Abstract

Parents of children entering Kindergarten are anxious and eager to help their children prepare for this major milestone in life, however, many are unapprised of the best methods to assist. They focus heavily on academic preparedness such as reading, writing, and mathematics, and do not consider preparing their children socially, emotionally, and physically. This project describes my development of a Kindergarten readiness handbook for parents, applying my personal experience as a Kindergarten teacher as well as qualitative content analysis to analyze the literature on early learning and other parent handbooks and resources. The handbook deals with five domains of Kindergarten readiness: social-emotional development, motor skills development, language and literacy development, self-care, and family and school partnerships. Along with information about these four domains, the handbook offers suggestions and strategies for parents to support their children with the transition to Kindergarten. This easy-to-understand handbook offers parents a concrete resource to help guide their children’s journey to formal schooling.
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Early learning, comprising a child's preschool and Kindergarten years, is arguably one of the most formative periods in a child's life. It is during these years that a child's intellectual, emotional, social and physical growth develops at an astonishing rate. With this astonishing rate of learning comes a responsibility to ensure that children are encouraged to be curious, and are given the physical, emotional, social, and intellectual stimulation they need to lay a strong foundation for later learning. A child's Kindergarten year should continue to foster this stimulation and offer ample opportunities for children to play and develop socialization skills. Nonetheless, it seems that over the last several years, the Kindergarten years have become increasingly more academic, with a stronger focus on reading, writing, and mathematics as opposed to the development of a child's social self. With this emphasis on academics, some parents are lacking information about their role in preparing their child for Kindergarten.

I have the privilege of working in British Columbia's largest school district, a progressive district in many ways; however, there is a lack of formal information provided to parents about Kindergarten readiness. Parents want to do what is best for their children, and this lack of information leads to parent confusion and anxiety, as they are not prepared for the school's expectations. Providing parents with information in the form of easily understood literature about Kindergarten readiness would address this problem, and help parents prepare their child for their journey into formalized education.

With the introduction of full-day Kindergarten in 2010, parental questioning regarding Kindergarten readiness was at an all-time high. The change from a half-day to a full-day program caused much debate among teachers, parents, and other school personnel. Regardless of one's opinion, full-day Kindergarten is now a reality for teachers, parents, and children in British
Columbia’s public school system. As with any major change in education, there were many concerns from parents, teachers, and administrators about how the new full-day Kindergarten program was going to work. Based on my observations as a Kindergarten teacher during the transition, most parental anxiety stemmed from concerns about their children’s readiness: would four- and five-year olds be ready for such a long day. There was also great concern about how full-day Kindergarten would work in the school system. I remember discussing at great length with colleagues, administrators, and parents such concerns as recess and lunchtime supervision, hiring qualified Kindergarten teachers, and maintaining the uniqueness of the Kindergarten program. The notion of Kindergarten readiness became more relevant and at the forefront of parents’ thoughts with the introduction of the full-day Kindergarten program.

With this change came a need for more information directed at parents, outlining what they could do to support and nurture their children in preparation for full-day Kindergarten. In my experience, there is a lot of unnecessary anxiety involved in preparing for Kindergarten, specifically for parents. This anxiety and unease seems to be a direct result of the lack of information provided by school districts, the Ministry of Education, and the provincial government about Kindergarten readiness. Based on my observations, these parental concerns still exist today. Although the Ministry of Education published a well-written document about what the full-day Kindergarten program should entail, they targeted teachers and education professionals, not parents. Moreover, the document was not well distributed and it did not offer parents enough information about what they could do to support the strongest start possible for their children.
Significance of the Project

The Kindergarten year is a year unlike any other; there is something very special about a child’s first year of formal school. I consider it a privilege to be a Kindergarten teacher and place great value on my responsibility to ensure a strong start. I have observed that the first year of school has the potential to shape children’s attitudes and dispositions toward learning, as well as how they view themselves as learners. I believe very strongly that the Kindergarten year should be one of exploration, discovery, and growth: a year in which children begin to see themselves as capable beings who find tremendous joy in the learning process. To this end, I have written a Kindergarten readiness handbook for parents. This handbook examines five major domains associated with Kindergarten readiness: social-emotional development, motor skill development, language and literacy development, self-care, and family and school partnerships.

Over the course of my research, I have found that there are existing guidebooks and manuals that offer in-depth information for parents about what skills are helpful, necessary, and valuable for a child entering Kindergarten, however, these manuals are all from the United States. I believe that information regarding Kindergarten readiness should come from local school districts and need to be presented in a way that is easy to understand and appealing to read. Teachers and administrators have expectations for children as they start Kindergarten, and in my experience, these expectations are a revelation to parents. This research is important because parents want success for their children; they want to understand what they can do to ensure the best possible start to their children’s educational journey. This handbook was written to bridge the gap between parental understanding and school expectations.
Background of the Project

When I started my teaching journey, I knew I wanted to work with young children. At that point, working with young children meant teaching any level from Kindergarten to Grade 3. It was not until my third year of teaching that I realized that my passion lay in teaching Kindergarten. I realized that I wanted to be involved in a child’s introduction to school; I wanted to help them love to learn and nurture and honour their natural curiosity. Since then, I have been teaching and learning in Kindergarten.

The Surrey School District is a growing district that is unique in terms of its size, composition and challenges. The district has schools in some of the wealthiest neighborhoods in the Lower Mainland, as well as some of the poorest; however, the district’s greatest challenge is its rapid growth. Eight hundred new people move to Surrey a month and keeping up with the demand for space in schools is challenging (“Living in Surrey”, 2011). This rapid growth helps makes the case for a well-researched Kindergarten readiness document to help parents who may not be able to obtain individual help from school administration.

For parents, Kindergarten is one of the most exciting and stressful years. When I think about the transition to Kindergarten from a parent’s perspective, it is understandable why so many parents have concerns, questions, and worries about their child. Parents are leaving their child for a long day; they are unsure of how their little one will manage during the day and, on top of that, learn. They want as much information as possible about what Kindergarten entails, and what expectations teachers will have for their children. Each year when my school hosts a parent information night, parents ask the same questions, and they need guidance to address these issues. This project offers parents a practical guide for preparing their child for the transition to Kindergarten.
A child’s Kindergarten year is an exciting time for everyone involved. It marks the beginning of a child’s school career and his or her development of independence and self-confidence. Although the beginning of Kindergarten can be exciting, it can be a very stressful time for parents. This parental stress stems mostly from anxiety about their child’s readiness, or more specifically, lack of readiness. Parents are often unsure of what their children should be able to do prior to entering Kindergarten, which causes unease for parents as they feel “out of the loop” and ill-prepared to help their children with the transition to Kindergarten.

There is a rich and valuable base of literature about Kindergarten readiness; however, my research indicates there are few manuals for parents that offer detailed and practical information. The intention of this project is to help fill the void by providing a practical and informative Kindergarten readiness manual for parents.

Personal Location

I have been a teacher for seven years and have taught in two British Columbia school districts: Richmond, and currently, Surrey. I have had the opportunity to teach Kindergarten to Grade 3, as well as learning support. This range has allowed me to see firsthand the importance of early learning and the importance of establishing a strong foundation for later learning. I currently work at a school in an affluent area where most children come from homes with supportive parents who are educated professionals. I am a member of a Kindergarten book club as well as several other Kindergarten committees within the district. In these groups, we often discuss how parents emphasize their child’s academic preparedness, such as memorizing the alphabet, and spend less time on social emotional readiness, which Kindergarten teachers find more valuable in the transition to Kindergarten. These conversations, along with my personal
experiences, have led me to conclude that a parent handbook would be an excellent way to inform parents about Kindergarten readiness.

Overview of the Project

The goal of this project was to create a Kindergarten readiness handbook for parents, to educate and inform parents on preparing their children for their Kindergarten year. My hope was to clear up prevalent uncertainties by offering an easy-to-read handbook that would focus on five main topics: social-emotional development, language and literacy, motor skills, self-care, and the importance of the family-school partnership. The handbook begins by offering general information and introducing parents to the handbook, including information regarding the intended audience for the handbook, details of a typical Kindergarten day, common concerns for parents and children, and general information about Kindergarten readiness. To ensure the handbook is accessible to a broad audience, I limited the five main topics to one or two pages each. Each topic follows the same layout: a definition of the readiness skill, examples of the skill in action, and ideas for parents to help foster the skill. The manual also provides links and access to further resources to supplement the handbook. The simple layout and non-academic language is to ensure that as many parents and caregivers will be able to use the handbook as possible.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

There is a significant amount of research discussing the relationship between the early success of children and later school success. Therefore, it is clear that the need to prepare a child for their introduction into their formal school years is critical. The Kindergarten classroom is a place of wonder, deep learning, and growth for young children; however, in order to be successful children need to be both emotionally and physically ready for a full day in a classroom-learning environment. In order to best prepare children for this learning journey it is critically important to ensure that appropriate and adequate supports are provided at home. This handbook will offer parents and caregivers strategies to nurture their child in preparation for the exciting journey of Kindergarten.

Kindergarten readiness is not a new concept and as a result, many school districts have implemented informational resources or readiness programs for their schools. I examined scholarly articles, government publications, as well as other early education parent handbooks to draw conclusions regarding the most important aspects relating to Kindergarten readiness. I reviewed the existing literature on Kindergarten readiness in general, as well as the literature surrounding social emotional development, motor skills, language and literacy development, self-care, and family-school partnerships.

Kindergarten Readiness

When surveying the literature on Kindergarten readiness in a broad sense, there were articles that discussed at length specific skills that children should have upon entering Kindergarten. Gulino (2008) suggested that there are several skills necessary for Kindergarten readiness, based upon his personal experience as a school administrator and teacher. Gulino
stated that when children began their school career with success, they achieved higher levels of academic and social development. He identified eight areas that affected a child's Kindergarten transition: knowledge, such as letters and numbers; social adjustment; skills, such as tying shoelaces; attitude towards school; rules, such as the ability to listen to adults; and physical attributes such as age, family issues, and educational environment (Gulino, 2008). Gulino’s work exemplified the majority of the Kindergarten readiness literature, which stressed the set of skills necessary for Kindergarten success. There are very few documents, however, written for parents that discuss these readiness skills.

Lally (2010) argued the need to understand school readiness in a social context, and claimed that most researchers are limited by observing school readiness from Kindergarten to Grade 12, excluding earlier development. Lally purported that the problem with this perspective is that the first two years of a child’s life are the most impressionable years, and overall, policy makers do not understand the value in this part of life. Lally made seven recommendations for policy makers to address school readiness with success. First, he suggested the need for health insurance for all expectant mothers. Lally argued that critical brain development occurs during pregnancy; therefore, attention needs to be paid to the development of a child while in the womb. Second, he suggested better access to prenatal care and support; specifically, professional and paraprofessional support. Third, he suggested paid parental leave, which would give babies time to build positive attachments to parents and caregivers, an integral part of brain development. Fourth, Lally saw a need for childcare regulations and policies. He specifically addressed the need to have quality childcare, and suggested that the essential elements of quality childcare are small groups, low adult-to-child ratios, personalized care, trained caregivers, and continuity of caregivers. Fifth, he argued for fair wages for childcare professionals. He asserted that all
caregivers should be trained in early childhood education and that pay should be on scale with teachers’ pay. Lally’s final suggestion was for infant and toddler subsidies. On this point, he discussed how babies need, and deserve to have, very high quality care for brain development, and that parents need access to this high quality care at a reasonable price. In conclusion, Lally asserted that a change is needed in society’s general perception of preparedness for school. Moreover, if more care and attention were paid to high quality child and infant care, school success would be improved (Lally, 2010).

Social and emotional development

The social and emotional development of young children has been at the forefront of educators’ concerns in recent years. With a constantly changing world, self-regulation and self-management continue to be issues of interest to teachers and education professionals; at the root of these concepts are the social and emotional developments of a child, topics about which educators have written vast amounts of literature.

Santos, Fettig, and Shaffer (2012) made a connection between social-emotional development and early literacy. They asserted that naturally arising literacy opportunities not only support literacy skills such as listening and oral language, but also social-emotional growth. This happens through exposure to more sophisticated vocabulary and the use of longer, more complicated sentences, which, in turn, builds a child’s communication skills and allows for an easier expression of needs and wants (Santos et al., 2012).

The authors listed six key social-emotional skills that support success in school: confidence, capacity to develop relationships, persistence, effective communication, problem solving, and the ability to listen and be attentive (Santos et al., 2012). The literature in this area clearly declares that educators need to teach children skills associated with social-emotional
development. However, opinions differ with regard to how educators should teach these skills, using either commercial, purchased programs or through explicit teaching in a more natural way, as suggested by the authors, through stories and real life experiences (Santos et al., 2012).

There are many programs available for purchase by schools that claim to teach social-emotional skills. Ashdown and Bernard (2012) reviewed one such program, a social-emotional curriculum titled, *You Can Do It! Early Childhood Program*, which claimed to teach confidence, persistence, organization, and emotional resilience skills. Four teachers taught the program three times a week to 100 students from two preparatory and two Grade 1 classrooms in a suburban Catholic school in Melbourne, Australia with low socio-economic status and where approximately two-thirds of the children were English language learners (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012). One class was delivered the *You Can Do It!* curriculum by their classroom teacher, and another Grade 1 class served as the control group (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012). The program was delivered over a 10-week time span, and the findings of the study indicated that the program had a positive influence on social-emotional competence in Grade 1 and preparatory students, specifically in the decline in problem behaviours (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012).

The authors found the program to be most beneficial to Grade 1 students, and that it was equally beneficial for both boys and girls and for English and non-English speakers (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012). Ashdown and Bernard (2012) interpreted the findings as further evidence for the argument that social-emotional skills need to be explicitly taught, and that through an improvement of social and emotional skills, academic skills are positively affected as well. Although no direct recommendations were made, the authors believed that more programs such as *You Can Do It!* should be implemented into school curriculums (Ashdown & Bernard, 2012).
Motor Skills

When surveying the literature on motor development and early learners, there was a common thread that connected most of the studies. The literature focused on how children need to be exposed to naturally occurring opportunities to develop motor skills. That is, children need to have many opportunities to experience tasks that require motor skills, for example, painting, playing with dough, and riding a scooter. Weinstein (2013) explored the development of fine motor skills, stating that children need opportunities to develop fine motor skills during everyday tasks, as there is a direct link between fine motor development and the growth of enthusiastic and self-assured writers. Weinstein’s article looked at practical resource ideas for parents and educators, such as cooking, mixing, mashing, and using spoons; playing dress up with dolls or figurines; and bouncing balls (Weinstein, 2013).

The Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services’ (2007) *Early learning for every child today*, written by an expert panel on early learning, complements pre-existing documents of its nature in Ontario. The document provided motor development indicators from birth to 24 months and continued to school-aged children five to eight years old, and provided ways for parents to interact with their children in order to stimulate development, emphasizing that children develop gross and fine motor skills on a continuum, beginning at birth (Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2007). A gross motor skill for a child from birth to 24 months would be reaching and holding, and an example of an interaction to develop this skill would be holding an object of desire so the infant must extend his or her arm and grab it (Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2007). For a child of preschool age, the document listed several skills, such as walking, jumping, hopping, galloping, throwing, riding, showing expression in movement, dressing him or herself, eating, manipulating tools such as scissors, and drawing
(Ontario Ministry of Children and Youth Services, 2007). This is a very useful and direct document because it provides indicators, and is unique in that it suggested ways for parents or caregivers to interact with their children in order to develop these skills.

**Language and Literacy Development**

The existing literature on early learning and language development revealed clear and apparent themes. Across the studies, there was a strong emphasis on immersing children in a literacy- and language-rich environment. In the two articles reviewed here, the authors addressed both the importance of literacy-rich environments that promote strong oral language skills, and the importance of reading on language development in young children.

Massey (2012) explored a preschool teacher’s use of concrete and abstract comments and questions in relation to storybook reading, in order to promote classroom conversation. Massey argued that early childhood educators have a responsibility to promote oral language development in their classrooms, and that they must work intentionally to create a classroom in which children become active participants in discussion and dialogue. Massey perceived the teacher’s role as a conversational partner and language facilitator, asserting that children need to respond to concrete and abstract questions while being read to in order to develop a strong vocabulary base. For example, when children are being read a book about raccoons, the teacher might ask abstract questions such as “what other animals do you know that have stripes?” (Massey, 2012, p. 126). According to Massey (2012), these abstract questions require children to access prior knowledge and make associations. Massey also examined the important role of the play centre as a place where children can practice their language skills and take part in guided play, which is play with an adult facilitator. In her conclusion, Massey suggested that planned
and deliberate storybook reading with a strong emphasis on abstract questions and a follow up of
guided play is very beneficial to a young child’s oral language development.

Kampmann and Bowne (2011) looked at an inquiry-learning approach to preschoolers’
early language development. They suggested that children need literacy-rich environments that
are inquiry based; that is, they are given opportunities to interact with high quality materials that
are reflective of their interests and passions. The authors examined a yearlong study in which a
toy elephant, named Ellie, was used to support children’s literacy and social development after a
teacher noticed a spark of interest in her classroom (Kampmann & Bowne, 2011). They
explained how the teacher introduced a stuffed toy elephant to the children after the students had
discovered that when they blew into the holes of pool noodles, they could make a sound that
resembled an elephant (Kampmann & Bowne, 2011).

Kampmann and Bowne (2011) explained how Ellie was woven into the students’
classroom unit about mapping. Questions about where Ellie lived, and how they might find out,
were used to weave together the mapping unit and Ellie’s arrival in the classroom. The children,
with support of their teachers, wrote letters to Ellie, and with the help of support teachers and
parents, they received letters and pictures from Ellie detailing her adventures. The authors
asserted that through these activities, the children developed stronger oral language skills,
especially conversational skills and written language skills, due in large part to the written letters.
The authors concluded that a child’s passion and interests should be honoured; furthermore,
through honouring their passions, deep and meaningful learning emerges (Kampmann & Bowne,
2011).

Self-Care

Self-care is a notion that populated many of the pre-existing Kindergarten readiness
handbooks. Lee (2011) discussed the importance of modeling and scaffolding to develop self-
help or self-care skills in young children; scaffolding helps build confidence and a child’s desire to become more independent. Parents and teachers can provide scaffolding and support to children when they are attempting and mastering new tasks, and Lee shares some vital techniques for parents when promoting self-help skills in young children. The first strategy she discussed was show and tell: in this strategy, the adult models the task and walks the child through the steps as they try on their own (Lee, 2011). The second strategy was simplifying the task, in which the task may be broken down into smaller, more manageable steps (Lee, 2011). The final strategy was giving feedback, whereby parents may offer children ways to make the task more manageable: for example, sitting down to put on shoes, to prevent falling (Lee, 2011). Lee offered helpful real life scenarios that occur in the daily lives of preschoolers and direct advice on how teachers and parents can help their children to develop strong self-help skills.

**Family-School Partnership**

When looking at Kindergarten readiness, the transition to Kindergarten, and the beginning of a child’s school career, it is essential to view the process in a holistic way, honouring the experience from the perspective of school and family. Often, not enough is done to ensure that families feel comfortable with this process and have a good understanding of their role.

McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGennaro, and Wildenger (2007) investigated the Kindergarten transition experiences of 132 families with children who had completed an early childhood program prior to entering Kindergarten. The authors stated that many studies had discussed the importance of Kindergarten readiness and tholved (e variables that influence readiness; however, very few studies had examined the concept of Kindergarten readiness and the Kindergarten transition from the perspective of the families in
The authors surveyed parents who had children entering Kindergarten to examine their experiences and involvement in three aspects of the transition and readiness process: description of readiness activities, family concerns, and environmental variables related to family involvement (McIntyre et al., 2007). To obtain information, the authors mailed a 15-20 minute survey to families in late summer, with 57 items in total, covering five major themes: the child’s education history, family concerns, family needs in transition, family involvement in transition, and family demographic information (McIntyre et al., 2007).

The results of the study suggested that families would like more information regarding their children’s transition, specifically, more information about academic and behaviour expectations and information on Kindergarten placement and teacher (McIntyre et al., 2007). McIntyre et al. (2007) indicated that many parents did not fully understand school expectations, and suggested that schools organize to discuss Kindergarten readiness in the context of the Kindergarten classrooms with the Kindergarten teachers. They also identified potential barriers to such meetings, such as class data, as class lists were often not available until just before the school year began (McIntyre et al., 2007). The authors of this study suggested that these barriers might be difficult to overcome at the school level; however, one solution may be organizing a team of school and outside professionals who would support transition (McIntyre et al., 2007). McIntyre et al. (2007) stated that there was a strong desire on behalf of parents to be involved in planning for Kindergarten, but that they often did not know how or what to do; they concluded by saying preparing for Kindergarten is a key time to be fostering parent and school partnerships.

Existing Readiness Manuals and Government Publication

In the province of British Columbia, there is no Kindergarten readiness manual for parents; providing information about Kindergarten readiness is dependent on individual districts
and schools. A helpful and informative document distributed by the British Columbia Ministry of Education (2008) entitled, *British Columbia Early Learning Framework*, outlined the Ministry’s view on early learning for early childhood professionals; however, it might also be of interest to families with young children. It stated that children are capable and full of potential, they are natural learners, and that children’s natural curiosity should be the focus of early learning (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2008).

The report offered learning goals for young children, divided into four domains: wellbeing and belonging, exploration and creativity, language and literacy, and social responsibility and diversity (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2008). As this document was primarily intended for early childhood educators, it offered questions for early childhood educators to consider when trying to achieve these goals with young children.

Another important Ministry of Education document was the *British Columbia full-day Kindergarten guide*, a planning and information guide for Kindergarten teachers (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2011). The document was divided into five sections: (1) the purpose of full-day Kindergarten; (2) characteristics of Kindergarten children; (3) planning Kindergarten children’s learning; (4) planning Kindergarten environments, routines and schedules; and (5) Kindergarten families and community. This document was helpful for Kindergarten teachers as it is both theory and practice based; that is, it offered practical ideas to support early learning, but also explained why these practices are encouraged. I have used these documents as additional references at the end of the handbook.

The handbook written by the First Five Santa Clara (2010) program in California was a thorough and easy-to-read handbook. The point form, 15-page handbook provided detailed and comprehensive information without being overly wordy and difficult to comprehend. The
document was divided into four sections: one section discussed Kindergarten readiness, that is, how to determine if your child is ready for Kindergarten, and the other three sections examined social emotional development, self-care, language, and early academics. In each section, there was a selection of tips to guide parents in determining how they could best support their children, and easy to understand and follow activities. One aspect that sets this handbook apart from others is the section on the importance of a family-school partnership. This well written handbook was easy to read and understand, and user-friendly, although it could be improved by including a list of credible references that parents could refer to for more information.

Another handbook, by the Department of Early Childhood for the Boston Public (2013) schools system, was comprehensive and written in a language that was easy to understand. The layout of the 24-page handbook was aesthetically pleasing, a full-page booklet outlined in five sections discussing the importance of the family-school partnership, specifically; the important of learning at home, curricular elements of the Kindergarten program, the classroom environment, transitional information for parents, with the last section offering a list of resources and websites for further information.

The Alberta Ministry of Education (2012) developed a handbook available in the early learning section on the ministry’s website (www.learnalberta.ca), which included a two-page fact sheet that offered basic information regarding each curricular area of the Kindergarten program. The document focused on what children would be exploring in each curricular area (i.e., the skills that a child would learn in their Kindergarten year). The document addressed early literacy, early numeracy, citizenship and identity, environment and community awareness, personal and social responsibility, physical skills and wellbeing, and creative expression. This document was easy-to-read and offered clear learning intentions for parents. Although this document was
helpful and offered important information to parents about what their children would be learning in Kindergarten, it did not discuss directly what parents could do to support their child’s transition to Kindergarten.

Conclusion

It is clear to see from the research that there is a distinct need for school districts to provide parents with information on the importance of Kindergarten readiness before entering the educational system. It is easy for parents to assume that children are ready for Kindergarten when they are old enough to start school; however, this is simply not the case. An examination of the research and resources on Kindergarten readiness demonstrates that there are skills, including social and emotional readiness and motor skills, which children should develop before Kindergarten.

In my experience, parents want to support and encourage their child entering Kindergarten in any way that they are able. However, from my experience and the literature on the topic, parental understanding of what is important concerning Kindergarten readiness does not always match the expectations of the school or the teacher. It is vitally important that parents see themselves as their children’s first and most important teacher. It became clear in my research, that parents who are involved in their children’s education pre-Kindergarten and throughout their school career feel connected to their children’s school to build a positive relationship towards school, and a strong family-school partnership. In my experience as a Kindergarten teacher parents are concerned about how they can best help their children prepare for Kindergarten. This parent concern helps to make the case for a well-researched, easy-to-read and understand parent handbook. One of the main goals of the handbook was to alleviate some of the confusion parents have about how to best support their child, and answer common
questions and concerns. The research conducted in my literature review was used to construct a handbook for parents that contain practical, helpful and easy-to-understand information for parents as they support their child into their Kindergarten year.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

As I stated in Chapter 1, I am a Kindergarten teacher in the Surrey School District. In my personal experience and after speaking with many parents, I realized that parents wanted to know what they could do to best prepare their child for Kindergarten. From these observations, I saw a need for a thorough and detailed handbook that would help parents, teachers, and children understand the skills and expectations that they would face as they enter their Kindergarten year. The primary intention of this study was to create a printed handbook for parents, which addressed the issue of Kindergarten readiness in the Surrey School District.

The research I conducted thus far has examined the current state of Kindergarten readiness, as well as the most important themes I plan to address in the handbook. These themes include social emotional development, motor development, language and literacy development, self-care, and the importance of a strong family-school partnership. I developed this handbook based on current research on Kindergarten readiness to help parents foster readiness skills in their children in ways that are developmentally appropriate, appealing to young children, and fun!

Qualitative Content Analysis

My primary research method for constructing a Kindergarten readiness handbook was qualitative content analysis. Qualitative content analysis is a proven method for writing handbooks, manuals, and guidebooks, and, for a beginning researcher, I prefer a straightforward and systematic approach. According to Berg and Lune, (2012) “content analysis is careful, detailed, systematic examination and interpretation of a particular body of material in an effort to identify patterns, themes, biases, and meanings” (p. 349). Content analysis focuses on the
messages, which are presented through written documents. Moreover, in qualitative content analysis these messages carry an impact on the reader (Krippendorf, 2013). Therefore, one of the main goals of content analysis is to identify the impact the messages have and present them in a clear and concise way. Qualitative content analysis allows researchers to sort through vast amounts of information and data in an organized and symbolic fashion. My intention when setting out to write a Kindergarten readiness handbook was to sift through the existing research and look carefully for themes, patterns, and trends, and as noticing themes is a major component of qualitative content analysis, it made sense for me to choose this research method.

As mentioned, qualitative content analysis is a way of looking very closely at a particular topic with the intention of detecting themes and patterns; because of this, I saw content analysis as a good fit as my primary goal was to construct a model that describes a phenomenon in great depth. Qualitative content analysis is an unobtrusive research method in that it allows the researcher to obtain data without being involved in the interactions of the participants (Webb et al., 1981). By using this unobtrusive research method, all of my research was done by examining prior information written about Kindergarten readiness. Qualitative content analysis has been used in many disciplines, including sociology, art and education. Regardless of the discipline, content analysis is a practice of coding and interpretation, and data is organized according to themes and then interpreted based on these themes. According to Berg and Lune (2012) there are three major approaches used to analyze data in qualitative content analysis: interpretive approaches, social anthropological approaches, and collaborative social research approaches. In interpretive approaches, researchers see social action and human activity as text; in other words, they set out to translate scripts from interviews and observations into data that is then written into text and analyzed for interpretation. In social anthropological approaches, Berg
and Lune (2012) state that researchers use field or case studies to gather the data needed for their research. With this approach, researchers often spend significant time in the community they are researching as well as with the members who make up the community (Berg & Lune, 2012). This particular approach will yield unique results, as the researcher will undoubtedly develop a special perspective based on their time in the field and with the participants. The notes the researcher yields from their time in the field then become the basis for text and will be interpreted for results (Berg & Lune, 2012). In collaborative social research approaches, researchers are usually looking to evoke some change or action and work with their subjects to evoke this change. The subjects are stakeholders in the situation, and the information is used to “craft action and as information to understand a situation, resolve a problem, or satisfy some sort of field experiment (Berg & Lune, 2012, p. 351).

When reviewing these methods I did not feel as though my particular research fit into any of the approaches outline by Berg and Lune. As qualitative content analysis is a tried and true research method, there is a profusion of information written about it. Upon further research, I came across three further means in which to understand content analysis. According to Hsieh and Shannon (2005), content analysis can be understood in three approaches: conventional content analysis, directed content analysis and summative content analysis. Conventional content analysis involves coding for categories that are taken directly from raw data. Directed content analysis uses categories taken from existing theories and research; in this method the researcher immerses him or herself in the data using the existing themes and the ones that emerge from the data analysis. Summative content analysis begins by looking at the existing data for pre-existing words and phrases and counts them to notice themes and categories. Hsieh and Shannon’s approaches to content analysis fit more directly with my research. Specifically, their approach of
directed content analysis seems to be the best fit. The area of early learning is well researched, and there are apparent themes that exist in this area of study already. Being a Kindergarten teacher, I was aware of these themes prior to my initial research and used these themes as a basis to start my research, with the open mindedness to understand that these initial themes and understandings would change, as I got deeper into my research.

When conducting my research I did not observe or interview any participants, therefore reducing my chances of disruption or invasion of privacy (Saldaña, 2008). Using this research method helped eliminate possible biases that can occur when dealing with human subjects and active participants. In order to conduct quality content analysis, Berg and Lune (2012) outline a detailed qualitative analysis plan, which they argue should include five standard sets of analytic activities. As a beginning researcher, I followed the suggestions laid out by Berg and Lune in which they suggest a series of six steps. The steps are as follows:

1. Collect and organize data;
2. Begin coding, in which codes are developed or identified in the data;
3. Analyze the codes for themes;
4. Sort the materials by these themes, or categories, looking for commonalities and patterns;
5. Analyze the organized materials and look for meaningful patterns; and finally,
6. Use those identified patterns combined with previous research to settle on a set of generalizations about the research topic (Berg and Lune, 2012).

In the sections below, I will outline my personal research process that as previously mentioned was strongly influenced by these steps outlined by Berg and Lune.
My Research Steps

My first step was to prepare, by collecting and organizing the data. This step included collecting scholarly articles, handbooks and other publications. I began by reading and re-reading materials about Kindergarten readiness, starting with information that was broad in scope and discussed Kindergarten readiness in a general, overall sense. After reading articles about Kindergarten readiness, I began to formulate my research question. My research question was: What information, strategies, and ideas should be included in a parent handbook about Kindergarten readiness? After I had formulated my research question, I began to identify themes that were reoccurring in the literature, such as motor development. To help identify and organize these themes I used a concept map, which helped me create a research plan that was thoughtful and manageable, and facilitated determining the relationship between my personal ideas, discoveries from my literature review, and my intended plan of action. From my personal experiences and literature review, I created a concept map that identified ten ideas and concepts related to Kindergarten readiness. The 10 concepts I initially identified were Kindergarten readiness, language, literacy, social-emotional development, fine motor skills, gross motor skills, parent-school partnership, special needs, English language learners, and numeracy. As I am a visual learner, creating a concept map provided an initial direction and helped me perceive preliminary themes and patterns related to Kindergarten readiness.

It became clear early in my research that those ten themes were too many to manage. I went back to the literature and re-analyzed, looking for overlapping themes or themes I could combine. My goal was to identify four to five major themes within the scope of Kindergarten readiness, and to make those themes the basis for the handbook. The four themes I initially identified were social-emotional development, language and literacy development, motor skills
development, and the development of a family-school partnership. The themes that emerged from my literature review and analysis matched my experience as a Kindergarten teacher, that is, the themes were also areas where I saw a need for clarification among parents and caregivers.

The second step was organizing and reading, wherein I reviewed the data and began the process of coding. I did not use any coding technology, but rather coded manually. As a beginning researcher with limited experience with coding, I followed Saldaña’s (2012) instructions for coding. As suggested by Saldaña (2012), I began with generic coding practices, and kept an open mind about changing my coding process if I was not discovering worthwhile information. I coded by hand, using a colour-coding system involving highlighters to code in the margin of the literature. I used the established four themes as the basis for coding, examining the literature for information that fit into the categories of social and emotional development, motor development, language and literacy development, and family-school partnership, being open to these themes changing through the process. These themes led to vast amounts of data being coded, however, as a novice researcher, it was important that I did not miss anything significant. It became clear quite quickly that my original list of themes was missing an important topic; through coding, I discovered the theme of self-care. The handbooks and articles I had read mentioned repeatedly key words such as independence and self-help, words that led me to add the theme of self-care, which I had not initially identified. As I reflected on the process of coding it was clear that it allowed me to find data that was “meaningful and informative” (Krippendorf, 2013). Initially I used In Vivo coding and descriptive coding practices. Descriptive coding captures in a word or short phrase the main idea or essence of the data being analyzed. This is different from In Vivo coding in which an actual word taken from the text is used to summarize the text. To summarize this preparation stage, I immersed myself in the existing literature,
theories, and explanations, and emerged with the information necessary to begin organizing my data.

My third step was Second Cycle coding. According to Berg and Lune (2013), second cycle coding involves organizing the data discovered through pattern coding. I used pattern coding to analyze and synthesize the codes from First Cycle coding. The purpose of Pattern coding is to highlight key themes and explanations that emerged from First Cycle coding (Saldaña, 2012). I used a red pen to write in bold the themes uncovered from each piece of literature at the top of the first page of text. After this process, I analyzed the themes as a whole and looked for meaningful patterns among the themes. Although at this point I had identified five important themes regarding Kindergarten readiness, going through the process ensured the themes I had originally identified were the most significant with regard to Kindergarten readiness and should in fact be the basis for my handbook.

I used webbing and charting when looking for themes. I sorted through the codes to look for reoccurrences, noting reoccurrences on index cards and marking how often they came up. These index cards served as a visual tool in order for me to see clearly the themes that were developing. I coded until I felt I had reached saturation, which was once all the codes fell under one of the themes I had identified earlier.

My next step was to determine if I could combine any themes to create larger, more complex themes or if I could expand any themes that were too dense. During this process, I remained flexible and open to the possibility that new themes could emerge and that some could become less relevant than I originally considered, though the five themes I originally identified persisted, and as a result became the basis for the handbook. The patterns and themes uncovered from the two cycles of coding ultimately served as the evidence and research for the handbook.
The handbook has an introduction, a section defining Kindergarten readiness, and sections addressing the five specific categories related to readiness: social and emotional development, language and literacy, motor skills, self-care, and family-school partnerships.

**Part One: Introduction to Kindergarten.** This section provides information about common concerns that parents and children have about starting Kindergarten, a brief description outlining the contents of the handbook, identifies the target audience, and outlines activities that make up a typical Kindergarten day.

**Part Two: What is Kindergarten Readiness?** This section defines and discusses the meaning of Kindergarten readiness, introduces the Kindergarten curriculum, and identifies the five domains that the handbook will cover: social and emotional development, language and literacy development, fine motor development, self-care and family-school partnerships.

**Part Three: What parents can do.** This section describes the important role parents play as a child’s first teacher, and provides a visual tool to illustrate what parents can do to help prepare their child for learning. The graphic shows how parents can offer their children opportunities to talk, play, read, draw and write, and explore new places, including a brief explanation of each topic and activities parents can engage in with their children to enhance these opportunities.

Parts Four to Seven explain in detail four of the five domains related to Kindergarten readiness: social and emotional development, language and literacy development, fine motor development, and self-care. Each section follows the same format to make the handbook consistent and easy to read:

- What is [social and emotional development]?
- [Social and emotional] skills are....,
• I am developing [social and emotional skills] if I can…,

• Ways parents can foster [social and emotional] skills.

Part Four: Social and Emotional Development. This section defines and provides a description of social and emotional development, focusing on outlining the social and emotional skills that are helpful for children entering Kindergarten. Some of the skills outlined in this section are the ability to relate well to adults, the ability to calm down, and the ability to play cooperatively in a group. There are also suggested ways in which parents can foster these skills in their children, for example, helping your child learn to calm down on his or her own by taking deep breaths and counting to three.

Part Five: Language and Literacy Development. This section addresses the importance of language and literacy development, and outlines the importance of listening, understanding, and expressing language. Children who are developing strong language and literacy skills can express their needs and wants, speak clearly, as well as listen and understand when spoken to, for example, when being given a direction. This section also offers ways in which parents can foster language and literacy development in their child. Suggestions include reading daily to your child, taking your child to the library, as well as talking to your child while doing everyday tasks.

Part Six: Motor Skills. This section describes the importance of motor skill development in young children, defines gross and fine motor skills, and discusses the different muscle groups used for gross and fine motor skills. Indicators of motor development are given, for example, the ability to skip, hop, and jump, walk up and down stairs independently, build with Lego and blocks, and use a zipper and manage buttons. Suggestions for parents to foster these skills include making time for play at playgrounds, playing with play dough, making time to explore
with crayons, pencil crayons, pencils and scissors and encouraging proper grip. I have also included a visual about the development of pencil grasp.

**Part Seven: Self-care.** In this section, I discuss the importance of self-care skills among young children. I define self-care as the ability to take care of his or her personal needs, for example being independent toileting and hand washing. Some indicators of the development of self-care skills are the ability to eat a snack or lunch without aid, and the ability to use the bathroom independently. Suggestions for parents to foster these skills include practicing toileting skills, encouraging independence, and insisting on children cleaning up their own toys and games.

**Part Eight: Family-School Partnership.** In this section, I outline the key role parents play in their child’s success. When parents are supportive of their child’s education and take an active role in their child’s schooling, their child is more successful throughout their educational career. This section helps parents see the value in becoming involved in their child’s school life, and includes a checklist of approaches parents may apply, including parent-teacher communication techniques and roles parents can assume within a school setting.

**Part Nine: Children with special needs.** Surrey School District has a policy of inclusion within its schools and classrooms, and this section discusses extra steps parents may take when preparing their child with special needs for Kindergarten. I have created a list of things for parents to consider, for example, introducing the classroom teacher to their child before school starts, taking a tour of the school, providing information about the child’s special needs, such as doctors’ reports or speech and language assessments, and meeting with the school principal to discuss the child’s strengths, weaknesses, and possible supports.
Part Ten: The transition to Kindergarten. This one page section provides suggestions to make the transition to Kindergarten as smooth as possible. Some of suggestions include reading books about starting Kindergarten, keeping a “countdown to Kindergarten” chart at home, and always talking positively about Kindergarten.

Part Eleven: Resources for parents. This section comprises a vetted list of websites, articles, and documents, which contain high quality, research-based information about early learning. I have included online games and websites such as Starfall, and the Imagination Tree, as well as documents such as the British Columbia Primary Program and an article about social and emotional development.

Part Twelve: Storybooks about Kindergarten. I have compiled a list of read-a-loud storybooks that discuss getting ready for Kindergarten. These are books I use in my teaching practice, and suggest parents read in the summer to get their child excited about Kindergarten.

I intentionally wrote this manual with the average parent or caregiver in mind. This practical handbook contains valuable strategies and information based on academic research, and although the handbook is in-depth and thorough, the handbook is not overwhelming in length. I used easy-to-understand language as well as charts and lists to emphasize the information set out in the manual to create a handbook that parents from all backgrounds could use to ease their worries and answer their questions about Kindergarten readiness. The ultimate goal of this project was to create a practical and helpful guide for parents in the Surrey School District, so parents can feel confident and self-assured when sending their children to Kindergarten.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have outlined in detail the research I conducted in order to write the handbook. As I have previously mentioned, I followed the suggestions of Berg and Lune (2012)
in order to guide my research, as this process was new to me as a beginning researcher. The research process I followed was multi-step, yet straightforward as I managed to keep my materials, notes, and coding organized and clear throughout the entire process. Content analysis is a proven method for writing handbooks, and as a novice researcher, the simplicity of using existing literature on early learning, and pre-existing handbooks as the basis for my research provided ample information as well as it allowed me to not feel lost in the process and on top of my research.
Chapter 4: Results and the Handbook

The chapter outlined step-by-step the process I followed in writing the handbook. This lengthy, tedious, and sometimes, frustrating process allowed me to feel strongly about the value of the research I conducted as well as the themes that I ultimately ended up using in my handbook. In this chapter, I have created a practical, research-based, and easy-to-understand handbook for parents and caregivers who have children entering Kindergarten.

Table 1 outlines the themes that emerged throughout my research process and moreover, the bolded themes signify the themes that emerged as most reflected in the literature and therefore most significant. As a result, the boldfaced themes came to inform the majority of the handbook. The themes shown in Table 1 represent a specific section in the handbook; for example, self-care and social and emotional development. Although, it was sometimes challenging to stick to the specific themes I discovered this allowed my research to be concise and specific versus vague and overly general.
Table 1

**Table of Themes (in boldface) from Content Analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Example from Handbook</th>
<th>Sources</th>
<th>References</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Kindergarten readiness</strong></td>
<td>Most important skills for best start possible</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Learning through play</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Play is a child’s work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Spending time talking and playing with your child helps increase their vocabulary</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School expectations</td>
<td>Skills necessary to promote a successful year</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Foundational skills</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Motor Skills</strong></td>
<td>Developing at a rapid pace</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Skills need to be encouraged</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Opportunities to practice</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parental Concerns</td>
<td>What does it mean to be ready for Kindergarten?</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Parent’s role</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning starts at home</td>
<td>Parents are a child’s first teacher</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Social-emotional development</strong></td>
<td>The ability to manage behaviour and responses</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value of friendships</td>
<td>Deepest learning is done in a social setting</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-regulation</td>
<td>controlling your emotions and reactions</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of Social skills</td>
<td>Socially appropriate behaviour</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social/Emotional Skills</td>
<td>Cooperation, sharing, taking turns</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tips</td>
<td>Tips for Parents</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Self-care</strong></td>
<td>Ability to take care of personal needs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expectations</td>
<td>Being mostly independent</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-care skills</td>
<td>Toileting, washing hands, and dressing</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tips</td>
<td>How you can encourage these skills</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Language and Literacy development</strong></td>
<td>Talk to your child all the time</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language Skills</td>
<td>Ask questions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tips</td>
<td>Encourage curiosity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literacy Development</td>
<td>Daily reading time</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Receptive and expressive skills</td>
<td>Listening and talking</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Motor development</strong></td>
<td>Language skills are thinking skills</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tips</td>
<td>I’m Ready When I Can…</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Young children’s motor skills are</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine motor development</td>
<td>developing rapidly</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Small muscle activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hands on activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross motor development</td>
<td>Large muscle activities</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gross motor examples</td>
<td>Running, jumping, stairs, playing on the playground</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fine motor examples</td>
<td>Drawing, cutting, play-dough, Lego</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early learning</td>
<td>Development of the whole child</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More than academics</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Skills</td>
<td>Literacy and Numeracy</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tips</td>
<td>These activities should be fun</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family-school partnerships</td>
<td>Children learn best when education is a partnership between parents, teachers and the child.</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Special Needs</td>
<td>What does kindergarten mean for my child?</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>Establishing a partnership through two-way communication and active involvement</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent resources</td>
<td>Resources for parents</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Websites</td>
<td>Internet resources for parents</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This handbook is intended to help parents understand what they can do to make the transition to Kindergarten as smooth and enjoyable as possible for their young child. The handbook is written in a straightforward way in order to reach as many parents and caregivers as possible. I have intentionally used graphics to support the text and have also intentionally kept the text to reasonable amount as to not overwhelm the reader. The handbook focuses on the development of the whole child, and is intentionally not overly focused on academics. I feel as though the handbook offers parents and caregivers a valuable resource when supporting their child in the exciting transition to the wonderful world of Kindergarten!
HERE I COME!

A Kindergarten readiness handbook for parents
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Motor Skills

Language and Literacy

Social and Emotional Development

Government Publications

Children’s books about starting Kindergarten!

Studies used to write this handbook
Part One:

**The Wonderful World of Kindergarten**

**Jumping in!**

Welcome to Kindergarten! This year will be full of wonderful and exciting new experiences for you and your child. With this new world of schooling comes many questions, worries, and wonderings about what Kindergarten will be like for your young child. This handbook was created to help address some of those wonderings in a way that is easy to understand and practical to use. This handbook examines four main areas of Kindergarten readiness and sheds light on questions that often come up from parents when they are preparing their child for Kindergarten. The Surrey School District hopes this handbook will be able to answer some of the questions that you may have and how to best prepare your child as you hand them off into the wonderful world of Kindergarten!
Jumping in...

**Some common worries and wonderings**
Starting Kindergarten is an exciting time for families, however along with this excitement often comes some worries. It is common for children and families to feel some anxiety surrounding the beginning of Kindergarten.

**Children will often wonder or worry about:**
- *Who will be their teacher?*
- *Will they have friends in their class?*
- *What happens if they miss their family?*

**Parents will often wonder or worry about:**
- *How do I know my child is safe?*
- *How will the teacher know if they need help tying their shoes, using the washroom, zipping up their coat?*
- *How will the big kids in the school treat the Kindergarten children?*
- *Who will ensure they are eating at lunch and snack time?*
- *Who will supervise the children at lunch and recess?*

It is important that your child is excited about their first day of Kindergarten. The Surrey School District is here to make the transition as smooth and worry-free as possible. We hope you find this handbook informative and helpful. Thank you for taking an active role in your child’s education!
What does this handbook offer?

This handbook offers up to date, research-based information regarding:

- Introduction to Kindergarten
- What is Kindergarten readiness
- Social and emotional development
- Motor skills
- Language and literacy development
- Self-care
- Family-school partnerships
- Additional resources for parents

Who is this handbook for?

This handbook is for anyone involved with Kindergarten-aged children!

- Parents/Guardians
- Extended family
- Teachers
- Principals and Vice Principals
- Child care providers
Kindergarten is a place of wonder, curiosity, and growth. Children come to Kindergarten with varying levels of life experience and knowledge. It is this diversity that makes learning in Kindergarten so rich and valuable. In Kindergarten, children will be given opportunities to demonstrate what they know and work hard to develop important skills that will guide them through their school career. This handbook is about much more than preparing your child academically; this handbook offers information that will help you foster your child’s confidence, and prepare them to be the best learner they can be!

Play, Learn and Grow...Together!
Living the Kindergarten Life!

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A KINDERGARTENER MAY INCLUDE:

✓ LEARNING OPPORTUNITES AND EXPERIENCES
✓ MAKING FRIENDS AND PRACTICING SOCIAL SKILLS
✓ EXPLORING OUTDOORS
✓ LISTENING TO STORIES AND PLAYING GAMES
✓ QUIET REFLECTION TIME
✓ LEARNING TO SOLVE PROBLEMS
✓ LEARNING INDEPENDENCE SKILLS
✓ HAVING FUN
What will my child learn in Kindergarten?

The Kindergarten curriculum in the province of British Columbia is a standard document produced by the Ministry of Education. This 50-page document outlines each subject area taught in Kindergarten: English language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, physical education, arts, and health and career education. Within each of these curricular areas, the Ministry lists specific skills that children are expected to be able to do by the end of the year, called prescribed learning outcomes. These prescribed learning outcomes make up the bulk of the Kindergarten curriculum. The prescribed learning outcomes are varied and generous in order to give Kindergarten teachers and students flexibility in their learning. The deepest learning in Kindergarten occurs when children are interested, engaged and have had some say in the topic about which they are learning. Also included in the Kindergarten curriculum document are achievement indicators, an assessment tool for teachers that describe what evidence to look for when determining if a student has grasped a particular skill or understanding. The Kindergarten curriculum is a public document available at the following website:

http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/irp/curric_grade_packages/grkcurric_req.pdf

Although the curriculum document is long, it is worth a browse before your child starts Kindergarten. Understanding the curriculum will help you to understand some of the activities and themes that will be addressed in the Kindergarten year.
Part Two

What is Kindergarten readiness?
Kindergarten readiness means that your child has developed and is continuing to develop the social, emotional, physical, and thinking skills to be successful in Kindergarten. It is important to note the development of these skills is a work-in-progress, and a child entering Kindergarten is not expected to have mastered all or any of these skills. Schools are simply looking for movement towards these skills. It is common for parents to think that academic preparedness such as knowing the ABC'S, numbers, shapes, and colours are the most important skills necessary for starting Kindergarten. You may be surprised to learn that although these skills are important, they are most definitely not the most important! In the Surrey School District we are interested in developing and nurturing the whole child. Kindergarten readiness can be understood in 5 domains:

*The majority of this handbook will be spent discussing these domains in greater detail.
Part Three

Welcome to Kindergarten

Kindergarten Readiness starts at home!
What you do with your child counts! Every adventure, experience, or opportunity to learn and grow means something to your child's developing mind. Encouraging curiosity, wonder, and exploration are some of the best ways to prepare your child for their school career.

SO WHAT CAN YOU DO?

Talk

Read

Play

Draw and write

Go places
TALK!

- Ask questions
- Talk to your child as you are going about your day; the more vocabulary your child hears, the better prepared he/she will be
- Tell stories, jokes, riddles

PLAY!

- Ensure your child has ample time to play
- The most beneficial play is open ended, hands on, and child-driven; i.e.: building a block tower and pretending he is the bulldozer coming to knock it down.
- Encourage your child to use their imagination!
- Play with your child, be silly!

GO PLACES!

- Take your child to new places
- Parks, community centers, play groups, museums etc.
- Take them to everyday places like the grocery store, dry cleaners, bank, etc.
- It is important to remember that what seem like mundane tasks for adults can be exciting adventures for a young child eager to learn

DRAW AND “WRITE”!

- Find some time to draw or “write” about your adventures together
- Engage in real life “writing” opportunities (grocery lists, to do lists);
Remember that scribbling and drawing are the beginning stages of “writing” and serve a very important purpose in early literacy.

- Encourage your child to draw pictures of family, friends, pets, etc.
- Ask your child to explain his/her masterpieces to you.

READ!

- Read as much as you can together!
- Allow your child to choose books he/she would like to read
- Allow time for your child to look at books and “read” to him/herself
- Make reading a part of your nightly routine (15-20 minutes)
- Visit the local library to take out new and exciting books each week
Part Four

Social and Emotional Development

A COMPREHENSIVE MISSION FOR SCHOOLS IS TO EDUCATE STUDENTS TO BE KNOWLEDGEABLE, RESPONSIBLE, SOCIALLY SKILLED, HEALTHY, CARING, AND CONTRIBUTING CITIZENS. — (Greenberg et al., 2003)

What is Social and Emotional Development?
Social and Emotional development refers to a child’s understanding, expression, and management of emotions, and the ability to establish positive and rewarding relationships with others.

More specifically, social and emotional development refers to the development of several important skills that will help your child navigate their way through Kindergarten with confidence and joy. Young children learn best when they feel safe, loved and supported!

Healthy social and emotional skills in young children include:
- Expressing empathy
- Relating well to adults
- Engaging in cooperative play with peers
- The ability to recognize and label emotions
- Demonstrating a sense of curiosity and eagerness to learn
- Expressing needs and wants
- Engaging in pretend play
SO WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE IN YOUNG CHILDREN?
I am developing strong social and emotional skills if...

✓ I talk to adults and ask for help when I need it
✓ I take turns, share, and help others
✓ I try new activities and ask lots of questions
✓ I can focus and pay attention for 15 minutes at a time
✓ I can follow 1-3 step instructions and directions, for example, “hang up your jacket, and take off your shoes”
✓ I enjoy playing independently and in a group
✓ I feel good about my abilities, and I am confident enough to take some risks!
✓ I can calm myself down when I feel angry or frustrated

SO HOW CAN YOU FOSTER THESE SKILLS IN YOUR CHILD?
➤ Set routines. Children feel safe and are more cooperative when they know what is expected of them
➤ Help your child find ways to calm down when they are frustrated. For example, count to 10 and take 5 deep breaths.
➤ Use positive statements to teach your child appropriate behaviour. For example, “I like how you shared your toy with your brother.”
➤ Help your child recognize and discuss their feelings and the feelings of others. For example, “It looks like you are feeling sad, can you tell me why?”
➤ Teach your child that all feelings and emotions are okay, but not all actions are okay. For example, it is okay to feel frustrated, but it is not okay to hit someone
➤ Set consistent limits
➤ Model use of good manners on a daily basis

➤ Find lots of time for play with friends. When children play together they will inevitably have opportunities to share, problem solve, take turns, and respect one another's feelings

➤ Talk to your child when they have made a mistake. Help him or her think of what they could do differently next time
Part Five

LANGUAGE AND LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

"Children who hear many words beginning at birth do significantly better in school. The most important aspect of parent talk is its amount" (Hart & Risley, 2005)

What is language and literacy development?
Language skills are thinking skills! Language and literacy development refers to a child’s ability to listen, understand and express themselves using language. The more words children hear and practice, the more confident they become in their ability to express themselves and the more capable learners they will become! So remember... use your words!

SO WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE IN YOUNG CHILDREN?
I am developing strong language and literacy skills if...

✓ I use words to talk about my needs, wants and feelings
✓ I can speak clearly enough that people understand me
✓ I can hear and understand the meaning of most words, stories and songs...and ask for help when I don’t understand
✓ I can listen and understand when spoken to (I can follow directions)
✓ I enjoy singing or re-telling familiar songs, rhymes, and stories
✓ I use complete sentences and can connect my ideas together in a way that makes sense
SO HOW CAN YOU FOSTER THESE SKILLS IN YOUR CHILD?

- Talk to your child as much as possible! Use everyday activities as time to engage in conversations with your child. For example, ask your child to tell you about the colours they see at the grocery store, or the tastes and textures of the food they are eating.
- Make reading a part of your everyday routine. Take 15 minutes a day to sit down and read with your child.
- Sing songs, rhymes, and poems with your child.
- Take your child to the library; allow them to choose books that interest them.
- Ask your child lots of questions! Ask them to describe things, re-tell events, or tell you how they feel.
- Be a language role model for your child. Be careful not to use slang language and, of course, refrain from using foul language.
- Listen carefully and mindfully when your child is talking. Show an interest in what they have to say!
- Continue to use your home language while engaging in language activities.
MOTOR SKILLS

What are motor skills?
Motor skills are motions performed when the brain, nervous system, and muscles work together. Motor skills can be understood in two categories: fine and gross. Fine motor skills are small movements such as picking up small objects and holding a spoon. Fine motor skills use small muscles such as the fingers, toes and wrists. Gross motor skills refer to large movements that use large muscle groups. Some gross motor skills are jumping, kicking, walking and throwing. The development of motor skills greatly impacts a child’s ability to feel confident. When they have a strong set of motor skills, children are more likely to take risks, and engage in their learning. Children need ample time to develop motor skills, and they need opportunities to develop and practice motor skills every day.

SO WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE IN YOUNG CHILDREN?
I am developing strong gross motor skills if...

✓ I can jump, hop and skip on my own
✓ I can walk up and down the stairs independently
✓ I can run without falling down
✓ I can throw and catch a ball from a short distance
✓ I can use playground equipment with confidence

I am developing strong fine motor skills if...

✓ I can use play dough to roll balls, make snakes, and other shapes
✓ I can use crayons, pencils, and pencil crayons with a correct 3-finger pencil grip
✓ I am learning to button, zip, and tie or Velcro shoes
✓ I can or am learning to zip or button my own coat
✓ I can build with materials such as Lego and blocks
✓ I can use scissors (with proper grip) to cut out large shapes or pictures
✓ I can feed myself with a spoon and fork
✓ I can put on most items of clothing by myself

**SO HOW CAN YOU FOSTER THESE SKILLS IN YOUR CHILD?**

- Take your child outside to play!
- Allow for ample time to run, jump, skip, ride a bike, or scooter
- Take your child to the playground and allow them to climb, balance, and swing
- Give your child ample opportunities to use tools such as pencils, crayons, and felts
- Encourage your child to draw and paint!
- Let your child play with play dough; ask them to make balls, snakes, etc.
- Allow your child to use scissors and cut often! Help them with proper grip
- Encourage your child to zip zippers and button buttons
- Play with Lego, blocks, and puzzles

**PENCIL GRIP DEVELOPMENT**

![Pencil Grip Development Diagram](image-url)
Part Seven

SELF-CARE

What is self-care?
Self-care refers to your child’s ability to take care of his or her personal needs, such as going to the bathroom and washing their hands. A child who has well-developed self-care skills will feel more confident in the classroom.

SO WHAT DOES THIS LOOK LIKE IN YOUNG CHILDREN?
I am developing strong self-care skills if...

✓ I can wash my hands by myself
✓ I can take care of myself in the bathroom (Of course accidents happen!)
✓ I can eat a snack and lunch with minimal assistance
✓ I am well rested (10-12 hours of sleep each night)
✓ I know my first and last name
✓ I can pack and unpack my own backpack
✓ I can clean up the materials I am using

SO WHAT CAN YOU DO TO FOSTER THESE SKILLS IN YOUR CHILD?
❖ Encourage your child to be independent
❖ Practice independent hand washing before every meal
❖ Insist your child cleans up their own toys, and takes care of some of their personal belongings
❖ Practice independent toileting
- Give your child ample opportunities to practice eating on their own. This includes opening packages and reusable containers
- Give your child some responsibilities around the house, for example, making their bed and bringing their dishes to the sink
Part Eight

BUILDING FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

“Research shows that a parent’s behaviour toward their child’s learning has a substantial effect on a child’s adjustment to the first year of school and beyond”

(Belsky & MacKinnon, 1994)

Helping your child prepare for their Kindergarten journey is one step in preparing for this exciting time. Equally as important is establishing a strong family-school partnership! A family-school partnership refers to the connection between the school and the family of the child attending the school. Schools strive to establish strong and positive relationships with the families they service. Education is a partnership between parents and school personnel; the more involved you become in your child’s schooling, the stronger the family-school partnership will become! There are many ways you can become involved in your child’s school!

Ways to establish a strong family-school partnership

✓ Talk to your child’s teacher on a regular basis

✓ Join the Parent Advisory Committee

✓ Take part in school-wide initiatives, for example, home reading

✓ Volunteer in your child’s classroom or other areas of the school, like the library

✓ Get to know the other children and parents in the classroom

✓ Ask your child questions about their day. For example, what did you play at recess?

Who did you talk to during centre time?
✓ Read notes and notices from the school; knowing what is going on will help you to feel involved!
STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS
The Surrey School District is proud of support inclusive education and classrooms. If you have a child with special needs, you may feel some extra anxiety about how the transition to Kindergarten will go. Teachers, administrators, educational assistants, and other professionals are here to make the transition as smooth as possible.

What can you do?
✓ Ensure that the school is aware of your child’s special needs
✓ Provide any documents you have that explain your child’s special need, for example, doctor’s reports
✓ Plan some extra visits to the school and arrange a meeting with the teacher, school principal, and other professionals
✓ Ask about the availability of services that your child may need, for example, speech and language, and occupational therapy

The more the school knows about your child’s strengths and weaknesses, the better. Communication is key!
Part Ten

**THE TRANSITION TO KINDERGARTEN**

**Tips to make the transition to Kindergarten as smooth as possible!**

Transitions can be challenging for everyone, regardless of age! Although the transition to Kindergarten may seem daunting at times, there are several things you can do to make the transition easier for everyone involved.

- Visit your child’s new school!
- Take part in Ready, Set, Learn programs if they are offered
- Take your child to the school’s Welcome to Kindergarten program or Kindergarten orientation events
- Take your child to the school playground to play!
- Talk to the school principal if you think your child will require a tour of the school or the classroom ahead of time.
- Make a countdown to Kindergarten at home, and talk about the exciting things your child will do in Kindergarten!
Part Eleven

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Below is a list of resources, articles, government documents, games, and websites that you may find helpful:

Motor Skills:

➤ The Imagination Tree- http://theimaginationtree.com/2013/09/40-fine-motor-skills-activities-for-kids.htm

Language and Literacy:

➤ http://www.starfall.com


Social and Emotional Development:


Government Publications:

➤ http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/primary_program/primary_prog.pdf

➤ http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/irp/curric_grade_packages/gmkcurric_req.pdf
Children's books about starting Kindergarten!

Here is a list of wonderful read-a-loud stories about starting Kindergarten. Happy Reading!

- Miss Bindergarten Gets Ready for Kindergarten - Joseph Slate
- Kindergarten Here I Come - D.J Steinberg
- Countdown to Kindergarten - Allison McGhee
- Kindergarten Rocks - Katie Davis
- The Kissing Hand - Audrey Penn
- The Night Before Kindergarten - Natasha Wing
• Welcome to Kindergarten- Anne Rockwell
• Wemberly Worried- Kevin Henkes
Studies used to write this handbook:

All images used in this handbook are open source and taken from Microsoft Clip art and Design Gallery.


Chapter 5: Conclusions

Teaching Kindergarten is my passion; it brings me great pleasure to be a child’s first introduction to his or her school career. Bringing a child into his or her formal schooling years is not a task that should be taken lightly, and is one that should be done with a great deal of thought and care. As a Kindergarten teacher, I sometimes hear comments such as, “oh, it is not a big deal, it is just Kindergarten” or “all they do is play anyway”; these comments are an example of the misinformation that exists regarding the value of Kindergarten learning and the importance of Kindergarten readiness. Having taught Kindergarten for several years now, I see that these comments come from a place of confusion; parents and caregivers are often unaware of what to expect in their children’s Kindergarten year and what is expected from them and their children.

There were several motivating reasons for creating this handbook. One of the reasons is my passion for early learning; it seemed to me that there were plenty of “get ready” programs or documents widely available for children entering other grades, but nowhere near as many well-researched and thoughtful documents discussing Kindergarten readiness. I felt strongly that parents deserved a well-researched and easy-to-read document that would support them as they transition their young children into their school careers. Another motivating reason was to encourage parents to take an active role in their children’s education. If teachers, school administrators, and other personnel want parents to be involved, right from the beginning, we need to provide them with information about how they can do this in ways that are developmentally-appropriate and research-based. I believe that this handbook gives parents a guide that outlines how they can support their young learners and start out their school careers as involved and informed parents.
Perhaps the most important motivating factor behind writing this handbook was to develop a document that focused on the whole child, versus focusing only on academic preparedness. In my experience, parents felt as though they had “prepared” their children for Kindergarten if they could recite the ABC song and count to 10. Although academic preparedness is important, it is not the most important skill when evaluating Kindergarten readiness. Social and emotional preparedness, along with the development of self-care and motor skills, are as important when assessing a child’s readiness for school. A child who feels confident in his or her ability to complete a task with independence, such as zipping up a jacket, and who has developed strategies on how to play cooperatively, will inevitably find Kindergarten a happier and more meaningful place than a child who struggles with these moment-to-moment tasks. I feel as though I have developed a well-balanced handbook, which outlines the most important readiness skills necessary for children entering Kindergarten, in a way that is easy to read and understand.

Throughout this project, I analyzed government publications on early learning, Kindergarten readiness guides, as well as scholarly research. All of the information obtained from these sources helped serve as the framework for my own handbook. In using the research methodology of qualitative content analysis, I was able to sift through large amounts of information and glean the important messages from all the sources used.

It is important to note the limitations to my project. The audience for this handbook is the families of the Surrey School District, and more especially, the families at the school at which I teach. I did not involve these families in my research directly; that is, I did not ask them what information they would like to see in the handbook, as this type of research was out of my scope. I did use, however, my experience as a Kindergarten teacher and with parents to help
guide my decision making in what information to include in the handbook. I am a beginning researcher, and this is my first time using content analysis and writing a project of this extent; therefore, I expect there to be instances where my research is not done perfectly or like an experienced researcher. I followed the project procedure to the best of my ability and consulted my supervisor at all steps along the way to ensure I was on the right track.

I think it is also important to note some ways in which I believe the handbook can be made more accessible. For the purposes of this project, I created the handbook in paper format. However, I think it would be wise to have the handbook both accessible in print and online, on school websites as well as the district website which would ensure that the handbook reaches as many parents and caregivers as possible. Another recommendation I have is to ensure that the handbook stays up to date with the latest research in early learning. I would suggest that the handbook be reviewed and updated each year to ensure it is current and founded in the most recent research.

This project has been a labour of love! As I reflect back on the experience of completing my Master's degree I am overcome with feelings of pride, exhaustion, and exhilaration. Completing this degree has been a dream of mine for several years and to be at the end of my journey is incredibly exciting. I believe that the parent handbook is a valuable and much needed resource for parents at my school and within the Surrey School District. Writing this handbook has helped to develop my personal as well as professional understanding of early learning. I feel strongly that parents and children alike will benefit from the use of this handbook. When parents feel informed and in the loop about Kindergarten readiness, their children will inevitably be more successful in their Kindergarten year. As a Kindergarten teacher, this is my ultimate goal: to ensure the happiness and deep learning of children and parents alike.
References


