Rethinking School Readiness

By Vicki Skoulogenis
Conceptualising School Readiness

- School readiness has traditionally been thought of as a simple outcome of maturation or chronological age, and has focused on particular qualities and capacities in the child (Crnic & Lamberty, 1994; Kagan & Rigby, 2003).
- Once these were demonstrated (or achieved), the child was considered to be ready for school.
- The implication was that early childhood services and communities did not have any role to play in promoting school readiness, nor did schools have to do anything about getting ready to meet the child’s needs.
This “individual child maturation” view of school readiness has been shown to be too limited.

Readiness does not reside solely in the child, but reflects the environments in which children find themselves – their families, early childhood settings, schools, neighbourhoods, and communities (Kagan & Rigby, 2003).

School readiness is now seen as having four interrelated components: children’s readiness for school, school’s readiness for children, and the capacity of families and communities to provide developmental opportunities for their young children (Emig et al, 2001).

This has been represented as an equation:
An Equation for School Readiness

Ready Parents

+ Ready Systems
  (parenting education, health and nutrition, early care and education, assessment and early intervention)

+ Ready Schools

+ Ready Communities

= Ready Children
Why is this issue important?

- School entry involves a key transition for all children. This transition is not just to school, but from home, childcare, preschool and kindergarten.
- It is a transition not just from early care and learning environments, but often from small-scale to large-scale interactions, from highly personalised to less personalised relationships, and from environments with a limited range of ages to an institution with children of many ages.
- It is a transition to a different learning, education and care setting.
- How well children are prepared for this transition is important as it impacts on their long term outcomes.
What are the implications of the research?

- Children will not enter school ready to continue learning unless families, schools and communities provide the environments and experiences that support the:
  - physical,
  - social,
  - emotional,
  - language,
  - literacy,
  - and cognitive development of infants, toddlers and preschool children
‘Ready Families’

- ‘Ready families’ refers to children’s family context and home environment.
- There are large differences in family resources, including parenting skills and attitudes.
- Support is needed to help families provide responsive care and appropriate learning experiences for their children and to develop family well-being during the early years’ period.
‘Ready Services’

‘Ready services’ refers to the availability, quality and affordability of programs and services that positively support child development and contribute directly and indirectly to school readiness.

These include the care and education environments provided in preschools, kindergartens and childcare settings.

Linking services and establishing integrated service networks provides additional gains, including continuity and consistency.
‘Ready Communities’

- ‘Ready communities’ refers to both informal and formal resources and supports available to families with young children.
- Examples of informal resources include social networking opportunities for families to meet in family friendly environments, and for their children to socialise – in parks, for example.
- Formal resources include health services and libraries. Children whose families have easy access to such resources have better developmental outcomes than children whose families lack such access.
‘Ready Schools’ describes critical elements of schools that influence child development and school success.

These include links established with early years services, transition support programs for children commencing schools, a range of programs and supports available to cater for children with diverse needs during the early years of schooling, and teachers with an understanding of early childhood development.
What Next?

- Improving school readiness requires that we address the environments in which children spend their time and develop their skills and behaviours.
- Whether in their family or education/care environments, children need engaged, responsive care with organised and purposeful experiences and activities.
- Children need to be exposed to print, music, the natural environment, languages and the arts, to have stories read to them, and to have regular access to stimulating, play-based learning materials and experiences.
Considerations for policy and programs

The best way of preparing a child for school is to ensure that they have optimal social, emotional and learning experiences and environments during the early years, both at home and in community settings and services.

To ensure this, we need to create the conditions under which families and communities can meet the needs of children as they (and we) would wish (Moore, 2006).

Creating those optimal conditions requires collaboration between services and programs to ensure that the children and families receive all the help they need, and that potential barriers to children's learning are removed.
Considerations for policy and programs

- Specifically, policies and programs are needed to:
  - Provide all children with high quality early educational experiences. This is particularly important for those children made vulnerable to school ‘unreadiness’ by their disadvantaged family status or limited community resources and supports.
  - Support parents by creating family friendly early childhood environments and opportunities for families to meet other families.
  - Help families provide learning resources and experiences for their young children.
  - Build opportunities for family involvement in early childhood programs.
Considerations for policy and programs

• Build strong links and relationships between schools and early childhood services to ensure continuity of care and joint planning of transition support activities. These links are important for transfer of knowledge about the circumstances, needs and interests of individual children and their families. Further, continuity and consistency of the environment have been shown to be important factors underpinning the smooth transition to school. The loss of links between families and early childhood services is wasteful, and disruptive to children and their families.

• Build strong links between families and schools before, during and after transition.

• Provide a variety of supports to help ease children’s transition to school

• Establish integrated service networks, linking early childhood programs with other general and specialist child and family services.
Ideas To Get Started

• Reproduce articles on School Readiness etc. to include in newsletters or handouts.
• Order from suppliers attractive, colourful, easy to read brochures and other Early Literacy resources for your families
• Provide home-language resources as well as English if available
• Commit a section of your newsletter to feature Early Literacy information and publish articles in every edition
• Make a permanent Early Literacy display so families may browse and self-select resources. Commit to refreshing your display each term to show that Early Literacy is a current and ongoing priority in your service
• Hold an information session for staff and families about the changes to literacy understandings following recent research. Reflect together on the old ways and use resources to learn about the new ways which value young children’s learning needs
• Hold a “Keys to School Success Expo” by having an Open Day. Invite parents and grandparents to your centre and showcase the ways that your service supports young children’s developing literacy skills without “teaching” formal reading or writing.
6 Steps To Success - Literacy

1. Find Time To Read With The Children
2. Talk With Children
3. Provide Opportunities For Storytelling
4. Help Foster An Awareness Of Print
5. Encourage Letter and Word Recognition
6. Rhyme and Sing With the Children Often
Programs To Support School Readiness

ants in the apple

Letterland ABC

Jolly Phonics
Tools To Support School Readiness

- Phonetic Awareness Resources
  - Initial Sounds, Posters, Flash Cards, Guided Readers, Games etc..
Tools To Support School Readiness

- Mathematical Concepts
  - Number flashcards, Number Writing and Games
Tools To Support School Readiness

- Colour and Shapes
Tools To Support School Readiness

- Writing Tools
  - Correct Pencil Grip.
Tools To Support School Readiness

- Computer Software
Tools To Support School Readiness

- New Products
What Are You Waiting For?