need? Okay, let’s change this part here and here.” So, just being able to do that because you’re not actually able to do that in a [general education] classroom. So, just being able to accommodate, modify any type of work, or anything like that and then, also, a big one, which would just be, like, being flexible. So, “Okay, here’s your lesson plan, and this is what you need to get done. . . . But here’s my backup plans just in case. Extra activities [here, in line].” And you know . . . a [student] walks in and is already upset coming off the bus, and he’s not going to do anything that I’d plan for the whole day, so just being able to be flexible, which essentially is accommodating and modifying your [entire] schedule. But yeah, I would say, those are the main [challenges] . . . just learning to be flexible, learning to change things on the fly.

Some teachers (i.e., Ms. Gabby, Ms. Erin, and Ms. Kelly) perceived it would be very difficult to provide individualized instruction in a general education setting with a larger student-to-teacher ratio and a lack of resources. Ms. Gabby, a preschool SDC teacher, shared, “It’s very hard for one teacher, like a general education teacher, to implement all those things, while now navigating the 25 other kids who are, like, jealous or distracted by that one activity that the kid truly needs.” Ms. Erin, a preschool SDC teacher, shared:

[To go to general education, children with autism would need] attending skills in the sense that they won’t get the same attention that I’m able to give them because I have such low numbers [of students], and I know kindergarten classes are just going to be so much bigger, so they’re not going to get the support that I can give them in here with just two adults and four kids, you know.
Ms. Kelly, a general education kindergarten teacher, shared:

We have most of what we need, but at times need to be creative, even if it’s not the most effective. When the child has disability and their needs aren’t being met, then there’s a slow process to get them more support when you know they need it, and we can offer so little at a time.

Parent participants also held the perception that general education by itself may not have been able to provide the individualized attention needed to teach their child. Caroline perceived her daughter, Carla, “needs that extra attention that she couldn’t get in a general [education class].” Adam perceived his daughter, Ana, to have made significant progress because of the individualized, hands-on activities she received in her preschool SDC. Adam believed Ana did not receive the same benefit from her private preschool, due to the large student-to-teacher ratio, explaining, “[There were] 15 kids and one teacher. And most of it was really no, very little, hands-on training. So, that’s where she kept on getting lost. . . . There’s no one to help her.”

Parents of children with autism generally saw the benefit of the smaller student-to-teacher ratio in a preschool SDC and how it benefitted their child. For example, Diane believed her son’s unique needs were being met in his smaller class setting. She shared:

The ratio is pretty small. . . . I think they had about eight kids . . . and the teacher and two [teaching assistants]. Then, towards the end, it turned out to be, like, six kids for the three teachers. So, I feel like they really got to focus on his needs, his wants, and the teacher was very communicative. She would always send me pictures of what David was doing today, and it would make me feel good that I would see him smiling and be okay.

Participants recognized close supervision and flexible instruction were less feasible to implement in general education, where the student-to-teacher ratio was higher than the ratio in
SDCs. Therefore, students participating in general education were expected to function more independently.

**General Education is Set Up for Students Who Are Independent**

Several teachers reflected on the structure of general education being set up for students who were independent. Ms. Joanna, a TK–first grade SDC teacher, explained students in general education had access to a variety of materials and were expected to gather their own belongings when needed. In contrast, Ms. Joanna arranged the SDC to limit free access to materials, which could be distracting for many of her students with disabilities. She shared:

My classroom is catered for special needs kids, specifically kids with autism. So, my classroom is set up for that. The [general education] classroom isn’t. So, everything in a general [education] classroom is set up where kids can run the class, so their stations, they know where things are. They can go and get it, bring it to their desk . . . [whereas] my class is set up where things have to be put away, because kids [with autism], they’re not ready for that independence. They just start, “Oh, I like that, I want that” . . . and they just start grabbing, and they don’t know we’re not using that right now, or you can’t get [them to understand] it’s not time for that. They don’t know that. So, [a student that I had that wasn’t ready for mainstreaming, when he spent some time in general education, he] was getting up and just like a baby in a candy store. He’s looking at all the other manipulatives [i.e., physical, hands-on materials] and grabbing . . . opening up containers, taking stuff out, and he just couldn’t, you know, engage with the teacher and peers. I had to put a lot of things away. And then, it’s like, out of sight, out of mind. Then, when it was time for them to, you know, let’s say I wanted them to use something, I would have to go and get it.
When describing their general education classroom schedule and routines, both Ms. Kelly and Ms. Karina mentioned their expectations for students to follow the classroom routine and perform independent tasks, especially written work. Ms. Karina, a general education kindergarten teacher, shared, “I also explain to [parents] my expectation of independence. You know, that once I’ve taught a routine in our class, I expect your child to do it independently. I’m expecting your child to be responsible for things.” Ms. Kelly, a general education kindergarten teacher, shared:

So, right when they come in, they have the independent worksheet. So, that’s just to give everybody enough time to put their backpacks away, to get their snacks out, for me to take attendance. So, in the beginning of the year, it’s more of like a coloring worksheet, or like drawing lines. And then, as it gets, you know, we get more into the year, it’s more knowing, like, looking for the sight word, color this way, or just more like writing the letter A or the high frequency words over and over again. But that’s our morning. We start up with the independent worksheets, and then we start with our morning routine. . . . We have a spelling test each Friday. . . . They get the whiteboards, I give them each spelling word and they have to sound it out, and they have to write it on the whiteboard. . . . We do go over our shapes, our numbers, and then we have [physical education] . . . and then when we come back, we have our snack time . . . and then they have their recess, and [when] we come back from recess, it’s math. So, they work on a worksheet right when they walk in. . . . It starts off of like 1 through 10, and then it just slowly progresses . . . from the writing their numbers from 1 through 10 all the way from 1 through 100. . . . By the end of the year, they should be writing . . . their numbers 1 through 100 within 5 or 7 minutes, and then we start our math lesson. . . . Right after that, we have language
arts . . . and then we have decodable books where they try to look for their high frequency words and highlight them. . . . And they have writing. . . . So, that’s like the routine. They already know by the time writing comes, “Okay, lunch is almost near.”

Ms. Karina added her students were expected to have problem-solving skills because she did not have the time to individually guide them. She shared the following anecdote as an example:

They’ll be like, “My water spilled.” [I respond], “Yeah, it sure did,” like, “Why are you coming to me? You know where the paper towels are . . . I’m not gonna clean it up for you.” And so, I just always ask them, “Well, how could you solve that problem?” and they’re like, “I can get a towel?” [and I say], “Yes, go do that,” you know, like, “Next time, you don’t have to ask me. Go, go do it!”

Ms. Karina also shared a second anecdote, saying, “Once you step into a [general education] room, [the] kids know . . . if they’re with me, I’m like, ‘Sorry man, it’s just me. . . . You’re gonna have to wait.’” Thus, teachers held expectations for students to be independent in general education settings partly due to limitations in the amount of extra support and resources available for struggling students.

**General Education Teachers’ Lack of Training and Resources to Support Students With Disabilities**

Some parents recognized the lack of training and resources available for general education teachers to support students with disabilities. Caroline perceived general education teachers as lacking the knowledge and expertise to work with students with autism. From her own experience learning about autism, Caroline deduced:
You know, so [my daughter] needs that extra attention that she couldn’t get in a general 
ed class, you know, she needs to have that, and she needs to have an adult that 
understands that she has autism. Pretty much, you know, I don’t trust her around anyone 
who doesn’t understand what autism is, and it’s not to say they’re bad people, but I 
wouldn’t [even trust her to be] around me [the way I was] 5 [or] 10 years ago, when I 
didn’t know what [autism] was, you know. . . . So yeah, she requires very special 
attention. So, just, I’m glad she’s in special ed. I wouldn’t want her in general ed and 
then, even just, you know, with other kids who may not understand, you know.

Adam stated there were “15 kids and one teacher” in his daughter, Ana’s, general education 
class, which meant she received “very little hands-on training.” Adam believed “that’s where she 
kept on getting lost . . . [because] there’s no one to help her.”

The two general education teachers (i.e., Ms. Kelly and Ms. Karina) in this study 
expressed their motivation to support students with disabilities. However, their efforts to do so 
were limited by their training and lack of resources (e.g., special materials for writing and 
cutting, additional adult support in the classroom). Ms. Kelly, a general education kindergarten 
teacher, shared:

I honestly, I think what would help sometimes teachers and in general education, when 
we have students with disabilities is being like taking classes, or even like trainings on 
like, what techniques or methods would be most beneficial, because sometimes the 
techniques are the methods that we learn don’t necessarily apply to those with learning 
disabilities. . . . I mean whatever we learned when we were getting our credential, but it 
didn’t really, I mean it was more applicable to all students. You just learn strategies. You
do learn like different strategies and different techniques. But to me, that doesn’t always really apply to those students who have disabilities.

Ms. Karina’s suggestions for training were more related to navigating the IEP document and collaborating with other experts who worked with disabilities. When asked what she would want to know specifically about IEP documents, she responded:

I think it’s scary right away because I immediately feel, like “Oh no, I’m not trained in any of this.” If you read somewhere in there that they have an autism diagnosis, you’re like, “Okay, well, I’ve read a lot about it. I’ve experimented.” . . . So then, like, “Oh, God, I need to find something,” you know. That part is scary because I would never want to make the child uncomfortable, especially knowing ahead of time, like, that is their diagnosis. So yeah, wanting to know what’s in their IEP goals too.

Ms. Kelly added special materials were limited in the general education setting, and it was difficult to obtain them. She shared examples of materials that would be helpful for her to support students with disabilities, saying:

I would say manipulatives [i.e., physical, hands-on learning materials]. That, we need. I know that, at the beginning [of the year], we get [manipulatives] for math. But then, through the years, [the students] start to lose parts of the manipulatives. . . . This year, I would like certain scissors. . . . If students need certain scissors or certain ways of holding the pencils, I don’t have that, and I don’t know what’s best, and I don’t know how to request certain things like that. Like, if a child has a certain need or if they need [occupational therapy], what resources do I need to have in my classroom to help this child?
General education teachers may also need and additional adult support in the classroom to mainstream (i.e., educate alongside general education peers) a student with a disability, especially one transitioning from an SDC. As Ms. Karina explained, the additional adult could help with the student’s transition into a larger class and could also assist with any accidents (e.g., toileting accidents) that may occur. She shared:

Transition to kinder in general, that one adult to that many children. It’s hard because they’re having potty accidents, or you know, you’re in the middle of something, and someone comes out of the bathroom with their little undies down, like, “Stop everything!, we gotta go do this.” And so like, for the kids, like I said earlier, that are from a special class, used to having more adult attention. That’s really hard. So, if there were an aid or something in the classroom[, that would be helpful].

**Benefits of Mainstreaming**

Benefits of mainstreaming (i.e., students with disabilities learning alongside general education peers) were frequently discussed by one parent (i.e., Bianca), two preschool SDC teachers (i.e., Ms. Gabby and Ms. Hanna), one kindergarten SDC teacher (i.e., Ms. Joanna), and the general education teachers (i.e., Ms. Karina and Ms. Kelly). Bianca reflected on her past school experiences and noted the general education population did not have much awareness of disabilities due to the segregation of students with special needs. Bianca explained building awareness by including students with disabilities in the general education setting could teach others how to be more empathetic toward students with disabilities. She stated:

When talking to other parents that have kids with disability, I know that they like to keep their kids in special ed because it feels safe, you know, they’re surrounded by kids that have other disabilities as well, but, you know, we don’t live in a world where we’re in a
bubble. So, I want these little kids to see that there are kids that are different, because I 
didn’t grow up like that. I didn’t get to see different kids. Everybody was, you know, 
neurotypical. So, it’s so important for them to see that there are people that are different 
and we have to be empathetic and patient with them. We did get that. We got a wonderful 
class.

Bianca described how her son’s presence in his local community helped him build 
positive relationships with his peers and increase peers’ and their families’ awareness of Down 
syndrome. She said:

The classroom that he got, the kids that he got, they were so . . . we were really worried . . . 
[but] these kids were just wonderful with him. They were so great with him. They really 
took him under their wings, and they did exactly what we wanted from them. They were 
his little teachers and were always on the lookout for him, encouraged him to stand in 
line, and it was wonderful to watch. It really was. . . . He has the opportunity to have 
more friends, I think. He has so much more exposure being in this general [education] 
class. Everybody in the school knew him. . . . We would walk to the car, and you would 
have all these little kids saying goodbye to Ben. So, I feel like, if he would [have] been in 
the special [education] class, he may not have had the same exposure he has had in the 
general [education] class. . . . There’s more kids looking out for him, or are curious about 
him. I would love for them to ask more questions about him if they were more curious . . . 
. Even the parents. We did celebrate World Down Syndrome Day in March and the 
teachers sent out the flier that I made on the ClassDojo [an electronic messaging system] 
for the other parents to read, just to educate them a little more about Down syndrome. So, 
that was awesome.
Similar to Bianca’s perspective, Ms. Karina and Ms. Joanna, TK–first grade SDC teachers, acknowledged mainstreaming gave students with disabilities opportunities to connect with peers outside of the smaller SDC setting. Ms. Joanna shared:

One of my students actually saw one of the [general education] kids at the park. So, it was nice. It’s nice when you see kids in the neighborhood, and they recognize each other, and they start playing. So, that social piece is powerful.

Ms. Karina shared, “With some of the kids [who mainstreamed], you know, that were more social, they had relationships outside their SDC classes, [which] are usually so small, you know.”

Some participants recognized the capability of students with disabilities to learn from their typically developing peers. Bianca saw how her son Ben benefited from being around typically developing peers. She shared:

He just looks forward to going [to school] every day. Now that he’s been in for a few months, he’s great now. . . . He wasn’t waiting in line when he first started. . . . Now, he waits in line. He follows what his classmates do, he’s making more expressive noises with speech. . . . That’s why we pushed for [an] inclusive classroom, because he’s going to learn from his peers.

Ms. Kelly also shared an example of a student with Down syndrome beginning to copy his peers’ behaviors. She said:

He was becoming a little more comfortable with the setting, being around other students and his peers, and kind of forming a little bond. . . . The students were coming in front of him when we would do our morning routine and they would do the little gestures for the dances, and he would look at them, smile, and he would copy and mimic them.
Ms. Joanna shared another example of one of her students learning to become a classroom helper in both the general education classroom and SDC. She said:

We had a math lesson, and he does math in the [general education] class. So, we were doing the math lesson, and he was my helper. I’m able to use my little stylus and write on my computer screen [to demonstrate on the class monitor]. So, [he was following along] while I was, you know, working hands on with the other students. And so, when we’re done with the lesson, I was up at the front, finishing up, and he was going around and checking their work, something that I do because my students can’t . . . check each other’s work, we’re just trying to get [them] to complete the work. . . . I know [he learned that] from [the general education class], because you have little monitors that go around in [the general education class]. They give them jobs, and that’s one of them, where you go around and check to see if everybody did this or that. And so, I saw that’s him learning how to be more independent, how to have a job, how to help others. . . . He was able to get up and walk around and, so, that’s a benefit for sure . . . picking up these skills that you wouldn’t be able to in my classroom.

Ms. Karina shared the presence of a child with a disability in her general education class also helped her typically developing students learn to accept others’ differences. She stated:

I just always loved the mainstreaming. It was such a good opportunity for the [general education] kids. . . . It was so invaluable for them to have to welcome someone who’s not like them into their class, and we would see it would pay off like on the playground. . . . I loved having that opportunity for my gen ed kids.
Ms. Kelly, a general education kindergarten teacher, also shared, “[The students with disabilities in my class have been] very sweet and kind, very friendly, and I do feel like their peers tend to really enjoy their company.”

Teacher participants recognized mainstreaming was not implemented at other school sites in the district because of teachers’ various beliefs about including students with disabilities in the general education setting. Ms. Hanna expressed gratitude for the general education teacher at her site, stating, “That’s why we like [Ms. Lori’s] class because she does the mainstreaming. I don’t know if other sites do the mainstreaming.” Collaboration between general and SPED staff appeared to be an important factor whether mainstreaming was available for students with disabilities.

The final themes of this section further discuss the importance of collaboration between general and SPED teachers, preschool SDC and kindergarten teachers, and parent–teacher communication and collaboration.

**Collaboration Between General and SPED Staff**

Collaboration between general and SPED staff was particularly helpful for mainstreaming purposes so teachers could collectively monitor students’ progress, discuss and share techniques, and make systematic adjustments in their instruction and the amount of mainstreaming that occurred. Ms. Karina, a general education kindergarten teacher, compared the relationship she had with the SPED teachers between two different schools, and noticed how the lack of collaboration between general and SPED staff influenced the amount of support and opportunities given to students with disabilities to be around typically developing peers. She noted:
[Mainstreaming would be easier] if there was a stronger relationship between the [general education] and the . . . [SDC teacher] that are at sites. If there was a stronger connection between them, I think that this would all be a lot easier. It wouldn’t be so much “you and us.” But I know that there’s differing opinions on that, and I guess it’s sad, but teachers have different levels of tolerance and understanding for kids. And you know my old partner that was SDC at [School A] is [now at School B] and he’s like, “Yeah, no, I’m totally by myself, like they don’t involve me in anything.” I was like, “Really?” So yeah, and then, I kind of, like, I tried this year at [School C], the SDC class uses our playground, so I would try to interact with the kids, you know, and at the beginning of the year, I got the feeling that it kind of bothered their teacher. . . . And so, I was like, “Okay, I won’t,” you know, but . . . they’re here, like, I just don’t feel like it should be such a divide. . . . Like, yeah, you’re in a different classroom, because you have different needs, but you’re 6, and you’re at this school, like, I just think, if it weren’t such a divided situation, this would be easier.

The SDC teachers also learned from general education teachers on how to best prepare students for the general education setting. Ms. Erin, a preschool SDC teacher, once had a student who she was considering for transition to general education. She found his skill level was well above his peers, and she needed ideas on some things for him to practice that would prepare him for the general education setting. She consulted with the general education kindergarten teacher, who offered some of the same materials she was using in her classroom. Ms. Erin stated:

Thankfully, I have the kindergarten teacher next door. That’s super helpful so I could ask her and I could, or ask for what, what I could work on with him, and earlier this year she has given me sight words to start working on with him. So that’s, that’s super helpful to
be able to communicate with someone who can help me in preparing the kiddo to
transition over [to general education].

Ms. Kelly recognized her role as a general education teacher as a “main resource to help
[students] with grade level.” One of the things she noticed about her struggling students was they
appeared to have no experience with cutting but “should have some exposure.” She realized this
skill was one thing she could encourage preschool teachers and parents to work on to better
prepare students for kindergarten.

Teacher participants who, at the time of the study, had implemented mainstreaming for
students with disabilities attributed their successes with mainstreaming to the collaborative
relationship between general education and SPED teachers. Ms. Joanna, a TK-first grade SDC
teacher, shared:

They get to see all kinds of kids and we’re very much involved with the general
population, and I, myself, work a lot with the general education teachers. We do planning
together. We do different activities throughout the year, like during holidays. We like to
do things together. We do shows, performances sometimes, too, so I think that’s
important. I also talk a little bit about the curriculum that, you know, their child is being
exposed to, the kindergarten general curriculum. It’s modified [in my class], so it’s taught
at a slower pace . . . but they do have the curriculum. The materials that [general
education] kindergarten students have as well. And then, [we] talk about the types of
students . . . their disabilities . . . so they have an idea of that information.

Ms. Joanna compared how she interacted with two different general education teachers who
differed in their initial receptiveness to mainstreaming. Despite working with a teacher who was
hesitant to mainstreaming, she found success discussing a plan to gradually introduce students with disabilities into the general education setting, sharing:

When you first bring it up to [the general education teachers], they actually get really scared, and they actually kind of look at you, and they, some of them don’t really want your kids, and they just don’t want to say it outright. But they know they don’t have a choice, so they kind of just stay quiet, so yeah, so that’s usually the first thing I get is I can tell like, they don’t necessarily want them. But then, once I kind of talk them through it and everything. . . . I actually had to be preteaching my kids the lesson, and then sending them to [general education]. And then, she would teach it again, so that was their second exposure to it. But yeah, so mainly, what they do is they just kind of say, “Okay, like, what are your kids like?” You know, I tell them, “These are students who obviously don’t have behaviors.” If they had behaviors, I probably wouldn’t be able to send them. . . . The students I’ve sent so far don’t have any behaviors. So, I was able to tell that teacher and the kinder teacher in the past, like, “Hey, these are two students. They are able to focus.” . . . I did send an aide with them the first couple of weeks, just to make sure and see how they’re doing, how they reacted to it, just because it was their very first time in that class, you know. And then, once they got used to it, I was able to pull the aide back little by little. And so, this last year, my aide didn’t even have to go because they were used to it. But yeah, so the [general education] teacher . . . and it also just depends which teacher you get on how responsive they are to it. So, that first grade [teacher] was like, “Yeah, bring it on. Bring him in,” you know. And the second-grade teacher this last year, rightfully so, it was, okay, because of all the COVID stuff, but she was just really worried about it at the beginning of the year, and so, I was in there talking with her a lot.
I’d go in and I checked and I’d ask her like, “How are they doing? What do you notice?” Like all that stuff. And then, I talked to the boys about it. But by the end of this last year, I loved that I sent them in there, because she just totally accepted them as her own, even though they were only there for an hour and a half each. It was every single day, so the class should make sure that the class was used to them.

It appeared teachers had increased satisfaction with the transition to kindergarten for students with disabilities when they had increased options for students and support from all educational staff involved. Ms. Hanna, a preschool SDC teacher, and Ms. Joanna, a TK–first grade SDC teacher, appeared the most satisfied with the transition to kindergarten process but were also the two SDC teachers with the most experience recommending students for transition or mainstreaming into the general education setting. Ms. Hanna and Ms. Joanna shared having collaborative experiences with the general education teachers contributed to their successful experiences with transitioning students into general education.

**Collaboration Between Preschool SDC and Kindergarten Teachers**

Some teachers (i.e., Ms. Erin, Ms. Jackie, Ms. Joanna, Ms. Kelly, and Ms. Karina) discussed the benefits of collaboration between the preschool and kindergarten teacher after a student’s transition to any setting (i.e., SDC or general education). The collaboration would be helpful to ensure the receiving teacher had good background knowledge of the student, if they were not able to attend the child’s transition IEP, and for the previous teacher to share any ideas for strategies that previously worked for the student.

Some teacher participants suggested a child’s previous preschool SDC teacher and current kindergarten teacher should follow up with one another after a child with a disability
transitioned to kindergarten. The follow up would involve a check in on how the student was doing and the previous teacher sharing any strategies that were effective.

Ms. Erin shared she “will definitely hear back from a [kindergarten] teacher” if there was a significant problem with the child’s current placement, and this contact would usually occur after 4–6 weeks. Ms. Erin shared how she planned to possibly follow up with teachers in the following school year, sharing:

I have a hard time because I feel like I’m bothering them, so I love when they reach out to me, or like if I happen to see them and ask about the kiddos. But for the most part, I don’t reach out. If anything, I will ask parents how the kiddos are doing. I try to keep in touch with the parents and then, that’s kind of how I found out how they’ve been doing. I feel like when I started at the beginning of the year, like I’m only worried about my own kids right, like, I am thinking about the previous ones, and like the ones I sent off. But in that moment, like I’m only thinking about them and it’s stressful and overwhelming, like starting the school year. So, I put myself in their shoes, I’m, like, “Oh yeah, they’re already dealing with so much.” Like, if I bug them and ask them how their day was, like I feel like I’m bugging them, but I don’t know. I feel like, now moving forward, I will especially because the teachers that I’ve sent kids to, well, this past year, like, she’s always really friendly and like, she responds to my email, so I feel like I’m not so much bothering her, plus she can just not respond, and I won’t even take it personally, but she’s busy. But yeah, there’s usually limited communication until transition season comes around again.

General education kindergarten teacher, Ms. Kelly, suggested follow up should occur around the 3rd or 4th week of kindergarten to give students some time to adjust the new setting.
Ms. Kelly thought this follow up could help the current teacher understand why certain IEP goals were selected for the student. She shared:

I would also say, like, that I always recommend to follow up with the teachers. But then again, maybe the team. Like the previous team and the team working together. . . . But also trying to like, the goals, seeing why, I just kind of always like to know, like, why did we set these goals? Like, why were these goals put in place in their IEP? Like, just a little bit of background of why these goals were set. And then, you know, we always know whether the goals were met or not. But, I just was always interested into like, “Well, why don’t we come up with these goals?” And that’s always, like, I’ve always liked background knowledge, just to give me a better insight, and I think it’s helpful when we have as much background knowledge as possible.

Collaboration between preschool SDC and kindergarten teachers appeared to support students’ smoother transition to kindergarten. Teachers also recognized the importance of collaborating with parents to better individualize support given to students with special needs.

**Parent–Teacher Communication and Collaboration**

Participants in this study consistently reported engaging in parent–teacher communication through a variety of modes: (a) electronic communication through a phone app or email, (b) communication folder with notes and flyers sent between home and school, (c) scheduled meetings, (d) telephone calls, and (e) direct contact before and after class. Participants reported parent–teacher communication supported collaboration to improve strategies to work with students at school and home. Ms. Erin, a preschool SDC teacher, summarized the benefit of parent–teacher communication as being “helpful to create a bridge between home and school.”

Ms. Joanna, a TK–first grade SDC teacher, added, “It’s number one, especially for kids that can’t
communicate.” Ms. Kelly, a general education kindergarten teacher, added, “If [the] parent is willing to communicate, [is] more open, that makes it so much easier to help the child together.”

Teacher participants shared how they sought input from parents to learn about children’s interests and preferences, which helped teachers understand how to work with them in the classroom. Ms. Flora explained, “Parents are experts on their children . . . what they’re interested in, what upsets them, they know the way their child ticks, what’s scary for them.” Similarly, Ms. Jackie, a TK–second grade SDC teacher, explained how she relied on information from parents to better understand how to work with her students, saying:

So that I know [how to] communicate [with the kids], like, “How do they generally communicate with you? Are there specific words?” Like, I have one student who says “jellies,” but they mean they want “fruit snacks.” . . . So, if there’s anything specific to that effect, if there’s anything . . . then I just ask them in general, “Anything you think that I should know?”

Parent–teacher communication is also helpful for general education kindergarten teachers. Ms. Kelly, a general education kindergarten teacher, explained, “The more that they tell me, the better and the easier it is for me as a teacher to understand how to help them.”

Bianca, a parent of a child with Down syndrome, shared she, as a parent, could inform the school team on strategies to help her son, Ben, succeed in school. She stated:

If something is not working for them, or they can’t figure out how to get him to do something . . . they can ask [me] what [they can do]. . . . Most of the time, he does the same behaviors at home, so I can tell them how I’ve had successes.
Teachers also shared they could inform parents on things to work on at home with their students. Ms. Kelly, a general education kindergarten teacher, offered some suggestions to parents to make learning more fun at home, sharing:

If they’re not interested with the homework, then they’ll ask me, “How do you get them to do the work in the classroom?” So, it’s kind of vice versa, like, I’ll ask them for help, and they’ll ask me for help, and, “How do I get them to learn their sight words? They’re not interested.” . . . And I give them suggestions to make it into a game. . . . If she likes playing with dolls, pretend that she’s a teacher and have her do the flashcards . . . or hide them around the room and tell them to get the word “the” and see if they can find it. . . . Or work on [it] for 1 minute each morning . . . make it into a game like matching.

Parent participants mentioned ways they had implemented things they learned from their child’s teacher. For example, Adam used hands-on materials sent home by Ana’s teacher to help with Ana’s homework. Caroline also saw her daughter, Carla, was picking up more nursery rhymes from school and would encourage Carla to practice them at home.

Parent–teacher communication also helped parents and teachers have a clearer understanding of students’ progress, which was important for discussions about how to help them. For example, Bianca shared she was disappointed her son, Ben, did not reach his IEP goals. Bianca believed more contact with his school team about his progress could have helped by discussing changes they could have made to his services. Ms. Hanna, a preschool SDC teacher, was concerned whenever her students showed minimal growth in their IEP goals. She explained it was important to discuss progress with parents, discuss how the students were doing in class, and “ask parents if there’s anything else they want to work on.”
Several themes on communication and collaboration between teachers and parents suggested teachers and parents each had an important role in supporting students’ education. The next main section contains themes representing how parent and teacher roles were enacted in the transition to kindergarten process.

**How Parents and Teachers Experience and Participate in the Transition to Kindergarten for Students With Disabilities**

This final section begins with two themes describing parents’ participation in transition IEP meetings. Both parent and teacher participants perceived parents generally trusted educational staff. One teacher and one parent were concerned parents may not have acted as equal members of the IEP team if they were not fully aware of the process. The remaining themes of this section reflect how decisions were made regarding students’ educational placement for transition and reported areas of improvement in the transition process. In general, kindergarten teachers [believed they] did not “have a say” in placement decisions and focused on learning about incoming students. Kindergarten SDC teachers held an informing role during transition IEP meetings for incoming students. In contrast, the role of the general education teachers was sometimes unclear because they were required to attend IEP meetings for students who may not have transitioned to their class.

Most of the SDC teachers believed increased transparency and options for educational placement could improve placement decisions. Although kindergarten teachers believed they did not have authority over placement decisions, preschool SDC teachers thought their placement decisions were limited by administrative authority and space for enrollment. All teachers expressed the need for more time and staffing to prepare for transition.
Parents Generally Trust in Educational Staff

All participants agreed parents generally trusted the educators on their child’s IEP team. Teachers shared their transition meetings had gone smoothly because most of the parents agreed to what the rest of the IEP team recommended. Even teachers who had been with the district for a long time rarely had a parent who disagreed with the rest of the IEP team. For example, Ms. Hanna had worked as a preschool SDC teacher for over 25 years and did not recall any difficult conversations with parents or times where there were significant disagreements, saying, “No, I’ve been lucky so far.”

Ms. Karina, a general education kindergarten teacher, had participated in many transitions to kindergarten IEP meetings and thought most parents entered the IEP meeting as if it was an “informational meeting” rather than expecting a “discussion.” She shared:

I’ve never had a parent disagree in the meetings I’ve been in, so it’s kind of, “Yeah yeah.” That’s when parents can, right? That’s when a parent can say, “No, that’s not what I want from my child,” [but], yeah, all the ones I’ve ever been in, that’s just how it’s gone, like, “Okay so our offer is [blah blah blah], the school’s hours are [this]” [and] parents [have] been, like, “Okay.” So, there’s never been . . . I’ve never been involved in any sort of back-and-forth discussion between the team and a parent, where they’re negotiating the places. I don’t have any experience with that. . . . And, I mean, it sounds like it runs really smoothly.

Parents also talked about their trust in educators. For example, Adam stated, “I think, overall, they’ve been doing it for a few years, and it seems to go smoothly.” Similarly, Caroline said she did not reach out to teachers as often because she did not find it necessary; she trusted “what they’re doing.” Adam and Caroline’s quotes showed parents may have viewed teachers as having
sophisticated experience with and knowledge about the transition to kindergarten process. Therefore, parents may have placed more confidence in teachers’ recommendations over parents’ own preferences for their children.

*Parents May Not Act as Equal Members of the IEP Team if They Are Not Fully Aware of the Process*

Parent involvement in decision-making processes about their child’s transition to kindergarten would seem valuable, based on participants’ views about parent–teacher collaboration, which was also discussed in a previous theme (i.e., Parent–Teacher Communication and Collaboration). However, Ms. Karina, a general education teacher, believed most parents came to IEP meetings to become informed about recommendations for their child by others on the IEP team, and parents did not typically have much feedback other than their agreement. Ms. Karina brought up not knowing whether parents agreed because they really agreed, because they trusted the school, or because they did not understand. Ms. Karina gave examples of some dialogue from IEP meetings where parents were simply asked if they had questions about their rights, but they were not explicitly told they had a right to disagree. She shared:

I’ve never been involved in any sort of back-and-forth discussion between the team and a parent where they’re negotiating the places. So, I don’t know I have any experience with that, I mean, and I mean that it sounds like it runs really smoothly. Then it must . . . I feel like the majority of the parents are very unaware of the way the process works. Some more so than others. Most of them may be aware of their child’s disability and why they’re currently placed in special ed. But I just don’t know, like, I think the parents understand, “Okay, my kid was tested. This is what they found out.” But I don’t know,
how does the parent know that they have the opportunity to say, “No, that’s not where I want my child”? I know in the parent rights, it is in the process of if they disagree, then you know, they could go through that. I mean, typically at the meetings that I’ve been in, like we’ve tried to say at the beginning, like, and then, “You have a copy of your parent rights. [Do] you have any questions?” But no one, and maybe we don’t actively, like, point out, like, “So if you disagree with something, blah blah blah.” But yeah, and then at the end, we say, like, “Oh, if you agree to everything, everything sounds good, you could sign.”

Ms. Karina added a factor may have been that the population consisted of mostly Hispanic families with most of them having high school as their highest level of education. She shared:

Yeah and I don’t like, I said, I don’t know if I’ve just been in meetings where the parents have just agreed, or if they haven’t necessarily understood and especially like in the community, that, well, half of the district is, and I can’t speak for the other half, because I feel like they’re very different populations, but it’s just a lot of the Hispanic parents and the families that [say], “Okay, teacher, you said this. So, this is what I do,” you know. They just put a lot of trust in the school and the school staff to make the decisions for their child. . . . And I don’t know if it’s because they’re just very trusting of the school, or if because they doubt their own knowledge and ability to do so, because I mean realistically, the parents that I’ve ever dealt with maybe 50%, 70% are high school graduates. . . . So, like, as a gen ed teacher sitting in an IEP with a team, I remember the first few ones I sat [in] and I was like, “What is this?” You know, it’s a lot [of information to comprehend]. And then, you know, after testing [the students], when [the examiners (e.g., school psychologists, speech language pathologists) are] like, saying the
names of tests, [my reaction is] “Oh, my gosh!” And then, so then, you start thinking [this is difficult to understand] . . . you look at the parent and you’re like, “Oh, yeah, no, they,” you know, “I don’t think [they understand].”

Ms. Karina’s quote suggests that some parents’ participation in IEP meetings may be hindered by a lack of understanding of the content discussed during the meetings.

Bianca, a parent of a child with Down syndrome and an advocate for inclusion, appeared very involved in discussions and decision making during her son’s IEPs. Her increased participation appeared related to wanting more inclusive opportunities for her son and a lack of inclusive programs in the district. Her advice to other parents was to “trust [your] instincts, if something feels wrong, then call it out, but trust your team also.” Bianca added parents could help school teams “figure out” how to support the child together, saying:

I think that’s a problem. They have this separate view of it. . . . They’re [like], “You’re not doing your job,” you know, and it’s very accusatory and I don’t think it’s fair because they’re human too and they make mistakes, and they don’t know your kid as much as you do, so they’re going to need your help. So, I make sure I tell my team, “We’re a team. If you need anything from me, you tell me, and I will get it for you, I will do it for you, and we will figure it out together. But we are a team.” So, I think that’s been my success so far.

Bianca added parents needed to be fully informed of a possible trajectory of SPED services, saying:

So, and I don’t know if they talk this plan out with other parents like they need to kind of, “Look, if you’re gonna keep them in special ed, this is what’s gonna happen.” So, I think they can improve on that, kind of give a glimpse of what’s gonna happen and give a
choice like, “Is that what you want? You want to keep them in special ed?” Not automatically assume.

Parents were not the only IEP team members reported to exercise less authority in the transition decision-making process. Compared to preschool SDC teachers, kindergarten teachers also expressed having a limited role in decision making at the transition IEP meeting.

**Kindergarten Teachers Do Not Have a Say in Placement Decisions and Focus on Learning About Their Incoming Students**

Kindergarten teachers expressed they “did not have much of a say” in the transition process, not just because they were not as familiar with the child compared to the preschool SDC teacher, but they also were not usually given enough information about the student prior to the IEP meeting. A TK–first grade SDC teacher, Ms. Joanna, stated, “I really don’t have that much control over [placement]. It’s usually the [preschool] teacher that is sending the student to me.” However, Ms. Joanna did not state dissatisfaction with the placement of students in her class. In contrast, a TK–second grade SDC teacher, Ms. Jackie, expressed a desire to become more involved in making placement decisions. She shared:

> I actually don’t have a say into that . . . [the SPED department] doesn’t give us a say at all, and that’s a whole different conversation. But, yeah, so I have no say. I would like a say, so that I could let them know, like, “Hey, I don’t think this is gonna be what’s best,” like, but I know that preschool teachers often choose my classroom because I do have all autism. . . . Generally, I just get their autism students but it is from my classes very structured. And it has the same routine and schedule every single day. So, I think [the] preschool teachers see that and say, like, “Okay, this student really needs that routine and
structure. I think that they’ll be a good fit here” and then, they also see that, “Okay, this student has autism, so they’ll be a good fit here.”

Ms Jackie continued:

The main thing that’s been an issue is, I get students who are, like, they already know their stuff, and then I get students who know nothing. So, it’s like to me, I should be getting in the same level students, so that we can do the same stuff. So, it’s like I feel, like, sometimes I get in students who are more towards mild/mod and then, I get in students who are more towards severe and it’s like, this past year has definitely, like, displayed that. And so, we’ve been telling the SPED department and all of that. And it’s just, and that’s like, one of the biggest problems is I’m getting students who, they’re not even asking me like, “Hey, is this a good fit for you?” They’re just giving them to me. . . .

So, what I’ve heard [is] the preschool teachers recommend the students for my class. And then, the special ed department has to “okay” them but, like, the special ed department doesn’t come into my class, so they don’t know what it’s like. They don’t know what the other kids are like, so it’s like, I don’t understand why they’re getting more of a say when they’re not even involved when I’m the main one who’s involved.

Both general education and SDC kindergarten teachers believed their role was limited in the decision-making process for students’ transitions. Placement decisions relied heavily on the preschool SDC teacher and the authority of SPED administrators.

Although kindergarten teachers believed they did not have authority over making placement decisions, they recognized one of their primary responsibilities was to learn about their incoming students. Ms. Joanna prioritized learning about their health concerns, allergies, toileting habits, challenging behaviors, likes and preferences, and parent involvement, saying:
Well, ideally, I would like to be able to sit down and hear everything. . . . I would like to listen to where the student is. I write down like any major concerns or, like, let’s say a student is hitting, or, you know, has an allergy, like, things that are very, very important. I write it down, and then, I also like to write down some of the things the student likes, ‘cause I use that information at the beginning of the year. I like to get a little idea of the parents. . . . I would like to hear how involved the parent is. Sometimes, I can tell if they’re very involved depending on the questions they ask me. And so, I’m there to answer questions but I also talk about the program. But I get a lot of the information about the kids from the IEP, which I read before, and then like I, you know, just when they start, you know [about] any major things. That major information, that’s what I like to write down at that meeting, ‘cause there’s, I mean, a lot of information they present. But what do I absolutely need to know when I start with them? . . . Any major concerns or health issues or allergies, and then, too, like sometimes, I wanna know certain things. Are they potty trained? You know, things like that. So, we know, “Okay, they’re not potty trained. We’re gonna expect to ask for diapers or extra clothes in case they have accidents,” stuff like that . . . you would learn a lot more sitting in the meeting [than just reading the IEP], just to find some of those essential pieces of information. Because when I write down the information, it’s at the end of the year, and then when I start to set up the classroom, that’s more what, 2 months later, and I go back to my notes and, you know . . . sometimes the information is in the IEP, but . . . I think when I have it just written, like there, I you know it’s easy access and I don’t have to go looking for it.

General education teacher, Ms. Karina, expressed the benefit of having students with IEPs because she thought she had a “jump start” with these students compared to their general
education peers. She explained the IEP gave her helpful information about a student about which she would otherwise not have been aware, saying:

Because [for kids with IEPs,] their needs are already identified. . . . [Otherwise], kids just show up. They’re just there so, like, you literally know nothing about them. So, it’s like “Oh, an IEP, okay I can now . . . I’ve got this name in my head, and I know this kid.” Like, you’ll know that kid better than anybody at the beginning because you have like, a point of reference for who they even are. The rest is just a bunch of names on the list.

General education teacher, Ms. Kelly, explained how it had been helpful to sit in the transition to kindergarten meeting to learn about a student coming to her general education class, and offered information to parents about what the class would look like. She shared:

Well, I’m just there to, I do attend, I feel like I’m there to just give my input of what kindergarten will look like, and I also get to kinda hear what the child is doing, and in their current class that they’re in and how the teacher either feels like, you know . . . I kind of get a sense of why the teacher feels that they’re ready to transition to kindergarten and general education. Sometimes they come from an SDC preschool, and they recommend them to go to general, and for the most part I feel like it has worked out . . . and I see why, I just see it’s good. It’s like a good background, and I do tend to have those children in my classroom when I do attend the IEPs, I do get them, so I kinda . . . get a little bit of knowledge on their background. So that helps, kind of like having the pink and blues where you just read them, and you kind of get a little bit of information from for the child.

In addition to learning about incoming students during the transition IEP, kindergarten teachers also served as informants about their classrooms and the kindergarten curriculum.
The Informing Role of Kindergarten SDC Teachers During Transition IEP Meetings for Incoming Students

Kindergarten SDC teachers in this study attended the transition IEP meetings for their incoming students, meaning placement decisions were often considered prior to the meeting (i.e., usually recommended by the preschool SDC teacher, and sometimes a SPED administrator). Although the kindergarten SDC teachers did not have much authority over the placement decisions, these teachers had a clear role of informing parents about the kindergarten program their child was likely to attend.

Kindergarten SDC teachers were able to answer parents’ specific questions about kindergarten, what their child’s classroom was like, and respond to additional concerns. Ms. Joanna and Ms. Jackie shared parents’ questions were generally about toileting and having multiple grade levels in a single classroom (e.g., TK to second grade). The SDC teachers presented multiple grade levels as an opportunity for students to work alongside peers at their skill level. Ms. Jackie stated:

‘Cause that is one thing that does worry them the most is that it’s such a big range. They just get worried, especially when they come in as TK that they’re gonna be with, like, big second graders. So, I do have to like, kind of explain that, and how that works. . . . What I do is I say that we do work in centers, in groups. So, I say, like, if your student is at the same level as a first-grade student, then they will be grouped together. We do small group work. So, I say, like I have two other aides for [this] reason, so that we can rotate so that we can all be working like that. . . . They will be grouped together by their academic level, like by their social level, of what they are able to do. And I do say, generally, it does work out where it’s like TK, kinder, first, and second, but like, this next year, my
second grader is actually very low. So, he is going to be grouped with the younger ones.
And so, that’s where that comes into play. That’s why I do make sure I say, “Oh, not just the TKs work together, like, they work, do work together by grade level or by skill level,” and all of that, so I do address it like that. . . . And then, I do let them know that at recess time, just depending on how many kids I have. . . . So, like, this last year, I have five second graders, and they were pretty big boys, and the rest of them were TK to first. So, like, this last year, my second graders played up at the big kids’ playground and the TK through first played down at the Kinder playground. So then, there was a little separation, so that’s ‘cause my second graders did get rough last year, so I do tell them, like I do monitor that. Like we do make sure like, hey, if my TK is out there and I do have a big second grader, or I do have someone who’s getting rough, like, we do separate that, so that they’re not, you know, getting hurt or anything like that. . . . I don’t do a lot of whole group teaching, unless it’s like an art lesson or history, or something like that. But I do split them up throughout the day depending on what we’re doing.

The SDC kindergarten teachers were not required to attend transition IEP meetings unless the child was likely to attend the teacher’s SDC class. In contrast, attendance of a general education kindergarten teacher was typically required, regardless of whether the child was likely to transition into general education.

The Role of General Education Teachers is Sometimes Unclear Because They Attend IEP Meetings for Students Who May Not Transition to Their Class

Three teachers (i.e., Ms. Erin, Ms. Kelly, and Ms. Karina), and one parent (i.e., Caroline), shared experiences during which the role of the general education teacher in the transition IEP meeting was unclear. General education kindergarten teachers were typically required to attend
the transition to kindergarten IEP meetings and were responsible for sharing information about general education. Ms. Karina explained how this role felt somewhat awkward because she lacked background information about the student, and she was unsure about sharing extra details to overwhelm the parent if their child was not being considered for general education. She stated:

I feel kind of just like a robot like this is my list, like I have these things in my head that I’ll usually say we want the kids to know when they come to kindergarten, and I always make sure that I say it’s things that we wish for, not something that children have to know. It’s not like a prerequisite. Nobody gets turned away because they can’t write their name. Depends on who is running the meeting, like I’ve had experience where, sometimes, [an SDC teacher] wanted me to talk about something specific but hasn’t told me ahead of time. So then, they’ll ask me a question that I’m like, “Oh, they want the parent to hear [this].” It’s hard, though, because, like I said, usually at the time when I share out in the meetings, it’s at a point where I don’t know if the child’s going to general education or SDC. So, I don’t know how specific to be because I feel like, if I knew “Okay, this kid is gonna be in general ed,” then I would be a little more specific. Where[as], if the child’s going to be transitioning to an SDC class, I feel like I just wanna give a really brief overview ‘cause the parents [are] just bombarded with so much information in an IEP; I don’t feel like they necessarily need my list of things their kid needs to learn.

Caroline expressed feeling “scared” that the general education teacher was part of the meeting, saying, “I didn’t know why she was there, and it scared me that she was there.” This fear was because Caroline did not want her daughter, Carla, to go to a general education class, and Caroline viewed the SDC as the best fit for Carla’s needs. Similarly, a preschool SDC
teacher, Ms. Erin, noticed the presence of a general education teacher in some transition to IEP meetings appeared to confuse certain parents. She shared:

At least from my experience, it’s very hard on the parent to hear . . . . For my transitions, I feel like the moms or the parents were just kind of like, “He has to know all of this?” and I feel like it’s a lot of information that is shared with them but obviously, like, it’s important. It’s good that they know, but I do feel like it’s a lot for them to take in and obviously of course, when the teachers then, like, I step in . . . . “Remember he has his own IEP they’re going to move at his pace, he’s gonna have accommodations, modifications, adjustments for anything that he may need.” And then, they seem a little bit more relieved. But I definitely think it’s hard for them to hear everything that kiddos gotta do in a gen ed kindergarten class . . . . I would say 98% of the time they don’t have any questions for the gen ed teacher.

It appeared collaboration among IEP team members and transparency about each of their roles could better facilitate their participation during transition IEP meetings. The remaining themes in this section address some factors influencing effective decision-making for transition IEPs, including availability of educational programs, administrative support, and resources to allow teachers extra time to prepare for students’ transition to kindergarten.

*Transparency and Options for Educational Placement Can Improve Placement Decisions*

Most preschool SDC teachers (i.e., Ms. Erin, Ms. Flora, and Ms. Gabby) and one kindergarten SDC teacher (i.e., Ms. Jackie) believed a lack of transparency about the kindergarten SDC programs prevented effective decision making during a child’s transition. Ms. Jackie thought there was a lack of information shared with the preschool SDC and kindergarten
SDC teachers that prevented deeper discussion about whether a particular class would be appropriate. She noted:

We’re not connected. I don’t know officially like, “Oh, what do you get,” you know, like that type of thing. I do know that there are other classes who have mixed disabilities, so they have, you know, just the generic [specific learning disability] or you know [other health impairment], stuff like that. But I do know that other ones are more towards the mild–moderate where it’s like, they just have the learning disabilities. They don’t have any behavior. They don’t need, you know . . . the visual schedules. They don’t have to do, like, sensory stuff or stuff like that. So, I would say that’s the biggest difference for me, is that mine has a lot more behaviors as they’re just sending me students with autism. Like, they’re just saying, like, “Okay, this class is autism, let’s just do [this],” and they’re not actually looking at, like, oh, this student has a behavior versus we’re also sending her this behavior student versus a student who is able to do everything at grade level. Like, they’re not actually looking at that, I don’t think.

Preschool SDC teachers shared experiences with transition to kindergarten IEPs in which they thought their recommendations were limited by available programs and services. The district implemented a new procedure in which the preschool SDC teachers completed a survey for each student transitioning from a preschool SDC to another SDC for kindergarten. Although this practice seemed to be a way to gather preschool teachers’ input, including where the teachers believed the child should attend, some teachers (i.e., Ms. Gabby, Ms. Flora, and Ms. Erin) noticed SPED administrators sometimes recommended a classroom that did not seem the most beneficial to the student. Teachers sensed, because administrators did not always recommend programs based on teachers’ input, there were limited programs available to address students’
needs. Ms. Flora described SPED administrators “seemed more concerned about student
numbers than anything else about the child.”

Teacher participants and one parent discussed issues related to having limited options for
students with disabilities. Ms. Gabby, a preschool SDC teacher, said, “I wish there was a middle
class or, like, an inclusion class [for] really smart kids, but [they] need to work on more social
skills.” Although the district had SPED programs other than SDC, it was generally understood
exiting out of the SDC setting meant a child would be spending most of their day in the general
education setting with some SPED support, such as having a resource specialist. However, many
SDC teachers recognized mainstreaming opportunities for students with disabilities were limited
due to teachers’ different views about including students with disabilities in the general
education setting. Limited mainstreaming led to Ms. Gabby, a preschool SDC teacher, stating
that “mainstreaming [was] site specific,” according to the school culture and teachers’ beliefs.

Bianca, a parent of a child with Down syndrome, related having more options to having
“parent choice.” She explained, because of the lack of an inclusion class, educators were not
“pushing for students with disabilities to have more time with general education peers.” Bianca
argued, without these options, the SPED program was not as individualized as it should be. She
shared:

The only thing that could use improvement was to give the parent a choice, maybe start
pushing towards inclusive, especially the kids that talk because there’s some kids, like
there was a little girl in in his class that was just a little chatterbox, and Mom decided to
keep her in special ed, you know, it was kind of disappointing. So, it would be nice for
the psychologist and the therapist to say, “Hey, you can push your kid. Are you sure you
don’t want to send them to general ed?” You know, it’s different, or I don’t know, just
some kind of encouragement to go in that direction. But I just sometimes, I know they’re impacted, and they have so many of these that they just kind of want to get through them really fast but I do think that they should. How to make it individualized still, and not just cookie cutter go through the motions. So, I mean, I know they have a lot of them to do. But if they’re going to be impactful making it individualized, they should make it individualized.

Bianca added parents needed to be fully informed of a possible trajectory of SPED services, saying:

So, and I don’t know if they talk this plan out with other parents like they need to kind of, “Look, if you’re gonna keep them in special ed, this is what’s gonna happen.” So, I think they can improve on that, kind of give a glimpse of what’s gonna happen and give a choice like, “Is that what you want? You want to keep them in special ed?” Not automatically assume.

Bianca explained parents should be informed of their child’s educational options and future ramifications for enrolling their child in a SPED program.

Preschool SDC Teachers’ Placement Decisions Are Limited by Administrative Authority and Space for Enrollment

As quoted in the previous theme (i.e., Transparency and Options for Educational Placement Can Improve Placement Decisions), teacher participants mentioned SPED administrators had some control over final placement decisions. Teachers noted administrators spent little time in the classrooms to familiarize themselves with the different programs. Therefore, placement decisions appeared to be based on enrollment numbers rather than addressing students’ individual needs. Ms. Flora shared:
But like, we fill out these surveys . . . but the surveys are still not the most effective for our kiddos. . . . They started last year with us, and the idea is great, but there’s a lot of holes and so we were able to give feedback last year, which was great. And they did make some of the changes, but not all of them yet. And it’s still, you know, it’s still a work in progress. . . . But [I’ve filled] out these surveys, and then they put one of mine in like the “low” [class]. . . . She has no business being in the class they put her in. [And I had another student that] should not be in the class at [School G because he’s], like, absolutely, he’s not verbal. . . . [In] my opinion, he’s profound, and so I don’t know. I mean, I don’t know how that happened other than just his address. . . . [We do get the list and] they said, “If there’s anybody that really strikes you is a big concern,” call, and I mean, I was calling like 5 minutes after. I read the list, that’s just not gonna [work]; he’s gonna be frustrated. They’re not gonna have the amount of staff he needs.

Ms. Flora’s quote exemplified most teacher participants’ frustrations regarding administrators’ authorization of students’ placements, with administrators prioritizing balanced enrollment across programs.

*Teachers Need More Time and Staffing to Prepare for and Participate in Transition IEP Meetings*

Kindergarten teachers in this study, both general education and SDC teachers, expressed their desire to attend transition IEP meetings for the full duration. However, this did not happen regularly. Ms. Jackie shared:

Ideally, I would like to be able to sit down and hear everything, but that didn’t happen with these meetings. Sometimes it does happen, and sometimes it doesn’t. It just depends
on schedules. I really don’t have that much control over that. It’s usually the teacher that is sending the student to me, and the school.

Some preschool SDC teachers said they would also prefer kindergarten teachers to fully attend the IEP meetings so parents would feel more comfortable about the transition. Ms. Erin shared:

I think it’s helpful to have the receiving teacher there. I think that is the best part, because I think transitions can be overwhelming for parents knowing that they were 3 years old, started in preschool, and was here for 2 full years, and now they have to go to a more, likely a brand new school, brand new teacher, brand new staff. I think it’s helpful to have the teacher there so she can introduce her, he or she, can introduce themselves. And kind of share their contact information. . . . So, I think that’s nice, yeah, I think that’s helpful.

Barriers to having kindergarten teachers fully attend meetings included difficulties scheduling with other IEP team members and availability of substitute teachers. Ms. Gabby shared:

I really had to fight to get it to happen all in 2 days because there was just not time to do it. So, things like that—logistics and just realizing our time and the team’s time—I wish that was, I don’t know if there will ever be a solution to it. Things like how they want us to invite receiving teachers but, then . . . they need a sub, or they need someone for them to come to our meetings. So, you know, little things like that when they expect us to have everyone there, but they don’t help us in getting them there.

Parents additionally supported the benefit of having all service providers at the child’s IEP meeting. Caroline stated, “I love that everyone that was part of her plan was there.”

Similarly, Adam “appreciated that all the service providers were there.” Having the full team in an IEP meeting appeared to reassure parents that the team was coming together to have a collective understanding of their child’s needs.
Conclusion

Results of this study addressed its purpose to examine parents’ and teachers’ social constructions of school readiness and the transition to kindergarten process among children with disabilities. Using the Significance Building Tool and Connections Building Tool of discourse analysis (Gee, 2011), data collected from participants’ interviews were analyzed to identify the child-focused and contextual variables that parents and teachers believed were relevant to school readiness and successful transitions. The resulting themes were coherent in that participants consistently emphasized the importance of students’ social–emotional and behavioral skills over academic skills. Students with disabilities were also understood as having unique educational needs, which participants considered when discussing contextual variables contributing to successful school transition. Contextual variables highlighted differences between the SDC and general education settings, including differences in student-to-teacher ratio, organization of materials, staff training, and available resources for students with disabilities. Participants also discussed the importance of collaboration among parents and teachers in supporting students’ school readiness.

A dialectical–relational approach to discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2001) and analysis of subject positioning (Willig, 2013) revealed parent and teacher participants held different roles and levels of authority during the transition to kindergarten process. Despite participants recognizing flaws in the current process and expressing a desire for change, their current roles and practices appeared to be socially constructed and maintained. For example, kindergarten teachers’ limited authority in placement decisions appeared related to the amount of time made available for them to prepare and learn more about students prior to their transition IEP meetings. Therefore, decisions about placement relied more heavily on preschool SDC teachers. However,
preschool teachers believed their decisions about placement were limited by the options available and administrative transparency about various programs in the district. Parents generally trusted school teams and agreed with educators’ recommendations for their students. However, one teacher and parent discussed the possibility that parents’ participation in the process was limited because they were not fully informed about their rights and educational options available for their children.

The next chapter summarizes and relates the findings of this study to existing empirical literature on school readiness among students with disabilities. The limitations of this study are also discussed, along with the study’s implications for practice and future research.
Chapter 5: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine parents’ and teachers’ social constructions of disability, school readiness, and transition to kindergarten among young children with disabilities. Two semistructured interviews were conducted with 12 participants, including parents of children with disabilities, preschool special day class (SDC) teachers, and general education and SDC kindergarten teachers. A dialectical–relational approach to discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2001; Gee, 2011), with a focus on subject positioning (Willig, 2013), revealed themes about participants’ perceptions and experiences supporting young students with disabilities as they transitioned from SDC preschool to kindergarten.

Study Limitations

This study contained several limitations. First, the themes identified in this study were specific to the school district from which the participants were recruited, and findings from this study may not be transferable to other school districts. This study was conducted in a district located in a predominantly Latino urban community in Southern California. Similar to other large districts in California, the majority of students with autism and intellectual disabilities in this district were considered as having extensive needs and placed in self-contained classrooms, segregated from general education peers (Cosier et al., 2019). Although the sample of participants in this study was small, the findings are valuable because they reflected the perspectives of multiple stakeholders; therefore, the results revealed a social construction of school readiness that existed among parents and teachers who participated in this study.

Another limitation of this study was generalizability across time, because this study was conducted in temporal proximity to national and global events that may have impacted participants’ perceptions of school readiness. Children of the parent participants did not
physically attend school in the previous 2020–2021 school year due to school closures during the pandemic. Another event was the initial movement toward universal preschool in the United States, which may have future implications for early childhood education curriculum and instruction. Although the current study did not examine the impacts of the pandemic and universal preschool to school readiness, the notion that these events would have any impact further supports Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta’s (2000) ecological and dynamic model of school transition. Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta’s ecological model considers interactions between the child and their contextual settings (e.g., neighborhood or community) and development of these relationships across time. The current study followed an ecological perspective and achieved its purpose of understanding the social construction of school readiness not expected to remain stagnant.

Finally, this study relied solely on parents’ and teachers’ recollections to gather their perceptions and attitudes towards the transition to kindergarten process. The researcher recruited participants who participated in the transition process in the past 6 months to minimize inaccurate recall of their experiences. Identifying common themes across multiple participants also supported the validity of study’s findings.

**Contribution of Findings to the Literature**

Consistent with the literature supporting an ecological framework of school transition (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000), the results of this analysis included themes describing contextual factors that influenced the early school experiences of students with disabilities. The contextual factors included the structure of the SDC and general education settings, availability of resources for mainstreaming, and collaboration among parents and teachers. Participants’ perceptions of the contextual factors appeared connected to the child-focused factors they
identified as important for school readiness. For example, many participants recognized the limited capacity for increased supervision and flexible instruction in general education settings; therefore, students in general education were expected to function more independently in school (e.g., general education students should be able to communicate effectively, comply with minimal redirections).

Parents and teachers in this study prioritized students’ social–emotional and behavioral skills over academic readiness. This finding followed trends in research on school readiness and children with disabilities because most U.S. studies published after 2010 included measures of social–emotional, self-regulation, and behavioral skills (Barton et al., 2012; Graziano & Hart, 2016; Hart et al., 2019; Jeon et al., 2011; Pentimonti et al., 2016; Weiland, 2016).

Participants’ frequent discussions on early handwriting, compared to other academic skills, was not expected based on existing research on school readiness among students with disabilities. Quantitative studies on school readiness among children with disabilities focused more on literacy (Graziano & Hart, 2016; Hart et al., 2019; Phillips & Meloy, 2012; Weiland, 2016), print awareness (Barton et al., 2012; Pears et al., 2016; Pentimonti et al., 2016), and early numeracy (Barton et al., 2012; Weiland, 2016). Although a multitude of measurement tools have been used to assess literacy and early numeracy, only a few studies have measured writing ability (Barton et al., 2012; Jeon et al., 2011) using the McCarthy Draw-A-Design task (McCarthy, 1972) or scales from more comprehensive tools such as the Woodcock–Johnson (WJ) subtests (Woodcock et al., 2001) and Bracken School Readiness Assessment (Bracken, 2002).

The current study added to the limited number of studies that have investigated parent and teacher perspectives on school readiness and transition practices involving children with disabilities (Jewett et al., 1998; Quintero & McIntyre, 2011; Welchons & McIntyre, 2015, 2017).
Parents and teachers in this study shared their accounts of the transition to kindergarten process and described their personal roles and decision-making authority. Parents in this study generally trusted educational staff and agreed with recommendations of the school team. The kindergarten teachers, both general education and SDC teachers, reported having minimal authority in making decisions about educational placement for students transitioning to kindergarten. Although preschool SDC teachers often recommended placement for students, they expressed effective decision making was hindered by limited educational options for students with disabilities and a lack of transparency about SDC kindergarten programs across the district.

These findings are similar to those obtained from the few studies that have investigated parents’ and teachers’ perspectives on the transition process for children with disabilities. These studies showed preschool teachers engaged in a mix of individualized and generic types of transition activities, but kindergarten teachers mainly engaged in generic activities (Quintero & McIntyre, 2011; Welchons & McIntyre, 2015). A common barrier reported by kindergarten teachers to practice transition to school (TTS) activities was lack of available time (Jewett et al., 1998; Welchons & McIntyre, 2017). The methodology and findings of this study added to the scant literature on school readiness among children with disabilities and have several implications for practice and future research.

**Implications for Practice**

Participants in this study recognized the benefits of collaboration among teachers and parents in supporting the transition to kindergarten process for students with disabilities. This finding inferred each collaborator (i.e., parent, preschool teacher, and kindergarten teacher) contributed a unique perspective and expertise in supporting students with disabilities and made important decisions about their transitions. Participants identified barriers (e.g., teachers’ limited
time for preparation, lack of transparency, and educational options for students) to effective decision making during transition individualized education plans (IEPs). School administrators may have had some authority to address the barriers and further support the transition process.

**Parents**

Teacher participants regarded parents as experts on their child, making parents valuable informants of their child’s preferences and strengths. Teachers in this study depended on parents to learn ways to best approach students with special needs and make them feel more comfortable in school. Therefore, parents should recognize their unique contributions to the decision-making process and increase their active participation during transition IEP meetings.

Parents becoming active members of the IEP team required they were fully informed about their rights and their child’s educational progress, services, and options. Parents should feel comfortable asking questions, giving feedback, and collaborating with the school team to make important decisions about their child’s transition. Parents who participated in this study appeared to have varied levels of active participation in the IEP process, which may have been influenced by their knowledge of their own rights, level of trust with the other IEP team members, and overall satisfaction with their child’s educational experience.

**Teachers**

Teacher participants recognized the importance of parent–teacher communication and building trusting relationships with parents. Teachers recognized parents and teachers could inform each other about students’ progress and approaches to address students’ challenges in the school setting. Teachers may have helped empower parents and foster parent involvement by validating parents as experts on their child and equal decisionmakers in the transition process.
Some teacher participants also asserted gaining parents’ trust helped parents feel more comfortable communicating with teachers about their child’s unique needs.

Teacher participants also recognized the importance of collaboration between general and special education (SPED) staff. General education teachers appeared to support mainstreaming but expressed they had a lack of training and desired to have more knowledge about teaching students with disabilities. Teachers who successfully engaged in mainstreaming reported having strong collaboration between general and SPED teachers at their site.

Students’ transitions to kindergarten may also be supported through collaboration between preschool and kindergarten teachers. Some teachers highlighted benefits of this collaboration, which included kindergarten teachers having sufficient background knowledge of incoming students. Some preschool SDC teachers followed up with kindergarten teachers of their former students, checking on how their students were doing, and sharing strategies that had previously helped the student in school.

Although teachers showed motivation to collaborate with one another and participate fully in the transition to kindergarten process, their efforts to do so were often limited by the time and resources available to them to prepare for transition IEP meetings. Teachers also thought decisions regarding students’ transitions were limited by transparency and availability of educational programs. School administrators may be able to address these barriers to teacher involvement in kindergarten transition.

Administrators

Most of the improvements sought by participants in this study require administrative support and systems-level change. Administrators were called by participants to facilitate increased resources and available educational programs for students with disabilities. Such
changes may involve improving school climate and fostering a culture of diversity and acceptance. The encouraged changes could address varying perspectives and receptiveness to inclusive practices among teachers across the district, which teacher participants identified as a barrier to consistent mainstreaming opportunities for their students.

Some teachers perceived administrators appeared more concerned about enrollment numbers across classrooms, rather than spending time in the classrooms to familiarize themselves with the different program options for students with disabilities. Administrators should maintain an active role in overseeing SPED programs and familiarize themselves with the needs of both students and educational staff. Participants also suggested administrators support the transition to kindergarten process for all teachers involved by facilitating shared information about available programs, offering guidance on placement recommendations, and providing additional staffing (e.g., substitute teachers) to assist with scheduling and full participation of all IEP team members in transition meetings.

**Future Directions in Research**

Participants in this study expressed a general interest in providing students with disabilities increased options (e.g., mainstreaming) to be around their general education peers. Additional research, conducted in school districts with more inclusive programs, could use a similar methodology to this study that might reveal differing perspectives on school readiness and transition to kindergarten for students with disabilities.

The results of this study expand on Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta’s (2000) ecological and dynamic model of school transition. Themes that emerged identified specific aspects of a school microsystem (e.g., classroom structure and resources, support provided by SPED administrations, collaboration between general and SPED staff) that appeared to influence
parents’ and teachers’ beliefs and practices surrounding the transition to kindergarten process for students with disabilities. Although participants also discussed parent–teacher communication and collaboration, aspects of the home microsystem were not targeted by the interview questions posed in this study. Future studies that aim to further investigate the ecological nature of kindergarten transition should more closely examine home microsystems, and other microsystems, to identify additional contextual factors influencing school readiness.

The ecological nature of school readiness and transition practices calls for ongoing research on this topic because social attitudes and perspectives about disabilities and education change over time. This study demonstrated the utility of discourse analysis in examining social constructions of school readiness, disability, and kindergarten transition. Researchers should consider using discourse analysis in their methodology to further investigate these topics. Additionally, a dialectical–relational approach may assist researchers in identifying barriers to positively transforming the transition process for students with disabilities.
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Appendices

Appendix A

Semistructured Parent Interview Questions

First Interview

Experience having a child with a disability; Perceptions of school readiness

• Tell me about (child).
• What do you like most about parenting (child)?
• What do you find challenging about parenting (child)?
• How would you describe (child’s) disabilities?
• Before having (child), have you had any prior experience or knowledge about (disability)?
• What have you learned from raising (child)?
• Tell me about (child)’s experience with school.
• What has been your experience getting educational support for (child)?
• What have been your experiences interacting with teachers and other school personnel?
• Does (child) get professional help outside of school? If so, what kind? Has it been helpful?
• What are some things that (child) does well in school?
• In what areas has (child) made the most growth?
• Did you feel that (child) was ready for kindergarten?
• What do you think makes children like your child ready for kindergarten?
• What have been your experiences interacting with teachers and other school personnel?
• What are your hopes and goals for (child)? What do you think will help your (child) achieve those goals?

Second Interview

Interactions with educational staff to support their child; Experience and perceptions of the transition to kindergarten

• What are some ways you and (child)’s teacher communicate with each other?
• How has this communication been helpful for your (child)?
• Has anything about these communications been difficult?
• How do you view your role as a parent in (child)’s education?
• What types of special education (SPED) services does (child) receive? What do you know about these services?
• How do you view your role as a parent in making decisions about (child)’s education and services?
• What concerns did you have about your child transitioning to kindergarten?
• Tell me about your experience having an individualized education plan (IEP) meeting last spring to discuss the transition to kindergarten.
• What was helpful about the transition to the kindergarten IEP meeting?
• In what ways do you think the transition to kindergarten process could be improved?

Follow up and member check

Summarize to interviewee: (a) overview of topics covered in previous interviews, and (b) summary of parent’s input including main themes relevant to the research questions of the study.

• Is there anything important you think I missed, either in my interview questions or my summary?
• Is there anything you would like to add regarding your experience having a child with (disability), your thoughts about kindergarten readiness, educational decision making for your child, interactions with your child’s IEP team, and/or the transition to kindergarten process?
Appendix B

Semistructured Teacher Interview Questions

First Interview

Experience working with children with disabilities; Perceptions of school readiness

• Tell me about your experience as an educator.
• What do you like most about being a teacher?
• What do you find challenging about being a teacher?
• Tell me about your experience or knowledge about educating children with (disability)?
• What have you learned through your experience working with children with (disability)?
• Tell me what a typical day looks like for a child in your classroom.
• What has been your experience supporting children with (disability)?
• What are some things that children with (disability) do well in school?
• What are some things in school that are challenging for children with (disability)?
• In what areas have you seen children with (disability) make the most growth while attending school?
• How do you know when a child with (disability) is ready for kindergarten?
• What do you think makes children ready for kindergarten?
• What has helped prepare children with (disability) for kindergarten?
• What are your hopes and goals for children with (disability) when they transition from your class? What do you think will help children with (disability) achieve those goals?

Second Interview

Interacting with families to support their child with a disability; Experience and perceptions of the transition to kindergarten process

• What are some ways you and parents of children with (disability) communicate with each other?
• How has this communication been helpful to children with (disability)?
• What about these communications has been difficult?
• How do you view your role as a general education/special education (SPED) teacher in supporting children with (disability)?
• What do you know about the general education kindergarten classroom?
• What do you know about the SPED kindergarten classroom?
• Do the children with (disability) that you work with receive professional help outside of school? If so, what kind? Has it been helpful?
• How do you view your role as a general education/SPED teacher in making decisions about children’s education and services, particularly for children with (disability)?
• Tell me about your experience having individualized education plan (IEP) meetings last spring to discuss the transition to kindergarten?
• What concerns did you have about your students with (disability) transitioning to kindergarten?
• What was helpful about the transition to kindergarten IEP meeting?
• In what ways do you think the transition to kindergarten process could be improved?

Follow up and member check

Summarize to interviewee: (a) overview of topics covered in previous interviews, and (b) summary of teacher’s input including main themes relevant to the research questions of the study.

• Is there anything important you think I missed, either in my interview questions or my summary?
• Is there anything you would like to add regarding your experience teaching children with (disability), your thoughts about kindergarten readiness, educational decision making for children with (disability), interactions with the IEP team, and/or the transition to kindergarten process?