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Title: An Exploratory Investigation into Fathers' Perspectives of School Readiness.

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, the global focus on Early Child Development (ECD) has delivered mounting evidence of it being one of the most rewarding areas of investment a country can make. A central outcome of quality ECD is to provide sufficient support to enable a child to arrive at Grade 1 ready to learn. Environmental factors impacting on child development and school readiness have thus been under increasing scrutiny. Although studies have delivered evidence of fathers' unique contribution to ECD, fathers' impact on a child's school readiness is often overlooked. The overall aim of this thesis was to report on the findings of the exploratory investigation on fathers' perspectives of school readiness. All relevant ethics principles were observed in the study. The study received ethics clearance from the Senate Research Committee (HS/16/5/41). The study followed an explorative design incorporating qualitative methodologies for data collection and analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a sample of nine fathers residing in Cape Town, who had full parental rights and responsibilities for their child in Grade R. Thematic analysis produced three themes with subthemes. The core findings suggested that first, fathers did not have a good fund of knowledge about school readiness and child development. Personal context and subjective experiences impacted or informed their views and beliefs about school readiness. Second, feedback from teachers and professionals was highly valued and was a primary source of information about their children's school readiness. Third, facilitating school readiness involved different systems and role players of which fathers are important role players. It emerged that in some ways the role of fathers remains undervalued and in others, fathers' ability to participate is diminished due to their fund of knowledge, gendered patterns to child rearing and engagement with school systems.

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis entitled, "*An Exploratory Investigation into Fathers' Perspectives of School Readiness*", is my own work. It has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university, and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by complete references.

Signed......~~Meyjbargh~~......
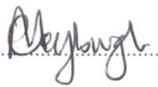
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The fathers who were willing to allow me into your world. Thank you for sharing your valuable time and thoughts with me.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

DBE	Department of Basic Education
DoE	Department of Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DSD	Department of Social Development
DSS	Department of Social Services
ECCE	Early Child Care and Education
ECD	Early Child Development
EDMT	Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition
Grade 1	First year of formal schooling
Grade R	Reception year
NCF	National Curriculum Framework
NDP	National Development Plan
NEGP	National Education Goals Panel
NICHD	National Institute of Child Health and Human Development
NIECDP	National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy
NPC	National Planning Commission
ORIM	Opportunities, Recognition, Interaction, Modelling
RSA	Republic of South Africa
SA	South Africa
SEH	Social-emotional health
TA	Thematic Analysis
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
UWC	University of the Western Cape
USA	United States of America
WHO	World Health Organization

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been an increase in studies that focused on fathers' contribution to early child development (e.g., Allen & Daly, 2007; Ball, 2007; Flouri & Buchanan, 2004; Harris, 2016; Hebrard, 2017; Howard et al., 2006; McWayne, Downer, Campos & Harris, 2013; Paquette, 2004). However, the area of father's beliefs, ideas and actions regarding school readiness has remained understudied (Cowan & Cowan, 2009; Rimm-Kaufman & Zhang, 2005; Thomas, 2008). The aim of this research was to explore fathers' perspectives of school readiness. The focus was on fathers' subjective thoughts about school readiness as they experienced the process of preparing their Grade R child for Grade 1. This study aimed to address a gap in the research about fathers' perspectives of their children's school readiness in a South African context.

1.1 Background to the study

The plight of children around the world has necessitated the development of laws, policies and plans to acknowledge and further their basic human rights (Britto, 2012; UNICEF, 2016). In providing ECD services, the South African Government fulfills its obligation to protect children's rights as stipulated by the Constitution as well as international law. For example, the Millennium Declaration (Hall, Sambu, Berry, Giese & Almeleh, 2017; Richter et al., 2012) and the National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy approved by Cabinet in December 2015 (Republic of South Africa (RSA), 2015). The policy describes an essential package which consists of services that are a necessary precondition for the realisation of young children's constitutional rights, namely, maternal and child health services, nutritional support, support for primary caregivers, social services and stimulation for early learning (Hall et al., 2017). There

were, however, many challenges with the roll-out and implementation of these services (Atmore, Van Niekerk & Ashley-Cooper, 2012a). The realization of comprehensive ECD services is contingent on collaboration between the systems in the child's network (Hall et al., 2017), for example, between families and schools. Hall et al. (2017) reported that ECD services were urgently needed to support the development of the next generation in the South African context where most children grow up in low socio-economic status communities.

1.2 The Importance of Early Childhood Development (ECD)

The topic of school readiness is nestled within the framework of ECD, under the Early Child Care and Education (ECCE) category of ECD services: "services and programmes that provide care and developmentally appropriate educational stimulation for groups of young children in centres and/or in community- or home-based programmes" (Richter et al., 2012: p. 13). There is no universal definition of early childhood (Farrell, Kagan & Tisdall, 2016), which has an impact on policies relating to the period when ECD service provision should begin and end. In South Africa, ECD is defined in the amended Children's Act (Department of Social Services (DSS), 2007) as "the process of emotional, cognitive, sensory, spiritual, moral, physical, social and communication development of children from birth to school going age" (Berry, Jamieson & James 2011: p. 17). ECD services generally include all those that promote or support the development of young children (Richter et al., 2012).

ECD has been a subject of global focus, evident in the increased amount of research, goals and action plans developed since the nineties (Black et al., 2016) by for example, the World Health Organization (WHO), World Bank and the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) (Daelmans et al., 2015; Irwin, Siddiqi & Hertzman, 2007; Sayre, Devercelli, Neuman, Sayre, &

Wodon, 2015; United Nations, 2015). It is considered the most powerful investment a country can make in reducing poverty and inequality (Rolnick & Grunewald, 2003). Investment in ECD not only has the potential to reduce inequality, but also to raise productivity, and therefore holds significant economic and social benefits for a country (Atmore, Van Niekerk & Ashley-Cooper, 2012b; Van der Berg et al., 2013). High quality early childhood education programmes were found to be among the most cost-effective educational interventions (Yoshikawa et al., 2013). Furthermore, the estimated long-term returns on investment in ECD are 13.7% per annum (Elango, Garcia, Heckman & Hojman, 2015; Garcia, Heckman, Leaf & Prados, 2016). For these reasons, ECD services are a priority of national social-economic importance (Richter et al, 2012).

The early years of a child's life lay the foundation for several outcomes, including but not limited to, cognitive- and social development (Camilli, Vargas, Ryan & Barnett, 2010; Gormley, Gayer, Phillips & Dawson, 2005); physical health (Hall et al., 2017; Schulman, 2005); education and personal income, life expectancy, as well as personal and social adjustment (Irwin et al., 2007; Richter et al., 2012a; Van der Berg et al., 2013). There is thus compelling evidence that ECD services make an impact, both on a personal and societal level (Martin, 2012). What is more, ECD services have the potential to provide support for children who might otherwise be trapped in a cycle of deprivation (Martin, 2012; Richter et al., 2012a). It is therefore in the interest of every citizen to support the investment of time and resources in ECD.

1.2.1 ECD and school readiness

Mental stimulation in the early years is important for children's development on all levels and enhances their ability to learn in school (Van Niekerk, Ashley-Cooper & Atmore, 2017). There is convincing evidence that ECD interventions produce significant benefits in terms of

school readiness and achievement, especially among underprivileged children (García et al., 2016; Naudeau & World Bank, 2011). One of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals now includes a specific ECD target (among several other relevant targets for young children): "By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys have access to quality early childhood development, care, and preprimary education so that they are ready for primary education" (Naudeau & Hasan, 2016).

In South Africa, one of the means to prepare children for primary education is through the provision of a reception year, known as Grade R. The Department of Basic Education (DBE) is progressively expanding its provision to make Grade R compulsory (DoE, 2001a). Great strides have already been made towards access to ECCE services as evidenced by the 83% of children who are currently enrolled in Grade R (South Africa National Planning Commission (SA NPC), 2012; Van der Berg et al., 2013). The Medium Term Strategic Framework 2014-2019 (Department of Social Development (DSD), 2014) highlights the focus on improving the quality of Grade R and simultaneously expanding provision to pre-Grade R (DSD, 2014; SA NPC, 2012). Grade R links ECD services to primary schools and is potentially the strongest component in preparing, as well as assessing children for formal schooling (SA NPC, 2012).

1.2.2 Parent involvement in ECD and school readiness

Notwithstanding Government's attempts to provide a supportive framework for ECD, the onus of child development and preparation for school primarily rests on parents/caregivers. One of the key ideas informing the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) is the importance of families as the first teachers of a child (DBE, 2015). The rapidly growing literature on parents' involvement in ECD and specifically school readiness, reflects the global focus on ECD (Kernan, 2012). However, researchers identified a gap in literature as family studies used the

term parent synonymously with that of mother (Cowan & Cowan, 2009; Lewis, 2014) and fathers thus remained understudied. Lewis (2014) maintained that the last forty years delivered many research studies involving fathers, but a gap about support services offered to fathers in the pre-school years remains.

It is evident that appropriate early childhood care and education (ECCE) play a significant role in a child's readiness for school. Despite legislation that advances their rights, with nearly two-thirds of children under six in South Africa living in the poorest 40% of households (Hall et al., 2017), the urgency with which ECCE services are required cannot be met by Government alone. Parents and caregivers remain the child's first agents of ECCE (Pelletier & Brent, 2002) and fathers play a significant, but often less visible role (Lewis, 2014). Understanding fathers' subjective experiences could contribute to the development of suitably empowering interventions to the benefit of the child.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Only a small number of studies have examined fathers' involvement in school during the preschool years (Cowan & Cowan, 2009; Downer & Mendez, 2005; Rimm-Kaufman & Zhang, 2005; Thomas, 2008). Moreover, research relating to the role of parents in their children's school transition, highlighted that information specifically about the role of fathers was extremely sparse (Cowan & Cowan, 2009; Thomas, 2008). Early literature in the field of school readiness focused mostly on assessment practices of the child's competencies needed to enter mainstream education successfully (Britto, 2012). Studies that expanded their focus beyond that of the child focused more on the role of the mother (Baker & Iruka, 2013; McCartney, 1990, in Britto, 2012; Early et al., 2002; Harris, 2016; Kim & Hill, 2015; Morgan, Nutbrown & Hannon,

2009; Paquette, 2004; Winter & Kelley, 2008). In a context where many children are at risk for school failure, it is essential to develop a variety of strategies to prevent and offset the damages caused by the environment. For the enhancement of such strategies and considering father's influential role in ECCE (Lewis, 2014), it would be useful to know what fathers' subjective perspectives are in relation to their children's school readiness.

1.4 Rationale

The Ministry of Basic Education demonstrated the importance of ECD with the following statement: "The care and development of young children must be the foundation of social relations and the starting point of human resource development strategies from community to national levels" (Department of Education (DoE), 1995: 31). Government's intent to improve the lives of children was written into law. The Children's Act 38 of 2005 (as amended by Act 41 of 2007) supports children's constitutional rights and provides a legal framework for ECD services (Berry et al., 2011). Laws and policy directives such as the National Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy (RSA, 2015), Whitepaper 5 on ECD (DoE, 2001a), Whitepaper 6 on Inclusive Education (DoE, 2001b), Green Paper on Families (Department of Social Development (DSD), 2011) and The National Development Plan 2030 (SA NPC, 2012) provided impetus for the study.

Compared to other countries, South Africa has very high dropout rates in basic education, as half of every cohort that enters the school system is lost by the end of the 12-year schooling period (De Lannoy, Swartz, Lake & Smith, 2015; South Africa, 2012; Spaull, 2015). This could in part be due to children arriving in Grade 1 not ready to learn (Samuels et al., 2015), as school readiness influences the trajectory of school performance (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000).

Researchers recommended that awareness about the vital role that parents/caregivers play in supporting a child's early learning should be raised (Van der Berg et al., 2013).

Literature pointed out the significant positive effects of father involvement on academic achievement and general success in life (Lamb, 2003, in Britto, 2012; Cabrera, Shannon & Tamis-LeMonda, 2007; Flouri & Buchanan 2004; Howard et al., 2006). Similarly, literature pointed out negative effects of father absenteeism and uninvolved fathers (Gray & Anderson, 2015; Jaffee, Caspi, Moffitt, Taylor & Dickson, 2001; McLanahan, Tach & Schneider, 2013; Rabe, 2007). Thomas (2008) reported that very little is known about what fathers think preparation for school should entail or what fathers' understandings are of school readiness. Hebrard (2017) concurred with this sentiment nine years later. Thus, the rationale for this study was to provide a voice for an often-overlooked partner in the task of providing conditions for optimal development of children.

1.5 Aim of the study

The overall aim of the study was to explore fathers' perspectives of school readiness.

1.6 Objectives

a)   To explore fathers' understanding of what school readiness entails

b)   To determine what fathers' perspectives are about the constructs and domains involved in school readiness

c)   To explore perceptions of the role or relative contribution fathers make in facilitating a child's school readiness

d)   To identify barriers and facilitators that exert influence on fathers' involvement in the facilitation of school readiness

1.7 Theoretical Framework

The present study adopted the Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000) as theoretical framework. This model is based on several ecologically oriented system theories e.g., Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998), Pianta and Walsh (1996) and Sameroff (1995). This theoretical framework was designed to guide research about the transition from kindergarten to formal school (Grade R to Grade 1 in South Africa), which provided impetus to use it as a framework for the present study.

The Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition accepted that successful transition to school has a major impact on a child's educational trajectory. The authors proposed that the child's competence cannot be completely understood without recognising the relationships between the child and the multiple systems that influence the child's development, such as, home, school, peer, family and neighbourhood contexts, and specifically, how these relationships change over time. Once the influence of these relationships is recognised, it points to the need to better understand the interactions between the multiple systems that influence a child's development, and ultimately, school readiness (LoCasale-Crouch, Gosse & Pianta, 2009). The schematic diagram in Figure 1 depicts the interaction between contexts that change or remain stable during the transition from Grade R to Grade 1.
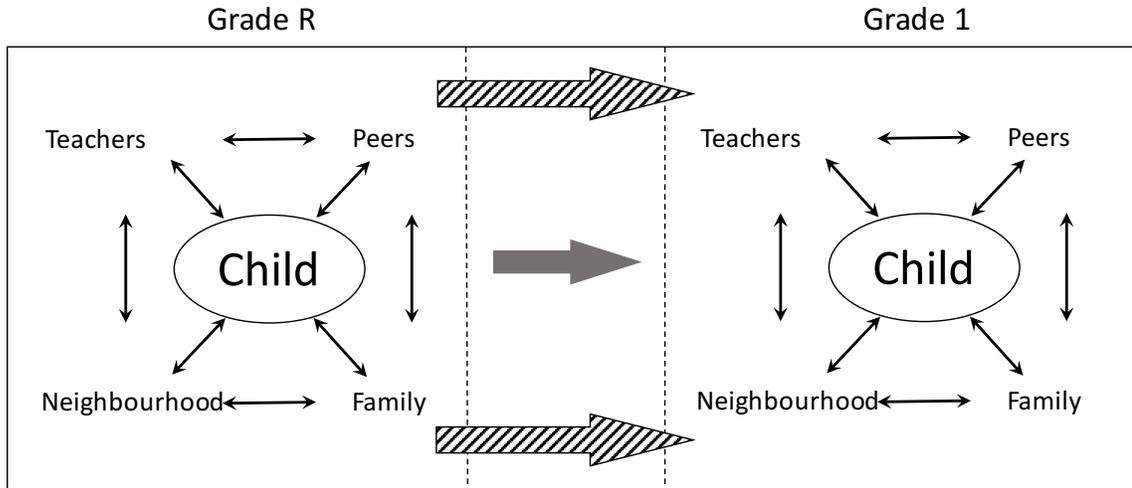
Figure 1: The Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition (adapted from Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000).

At the center of this model is the child (see Figure 1). According to this model, child attributes, such as temperament and intelligence, are affected by external factors, such as family, neighbourhood, teachers, and peers. Bold arrows between Grade R and Grade 1 diagrams represent time. Smaller arrows within each diagram represent relationships between the child and home, school, peer, and neighbourhood contexts. The large arrows depict two types of links: a) the interactions between contexts that change from Grade R to Grade 1 (for example conversations between Grade R and Grade 1 teachers), and b) continuity between contexts that remain stable over time, for example, the same school premises, in a case where Grade R forms part of the primary school (Little, Cohen-Vogel & Curran, 2016; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000).

The Economic and Dynamic Model of Transition is built on three other models that have formed the foundation for policy for several years. The first model (Child Effects Model) focused exclusively on the skills and abilities that the child brings to school as a measure of the child's school readiness. The second model (Direct Effects Model) acknowledged that the

ecology of the child's life, that is, the child's environment, in addition to the child's abilities, had an impact on their school readiness. The third underlying model (Indirect Effects Model) included the interrelationships between the teacher, family, peers, and community on a child's transition to school. The Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition, acknowledged all the factors in Model One to Three, with an emphasis on how these relationships change over time.

1.7.1 Model One, the Child Effects Model

This maturational model focused on the skills or abilities of the child at a given point in time as the primary measure of school readiness. For example, how many letters a child could write at the end of Grade R. There was little or no consideration for ecological or developmental influences. This model failed to consider how changeable children's abilities are, both across time and situations, during this phase of life (La Paro & Pianta, 2001). Most definitions of school readiness were based on this model of the acquired competencies of children and excluded the effect of circumstances, for example, quality of Grade R teaching or teacher-child relationships, that affected these competencies (Downer, Driscoll & Pianta, 2006; Mashburn & Pianta, 2006). This model continues to inform most school transition policies (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000).

1.7.2 Model Two, the Direct Effects Model

The Direct Effects Model acknowledged the effects of child attributes, as well as the direct impact of the social context (school, neighbourhood, peers and family) on children's ability to adjust to school. There exists sufficient evidence of the importance of direct contexts on the child's development, such as the family (e.g., Dotterer, Iruka, & Pungello, 2012), the school environment (e.g. Britto & Limlingan, 2012), and the neighbourhood (e.g. Jeon, Buettner & Hur, 2014). Model Two mostly considered this relationship in terms of a singular,

unidirectional effect of a context on child competence, for example, the study on father involvement during early childhood and its association with children's early learning by McWayne et al. (2013). Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) suggest that this line of research contributed to the understanding of the transition to school for at-risk children.

1.7.3 Model Three, the Indirect Effects Model

This model addressed the interrelationships between these contexts and the direct and indirect effects of the contexts on a child's development. It also included the bidirectional influence between child factors and the child's social networks and the significance of their combined effect. "Child characteristics interact with contexts through a transactional process – the child is affected by his or her context and the context, to some degree, is affected by characteristics of the child (Sameroff, 1995 in Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta, 2000: p. 498). For example, father involvement in ECD has an indirect effect on children's experiences and relationships at school (Britto & Limlingan, 2012; Howard et al., 2006), which in turn affects children's behaviour at school and home as well as the trajectory of the child's school success.

1.7.4 Model Four, the Dynamic Effects Model. The Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition.

Finally, the Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition acknowledges the combined effects of child, direct, indirect, and dynamic effects of contexts on children's transition to school. The main difference is that this model focuses on the development of relationships over time. Over time, the dynamic interactions between the child and the environment form patterns and relationships, that influence the child directly and indirectly.

The authors further highlighted how the quality of relationships within the transition ecology could affect the child: If these relationships are characterized by frequent contact,

agreed-upon goals, and a focus on supporting the child and the child's development of skills, they could contribute to positive transition outcomes. However, if these relationships lack a certain quality, to the extent that these relationships lack quality, they contribute to risk. The model therefore also provides a new way of evaluating risk.

The authors proposed that this model has certain implications for policy, practice and research which can be summarised in four key points: Firstly, to fully comprehend the complexity of early school transitions, the influence of multiple contexts on the child's capabilities should be recognised. Further research is required to examine the effect of the range of contexts (home, neighbourhood, community, school) on a child entering formal schooling. Secondly, investigation into the links among the contexts - home, school, peers, and neighbourhood - that play a role in this important period of a child's school career is needed, as these links have indirect effects on children's transition to school. Thirdly, longitudinal research into how the relationships among contexts develop and change over time could be helpful in understanding, as well as influencing this social system's effect on effectively bridging the gap to school. Lastly, the model also provided a new way of understanding risk associated with the transition to formal schooling. New patterns of relationships develop as the child prepares to be integrated into the new school context. "These relationships may mitigate or exacerbate risk status among diverse groups of children. Systematic research on these relationship patterns may lead to their reformulation, and related policy may ultimately enhance relationship sustainability over time" (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000: p. 503). This study attempted to contribute to the understanding of these relationship patterns.

1.8 Thesis Organization

This thesis was organized into five chapters. Chapter One provided background to the study, which included an overview of the importance of ECD services as it pertains to a child's school readiness. Chapter Two provided an overview of the literature related to the topic: a holistic approach to defining the term school readiness, beyond a child's capabilities, to include the stakeholders in the child's context. The chapter was concluded with a section dedicated to the literature on fathers as it relates to ECD and school readiness. Chapter Three, Methodology, described in detail the approach adopted for this study. The aims of research, data collection methods used, participant selection processes, and data analysis were presented. It concluded with the practice of reflexivity as a method of enhancing the trustworthiness of the data and ethics considerations of the study. Chapter Four presented the findings obtained from the data collection and analysis. The different themes which emerged through data analysis were discussed with supporting quotations from the interviews. Chapter Five concluded the study with a summary of the complete research study, a discussion of the findings in relation to the theoretical framework; the Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition, and the limitations and recommendations for further research.

The rules of APA Style®, as detailed in the sixth edition of the Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association® (APA) were used as a general guideline, within the framework of University of the Western Cape (UWC) requirements for the layout of this master's thesis.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

The body of literature presented in this chapter covers 1) Historical perspectives, definitions and domains of school readiness, 2) School readiness as a function of the home- and class environment with a specific focus on Grade R, and 3) Stakeholders in school readiness, including children, schools and families, concluding with the literature about fathers' involvement in ECD and school readiness.

Three main bodies of literature inform discussions about school readiness (Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2017). The first body is based on large-scale surveys that examined the views of stakeholders (e.g., teachers and parents) on their perception of school readiness. The second body of research examined definitions of school readiness by considering the relative importance of cognitive, social, and self-regulatory skills, as well as chronological age. The third body of work examined school readiness and child outcomes in the early years of school as a function of classroom and family experiences. There also seemed to be a recent upsurge in studies about the school readiness of high-risk children (e.g., Abenavoli, Greenberg & Bierman, 2017; Bailey, 2014; Bono, Sy & Kopp, 2016; Isaacs, 2012; Landry et al., 2017; Pratt, McClelland, Swanson & Lipscomb, 2016).

Researchers have showed that information on fathers in school psychology literature was scarce, for example, only nine out of a thousand articles reviewed included fathers, and only one of those focused on fathers (Greif & Greif, 2004). A growing body of literature, with a focus on fathers and their unique contributions to early child development, has subsequently developed (Allen & Daly, 2007; Harris, 2016; McWayne et al., 2013; Paquette, 2004). However, the

subjective views of fathers about school readiness remain largely understudied (Hebrard, 2017; Thomas, 2008).

2.1. Historical Perspectives of School Readiness

The research on readiness that has occurred since the late nineteen-sixties has been predicated on theoretical perspectives that have evolved over the past 100 years (Winter & Kelley, 2008). Meisels (1998) proposed that there are four theoretical perspectives underpinning definitions of school readiness, namely the Idealist/Nativist view, the Empiricist/Environmental view, the Social Constructivist view and the Interactionist view.

2.1.1. The Idealist/Nativist View

This is a maturationist view that holds that children's natural potential unfolds with time and there is nothing to be done to accelerate it (Dockett & Perry, 2002). Such maturational models place the responsibility of school readiness almost entirely with the child (Noel, 2010), rather than shifting the focus to prepare ECD centres or schools to receive all children (Winter & Kelley, 2008). From this perspective, it is often advised that children remain in Grade R for another year if they are deemed not ready for formal schooling.

2.1.2. The Environmental View

In contrast to an internal process, the Environmental view defines readiness in terms of children's behaviour or skills exhibited, such as identifying colours, numbers or letters of the alphabet. According to this view of school readiness, lacking skills can be identified and taught (Dockett & Perry, 2002; Meisels, 1998). As with the Idealist/nativist view, this perspective leaves the responsibility for the child's transition to school primarily with the child and parents (Noel, 2010).

2.1.3. The Social Constructivist View

From this perspective, the focus shifts from internal or external characteristics of the child, to the meaning ascribed to readiness by the community in which the child lives. In other words, readiness is constructed by the ideas of people in communities, schools and families, and its meaning is therefore expected to vary in different contexts (Dockett & Perry, 2002; Meisels, 1998).

2.1.4. The Interactionist View

The Interactionist View considers both the child characteristics and context, and its bidirectional influence on each other. It forms the premise on which ecological models are based (e.g., Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Pianta & Walsh; 1996; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000; Sameroff, 1995). Such models consider the web of child, family, school, peer, and community factors that are interconnected and interdependent on one another throughout the transition period.

2.2. Defining School Readiness

The literature shows no consensus on a definition for school readiness (Zigler, Gilliam & Jones, 2006 in Sícím, 2011; Texas Early Learning Council, 2011). This has implications for assessment as well as preparation required to facilitate school readiness by both parents and educators (Mohamed, 2013). Teachers and parents have differing views of school readiness. For example, teachers emphasize readiness in the social and self-regulatory domains, whereas parents emphasize basic academic skills (Dockett & Perry, 2004).

School readiness seems to be a concept that evolves as new research become available. In America, 21 different states have each developed their own definition as it relates to their goals for improving school readiness (Texas Early Learning Council, 2011). There, the importance of

school readiness is such that the state of Texas, for example, appointed a council of 19 members focusing specifically on getting young children school ready (Texas Early Learning Council, 2011).

A narrow definition of school readiness places emphasis on preparing children so that they develop a specific set of academic skills and abilities. For example, follow directions, demonstrate reading and reasoning skills, and carry out independent work, by the time they enter school (Kamerman, 2008). The USA National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) published a broader definition in 1991 that included the influence of families, schools and communities (Texas Early Learning Council, 2011). For this study, the definition provided by UNICEF (Britto, 2012), derived from that of the NEGP, was adopted as it considers the impact of the ecological context and is described along three facets namely, ready children, ready schools and ready families.

Ready children focus on children's learning and development that enables them to participate in the classroom. *Ready schools* focus on the school environment along with practices that foster and support a smooth transition for children into primary school and advance and promote the learning of all children. R*eady families* focus on parental and caregiver attitudes and involvement in their children's early learning and development, and transition to school. All three dimensions are important and must work in parallel, because school readiness is a time of transition that requires the interface between individuals, families and systems (Britto, 2012: p. 7).

In South Africa, the Department of Education has yet to develop specific guidelines or documents on the criteria for school readiness or the assessment thereof (Mohamed, 2013). The foregoing discussion highlighted the complexity of defining the concept of school readiness that

means different things to different people (Dockett & Perry, 2009). Regrettably, when all parties involved come to decision-making about a child's "readiness", the focus on the child's characteristics remain, even when those involved recognise that an individual child's readiness is only one element of a successful transition to school (Dockett & Perry, 2009). The problem with defining school readiness only according to the attributes of the child is that it does not take into consideration the environmental influences that impact on a child's development (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000; Thomas, 2008). Thus, research on school readiness remain a focus of further research with an extended focus that includes environmental influences, such as parenting and father-child relationships.

2.3 Dimensions/domains of School Readiness

There is consensus that school readiness is a multi-dimensional construct that refers to five developmental domains (McTurk, Lea, Robinson, Nutton & Carapetis, 2011). In 1990, the President of America and his state Governors established the National Education Goals which popularised the notion that every child must start school ready to learn (Kagan, Moore & Bredenkamp, 1995). This led to a Technical Planning Group tasked with establishing common views and vocabulary for early development. The Technical Planning Group suggested that early learning and development embraced five dimensions and these became widely accepted in the early childhood field (Kagan et al., 1995; Wesley & Buysse, 2003). These dimensions/domains that provided a measure for school readiness, included physical health and well-being; social and emotional development; approaches to learning; language development, and cognition and general knowledge (Belfield & Garcia, 2014; Hanover Research, 2013; Janus & Offord, 2007; Kagan et al.,1995; Winter & Kelley, 2012). The five dimensions of school readiness, though

interconnected, are separated for clarity in the discussion below. It further highlights that not all

domains have been equally adopted into research as a focus.

2.3.1 Physical health and well-being

Children who are ready in this domain, can meet the physical challenges of school.

Physical health and well-being refers to "children's physical preparedness for the school day, fine

and gross motor skills, energy level throughout the day, and physical independence" (Janus &

Offord, 2007). Unique to this domain is the effect of children's experiences and circumstances

(contextual factors) before they are born and very early during infancy, on their later well-being

(Fauth & Thompson, 2009). Table 2.1 summarizes the aspects of the domain of physical health

and well-being.

Table 2.1
Physical health and well-being

Domain of school readiness	Description	Competencies children develop	Contextual factors
Physical health and well-being	Physical health can be evaluated along three categories: 1. Physical development 2. Physical abilities 3. Background and contextual factors	1. Physical development: – overall rate of growth – level of fitness – body physiology 2. Physical abilities: – gross and fine motor skills – oral motor skills – sensorimotor skills – functional performance	1. Perinatal context 2. Caregiving environment 3. Health care utilization

Note. Kagan et al. (1995)

Table 2.1 provides a description of the categories along which physical health and well-

being can be evaluated, an overview of the competencies children develop and the contextual

factors that influence the child's physical health and motor development.

2.3.2 Social-emotional development

Social-emotional development is the foundation of how children learn and it begins years

before children enter school, in infancy (Pitcl, Provance & Kerslake, 2006; Goldstein-Ferber,

2010 in StGeorge & Fletcher, 2012). Social-emotional development in early childhood is

described in terms of "self-control, assertion, and cooperation, social competence, self-concept,

self-esteem, empathy, and emotion and behavior regulation" (Harris, 2016: p. 3). Gains in social-

emotional skills during preschool uniquely predicted reading performance and learning

engagement at the end of kindergarten (Grade R), even after concurrent preschool gains in

academic skills were accounted for (Welsh, Nix, Blair, Bierman & Nelson, 2010).

Table 2.2 provides a summary of characteristics of the domain of social-emotional

development.

Table 2.2
Social-emotional development

Domain of school readiness	Description	Competencies children develop	Contextual factors
Social-emotional development	It involves a sense of personal well-being that comes from stable inter-actions in children's early lives and interactions that enable children to participate in classroom activities that are positive for themselves, their classmates, and their teachers.	1. Emotional development: – self-concept – temperament – expression – self-efficacy 2. Social development: cooperate with peers ability to form and maintain reciprocal friendships	1. Internal, biological factors 2. External, cultural factors

Note. Kagan et al. (1995)

Table 2.2 provides a description of social-emotional development, an overview of the

competencies children develop, and the contextual factors that influence social-emotional

development of the child.

2.3.3 Approaches to learning

Approaches to learning refers to "a set of domain-general skills that encompass curiosity, persistence, planning, and engagement in group learning" (Bustamante, White & Greenfield, 2017: p. 112). It is one of the core school readiness domains, specifically significant in the prediction of school readiness in mathematics and language in preschoolers from low-income families (McWayne, Fantuzzo & McDermott, 2004). Parental and teacher expectations of children vary by children's gender and seem to impact children's attitudes and motivations (Kagan et al., 1995).

Bustamante and colleagues (2017) were the first to empirically demonstrate a unique relationship between approaches to learning and science, which may suggest that intentionally fostering children's approaches to learning in preschool could boost their science learning and potentially help narrow the school readiness and science achievement gaps that exist between privileged and disadvantages learners. Table 2.3 provides a summary of characteristics of the domain related to approaches to learning.

Table 2.3
Approaches to learning

Domain of school readiness	Description	Competencies children develop	Contextual factors
Approaches to learning	The inclinations, dispositions, or styles rather than skills that reflect the myriad ways that children become involved in learning and develop their inclinations to pursue it	Learning styles: – Openness to and curiosity about new tasks and challenges – Initiative, task persistence and attentiveness – Reflection and interpretation – Imagination and invention – Cognitive styles	1. Predispositions: – Gender – Temperament – Cultural patterns and values

Note. Kagan et al. (1995)

Table 2.3 provides a description of approaches to learning, an overview of the competencies children develop and the contextual factors that influence the child's approach to learning.

2.3.4 Language development

The language development dimension is closely linked to the social-emotional dimension as children learn to express themselves according to the customs of the community in which they grow up (Kagan et al., 1995). Researchers found that children's language development spurts and plateaus, but the timing of when language difficulties are experienced is significant: if language difficulties are experienced at 54 months, difficulties in mathematics abilities in the kindergarten year can be anticipated (Justice, Bowles, Pence, & Skibbe, 2009). There are 11 official languages in SA and most schools offer mother-tongue instruction in the first three grades of school and then transition to English as the language of instruction in the fourth grade (Taylor & Von Fintel, 2016). Table 2.4 provides a summary of characteristics of the domain of language development.

Table 2.4
Language development

Domain of school readiness	Description	Competencies children develop	Contextual factors
Language development	The acquisition of linguistic forms and procedures, social rules and customs for acts of expression and interpretation	1. Verbal language – Listening – Speaking – Social uses – Vocabulary and meaning – Questioning – Creative uses of language 2. Emerging literacy – Literature awareness – Print awareness – Story sense – Writing process	1. Variation – Individual differences in language forms and structures – Rate of mastery 2. Complexity – Different patterns for the use of language forms (e.g., formal or informal) – Different distributions of language functions as a result of social uses

Note. Kagan et al. (1995)

Table 2.4 provides a description of language development, an overview of the competencies children develop and the contextual factors that influence language development of the child. The importance of the role of the family in the development of literacy skills has been well documented (e.g., Caspe & Lopez, 2017; Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins & Weiss, 2006; Huisman, 2012). Forget-Dubois et al (2009) suggested that home characteristics affect school readiness in part through their effect on early language skills. They showed in their study with twins that this process is mainly environmental rather than genetic in nature. The report went as far as to suggest that early exposure to reading might be the most potent learning experience in early childhood.

2.3.5 Cognition and general knowledge

Cognition and general knowledge refer to how children think, understand and make sense of the world around them – their general information and problem solving skills (Kagan et al., 1995). Table 2.5 provides a summary of characteristics of the domain of cognition and general knowledge.

Table 2.5
Cognition and general knowledge

Domain of school readiness	Description	Competencies children develop	Contextual factors
Cognition and general knowledge	Cognition and general knowledge represent the accumulation and reorganization of experiences that result from participating in a rich learning setting with skilled and appropriate adult intervention. From these experiences, children construct knowledge of patterns and relations, cause and effect, and methods of solving problems.	1. Representational thought 2. Problem solving 3. Mathematical knowledge 4. Social knowledge 5. Imagination	Culture: – Care-giver beliefs and practices – Familiarity with the context

Note. Kagan et al. (1995)

Table 2.5 provides a description of cognition and general knowledge, an overview of the competencies children develop, and the contextual factors that influence cognition and general knowledge of the child.

As mentioned before, most of the research conducted on school readiness focused on children's academic competencies (Raver, 2003; Stefan, Balaj, Porumb, Albu & Miclea, 2009; Winter & Kelly, 2008). Raver (2003) highlighted that the cognitive and academic school readiness of preschool children were emphasized more than their social and emotional school readiness. Subsequently, an emerging body of research gave social-emotional development a more prominent focus. For example, Ladd (2009) commented that policies have yet to be adapted to reflect the findings and insights of this emerging body of literature. Similarly, Stefan et al., (2009) reported that the disproportionate focus on academics prevails despite the acknowledgement that emotional and social competencies play an important role, not only as protective or risk factors in mental health, but also as predictors of school readiness. If a child enters the formal school setting without being emotionally ready, there may be negative implications for the child's adjustment to school and self-concept (Fauconnier, 2005).

2.4 School readiness as a function of the home- and class environment
2.4.1 Effects of the home environment on school readiness

Studies over the last two decades highlighted that the importance of the home environment on a child's readiness cannot be underestimated (Baker & Iruka, 2013; Emerson, Fear, Fox, & Sanders, 2012; Yu & Daraganova, 2014). Research reviewed from 2000 onwards on the effect of the home environment on child development and school readiness focused on 1)

Parents, 2) Socioeconomic Status (SES) and ethnicity, and 3) home learning environment. A short overview of studies done in these areas will be discussed below.

2.4.1.1 Parents. Studies of the effect of parents on child development unsurprisingly formed the bulk of the literature relating to the relationship between home environment and school readiness. A literature review by Emerson et al. (2012) proposed that good quality home environments, along with supportive parenting styles and parent self-efficacy was related to good academic outcomes for children.

Parenting styles have been linked to specific areas of development, for example, it was found that home and parental factors, specifically home resources and parenting style, play a critical role in predicting student achievement motivation and engagement (Mansour & Martin, 2009). A responsive parenting style was reported to have a positive effect on children's learning in that it helps a child assume a more active role in the learning process (Landry, 2014). Findings from an American ethnically diverse sample of Head Start families (N = 207) showed parent coercion, encouragement of learning, and parent-rated mastery motivation to predict school readiness a year later (MacPhee, Prendergast, Albrecht, Walker & Miller-Heyl, 2018).

A better understanding of parenting styles and the effect of parent characteristics have informed the development of parenting programmes and interventions aimed at facilitating children's school readiness. Parenting programmes have in turn provided impetus for several studies (e.g., Brown, 2016; Leech, Wei, Harring & Rowe, 2018; Pitt, Luger, Bullen, Phillips & Geiger, 2013; Prinsloo & Reid, 2015).

Other parent characteristics that affect their children's school readiness include their education, marital status, mental health, as well as their attitudes-, engagement in-, beliefs- and concerns about school readiness (Belfield & Garcia, 2014; Bierman, Morris, Abenavoli, 2017;

Kim, Murdock & Choi, 2005; Magdalena, 2014; Peterson, Bruce, Patel & Chamberlain, 2018; Piotrkowski, Botsko & Matthews, 2001; Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011). These findings are identified and discussed in more detail later where parents are discussed as stakeholders in their children's school readiness process.

     2.4.1.2 Socioeconomic Status and Ethnicity. Most studies reviewed seemed to link parents' Socio-Economic Status (SES) level and ethnicity and it has been found to be an important factor among gaps in school readiness (e.g., Bono et al., 2016; Brooks-Gunn & Markman, 2005; Dotterer et al., 2012; Isaacs, 2012; McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGennaro & Wildenger, 2007; Ramey & Ramey, 2004; Reardon & Portilla, 2016; Walker & Berthelsen, 2010; Welsh et al., 2010). Some studies highlighted the link between SES and a specific domain of school readiness. For example, Baldwin (2011) found that parents who reported higher incomes were more likely to report higher levels of consistency between their perceptions and reported child ability in the social and emotional domain of school readiness. Baldwin (2011) used existing survey data of parent reports concerning children's readiness for school. She described participants based on their ethnicity, but did not distinguish between mothers and fathers in her study. Jeon et al., (2014) found that parents who had more family socioeconomic risks and neighbourhood disadvantage reported more depressive symptoms, which, in turn, suggested children's greater probability of having social-emotional problems. The Jeon et al. (2014) study also provided empirical evidence linking SES and lower cognitive skills in children. The degree of family socioeconomic risk was indirectly associated with children's cognitive ability through parents' cognitive stimulation at home. Only 8.8% of participants in this study were fathers.

     2.4.1.3. Home learning environment. Researchers have studied the effect of chaos on child development and it was reported that a disorganised and chaotic home environment was a

significantly unique risk factor of a child's social competence after controlling for the age and gender of the child, as well as the family SES (Jeon, 2010). Hur, Buettner, and Jeon (2015) supported this finding five years later and reported that a chaotic home environment was inversely associated with children's cognitive skills, socio-emotional development, and self-regulation. Conversely, a study on family routines has demonstrated an increase in children's social-emotional health (SEH) (Muñiz, Silver, Stein & Ruth, 2014). For example, participation in family dinners, storytelling, singing, and play was associated with higher SEH. MacPhee et al. (2018) demonstrated that the home learning environment and parenting practices predict children's school readiness in part by altering children's mastery motivation. These authors suggested that targeting pre-schoolers' mastery motivation may help parents and early childhood educators to better prepare low-income pre-schoolers for early school success.

2.4.2 Grade R as a Facilitator of School Readiness

There is a relationship between school readiness and academic performance, as well as positive social and behavioural competencies in adulthood (Van Zyl, 2011). Studies linked school readiness to the acquisition of knowledge, school completion, later skill development, and gaining academic skills, as well as success not related to academics (Britto, 2012; Duncan et al., 2007; Quirk, Dowdy, Goldstein & Carnazzo, 2017). Van Zyl (2011) examined the influence of school readiness on school performance in Grade 1 and Grade 7 in the Free State and reported a significant correlation between school readiness and school performance. The researcher recommended that pre-primary school and Grade R form an essential foundation for all future school performance. However, due to the selective provision of ECD services prior to 1994 and the low socio-economic status of most children in South Africa, many children arrived in Grade 1 not ready to learn (Samuels et al., 2015). This had to be remedied with urgency and the

Department of Education devised a solution in the form of a Reception Year before Grade 1, namely Grade R (Feza, 2015). Moreover, it formed part of the transformation strategy for education and training associated with the new Dispensation (DBE, 1995; DBE, 2001a). Grade R was seen as one of the interventions to reverse the effects of early deprivation and maximise the development of the potential of all South African children (DBE, 2001a).

The Department of Education proposed three types of Reception Year programmes namely, within the public primary school system, within community-based sites and through independent provision of Reception Year programmes (DBE, 2001a). Access to Grade R has improved dramatically, however, the authors estimated that the actualization of the target will be delayed by a too slow take-up rate (Atmore et al., 2012b).

Evaluative studies indicate that the focus has now shifted to providing children with a schooling experience of acceptable quality (Samuels et al., 2015; Van der Berg et al., 2013). Quality of schooling at this level refers specifically to "fostering positive social and cognitive learning in an environment that is safe, nurturing and stimulating, thus laying the basis for future learning and enhanced life chances" (Hoadly, 2013: p. 72). Existing literature shows poor quality in many ECD and Grade R centres (Samuels et al., 2015; Van der Berg et al., 2013). Attending Grade R was initially associated with better language and mathematics performance during primary school. However, the evaluation study conducted by Van der Berg and colleagues (2013) found that there is virtually no measureable impact in low socio-economic status schools located in poorer provinces. The authors proposed this could be ascribed to too rapid expansion, poor quality of Grade R provisioning, lack of qualified teachers and no standardised curriculum. This is unfortunate since the Grade R programme was intended to reduce the educational disadvantage faced by low socio-economic status children. However, some argue poor quality

may be part of a wider endemic failure of schools, known to exist in SA schools, rather than being specific to Grade R (Van der Berg et al., 2013). Grade R as it is currently implemented, does not serve the purpose of reducing inequalities, but rather contributes to the widening chasm between the privileged and the disadvantaged.

> This seems to point to a possibility that impact is associated with capacity. If this is indeed the case, capacity could perhaps manifest itself in the supportive framework for Grade R, in the availability of good teachers, and in parental support. Clearly, however, there is a quality dimension that needs to be investigated to ensure that Grade R has a greater impact, and that it serves to narrow rather than widen existing inequalities (Van der Berg, 2013: p. 24).

The authors recommended that awareness is raised about the crucial role that parents or caregivers play to support early learning.

2.5 Stakeholders in School Readiness

As mentioned earlier, the NEGP identified three components of school readiness, namely, readiness in the child, schools' readiness for children, and family and community supports and services that contribute to children's readiness (Britto, 2012; Emig, Moore & Scarupa, 2001). The following section describes these components in more detail.

2.5.1 Children

A school ready child is prepared socially, personally, physically, and intellectually within the developmental domains for early learning: namely literacy, mathematics, science, history and social science, physical and motor development, and personal and social

development. It is accepted that children develop holistically; growth and development in one area depends upon development in other areas (Hanover Research, 2013: p. 25).

The South African Schools Act 84 of 1996 (DBE, 2006) stipulated that a child should enter Grade 1 during the year in which they turn seven years old. Children therefore proceed to Grade 1 based on their chronological age, not necessarily based on being assessed and deemed ready for school. It follows that some children might experience problems in school due to developmental difficulties that were not identified earlier (Olsen, 2010). Some suggest that school readiness should be distinguished from age, which is currently the basis of policy and a legal requirement for schooling (McTurk et al., 2011).

The sooner children at risk for scholastic difficulties are identified and receive appropriate intervention, the better their chances at developing to their full potential (Bauer & Msall, 2010). Scholastic difficulties are usually identified or predicted with the help of screening and assessments by professionals like teachers and psychologists (Hanover Research, 2013; La Paro & Pianta, 2000; Linan-Thompson, 2014). A holistic approach across all five domains for early childhood assessment practices and policies is recommended, instead of focusing only on literacy and mathematics (Hanover Research, 2013). Future trends identified include assessments that also evaluate factors related to self-expression, such as arts and creativity (Hanover Research, 2013). Psychometric assessments should be used to identify learning problems with the goal of facilitating educational programme planning and instructional improvement and not to perpetuate discrimination (Cowan & Cowan, 2009; Hanover Research, 2013). However, equitable measurement of a child's abilities in a country like South Africa, with such a diverse population, remains a challenge (Foxcroft & Roodt, 2009). It requires a collaboration between educators, parents and the community as the behaviour of children differs across contexts

(Hanover Research, 2013). As researchers studied these collaborations, they mostly treated the role of mother as synonymous with that of parent, and there exists a gap in the literature about fathers' role in these relationships (Cowan & Cowan, 2009).

Children's readiness to transition to school is evidenced by behaviour and knowledge required for success in a learning environment. Areas to assess include, how well children are equipped to start and continue through primary school, as well as how children's general health and well-being are addressed as integral parts of promoting learning (Britto & Limlingan, 2012). Foxcroft and Roodt (2009), and Mindmuzik Media (2018) identified the following educationally-focused screening measures that are used in South Africa: the School-readiness Evaluation by Trained Testers (SETT) (Joubert, 1984); the Aptitude Test for School Beginners (ASB) (Olivier & Swart, 1974); the School-entry Group Screening Measure (SGSM) (Foxcroft, Shillington, Turk, Corby & Collier, 1997); the Developmental Test of Visual-Motor Integration (VMI) (Beery, Buktenica & Beery, 2010); and the Junior South African Individual Scale (JSAIS) (Madge, Van den Berg & Robinson, 1985). Literature identified that even when more formal school readiness assessment is done, existing measures of school readiness lack a holistic approach in that the focus is mainly on cognitive abilities, and other elements of the child's development are neglected (Bustin, 2007; Janus & Offord, 2008; Stefan et al., 2009). Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) cautioned against this disproportionate focus since children use, develop and adapt these skills over time as they interact with their environment.

Olsen (2010) put forward several factors that promote or interfere with the level of a child's school readiness, namely, chronological age, early care/preschool experience, family involvement and parental support: Firstly, with age cut-off dates in place, there could be a 12-month chronological age span between children in Grade 1. This is a significant developmental

gap between children in the same classroom. Secondly, there is strong evidence that children who attended a quality preschool programme enter school more ready to learn. Lastly, families who exposed their child to books and stimulating experiences from a young age and who can support their child through the transition to school, play an important role in facilitating the child's success.

There are also physical aspects that affect a child's readiness to learn. For example, a majority of kindergarten teachers surveyed in the USA believed that being physically healthy, rested and well-nourished were the most important factors affecting children's readiness (Heaviside, 1993 in Dockett & Perry, 2002). Yet, in South Africa, those are the very factors interfering with children's performance in school, as demonstrated in a study by Bruwer, Hartell and Steyn (2014). They interviewed Grade 1 teachers who raised concerns that children's circumstances negatively affect all areas of their development. The teachers in the study suggest homogeneous grouping of children according to their school readiness level to lay a good foundation for learners who are struggling without risking disruption of the class by learners who become bored with the slower pace. The policy of inclusive education as described in Whitepaper 6 (DBE, 2001b) should in theory give teachers the flexibility to adjust the curriculum content for learners who are vulnerable due to insufficient school readiness.

Dockett and Perry (2002) investigated what parents, educators and children deemed important as children start school. The findings show that children were, for the most part, positive about starting school. They were most concerned with knowing the rules of the school, so they could stay out of trouble. Their second preoccupation was with how they felt about school; mostly happy, excited or scared. Having friends or not, contributed greatly to their

expected level of happiness. Notably, 41 of the 44 participants were mothers and the study made no mention of paternal participants.

A more recent Canadian study had similar findings with three themes emerging, namely, play versus academic activities and homework; getting bigger but still needing help; and rules (Di Santo & Berman, 2012). Studies about school readiness tend to focus on the perspectives of teachers and parents to the exclusion of that of children (e.g., Dockett & Perry, 2004; Hatcher, Nuner & Paulsel, 2012; Lara-Cinisomo, Fuligni, Ritchie, Howes & Karoly, 2008; Mahan, 2015; Mohamed, 2013; Puccioni, 2015). Di Santo and Berman (2012) echoed Lam and Pollard's (2006) sentiments that children's input should be welcomed in the planning process of transition practices.

2.5.2 Schools and Educators

The way schools focus on the first year of primary school by facilitating the transition of families and children, providing support, and offering a quality learning experience, provide indications of schools' readiness for all learners (Britto & Limlingan, 2012).

> A ready school accepts all children and provides a seamless transition to a high-quality learning environment by engaging the whole community. A ready school welcomes all children with opportunities to enhance and build confidence in their skills, knowledge, and abilities. Children in ready schools are led by skilled teachers, who recognise, reinforce, and extend children's strengths and who are sensitive to cultural values and individual differences (Hanover Research, 2013: p. 25).

> Little et al., (2016) documented a comprehensive investigation of kindergarten transition activities. They underscored how schools that adopt proactive transition practices, acknowledge and promote the interconnectedness of contextual factors, as described in the Ecological and

Dynamic Model of Transition (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). Their study highlighted how some practices, such as inviting the child and their family to the classroom before the start of the school year, do more to honour the relationships in the ecology than other practices, such as only sending a letter to parents. The authors encouraged a better understanding of how such practices are used, how they vary across teachers within schools, and how they relate to student outcomes. The study did not specify any transition practices that focused specifically on fathers' participation in transition activities.

Educators play a very important role in the establishment of a "ready school" and quality schooling experience. The quality of caregiver and child interaction can be measured in terms of "responsiveness and sensitivity towards the child; stimulation for development; positive regard; attentiveness; and warmth" (Britto & Limlingan, 2012: p. 21). It makes sense that knowledge about early child development aids educators in their understanding of and interaction with children, specific to their developmental phase. In a study conducted in Gauteng to measure school readiness of Grade R children, it was found that despite huge differences in learners' socio-economic status, there were no significant difference in their achievement scores (Janse van Rensburg, 2015). However, the common factor amongst the different schools were the low level of qualified educators. The researcher claimed that the training level of educators was key to the attainment of school readiness of learners.

Educators' professional qualifications were linked with overall classroom quality (Britto & Limlingan, 2012). It is of concern then that in 2013 it was found that 78% of Grade R educators in South Africa did not have the qualifications to teach at this level. With the result that the potential benefits of Grade R were diminished, especially for disadvantaged learners (Hoadly,

2013). Research shows that impoverished and/or traumatized children have the most to gain from high quality early learning experiences (Loeb, Fuller, Kagan & Carrol, 2004).

Government has made effort to improve the quality of teachers in a number of ways (DHET, 2017): First, by familiarising teachers with the new curriculum, and especially the revised National Curriculum Statements, through short courses and workshops. Second, by upgrading the qualifications of under-qualified teachers through programmes such as the National Professional Diploma in Education. Third, by developing teachers' subject competence through various Advanced Certificates in Education. Fourth, by identifying opportunities and providing support for teacher development, through the Integrated Quality Management System and the Quality Teaching and Learning Campaign. Lastly, through ongoing continuing professional development programmes (Deacon, 2010).

Even when teachers have acquired the requisite qualifications, the challenge remains that the area of transition practices is often neglected in their training (Hatcher et al., 2012). Transition practices are parent-child interactions focused on school readiness, for example literacy or numeracy activities (Puccioni, 2015; Taylor, Clayton & Rowley, 2004). Collaboration between teachers and parents become important as best practices to support the transition. This includes stimulating parent involvement and fostering communication between parents, preschool and Grade R contexts (Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000; Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011). As mentioned earlier, most studies either do not differentiate between mothers and fathers in their parenting data, or specifically focus on data from mothers, which raises the gap for further research into transition practices and how to include it in teacher training curricula.

Educators' views are particularly important, because their early assessments of young children's readiness play an important role in guiding the family's focus on children's specific

developmental needs (Piotrkowski et al., 2001). Schools are encouraged to communicate frequently with parents and act on the suggestions and concerns of parents in order to foster strong relationships with the family. The aim of which is to help parents feel empowered in their role in the child's development (Britto & Limlingan, 2012).

In a study conducted to investigate early childhood educators' notions about the fundamentals of school readiness, results indicate that they believe three levels must be addressed to facilitate a child's readiness for kindergarten, namely, child, parent, and teacher: Early childhood educators believe that a child needs to be emotionally, physically, and cognitively ready and have good social skills that will allow the child to get along with others. They believe that parents need to provide a stimulating home environment and they need to prepare the child for the transition from home to school. At the teacher level, they highlighted the importance of teacher-parent relationships (Lara-Cinisomo et al., 2008).

Studies have found that for teachers, it is more important for children to have well developed social-emotional and communication skills as this enables them to teach the cognitive skills generally considered important by parents, such as counting, identifying colors and shapes, knowing the alphabet, and problem solving (Davies & North, 1990; Heaviside, 1993; Lin et al., 2003 in Miller & Goldsmith, 2017).

Given the important role that the family plays in early child development, parental involvement in education is invaluable. It is especially during the transition from home to school, that collaboration between parents and teachers becomes critical for a child's academic success (Britto & Limlingan, 2012; McWayne, Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen & Sekino, 2004). The readiness of schools and families for the child's entry into school and their role in facilitating readiness remain a focus of further research in South Africa.

2.5.3 Families and Parents

A school ready family has adults who understand they are the most important

people in the child's life and take responsibility for the child's school readiness

through direct, frequent, and positive involvement and interest in the child. Adults

recognise their role as the child's first and most important teacher, providing steady

and supportive relationships, ensuring safe and consistent environments, promoting

good health, and fostering curiosity, excitement about learning, determination, and

self- control (Hanover Research, 2013: p. 25).

Regarding school readiness, UNICEF considers "family" to consist of the people

who reside with the young children, including biological and non-biological caregivers,

siblings and extended family members (Britto & Limlingan, 2012). Irwin et al. (2007)

defined family as "any group of people who dwell together, eat together, and participate in

other daily home-based activities together" (p. 21).

Families are recognised as the first and main providers of early childhood care and

stimulation (Jackson & Dickinson, 2009; Mahoney & Wiggers, 2007). A study that examined

parent involvement and the social and academic competencies of children highlighted two

distinct patterns of parental involvement for kindergarten children (McWayne et al., 2004). The

first clear pattern showed involved parents, who were found to enhance their children's social

skills and academic performance by creating a home environment conducive to communication

about, and application of, the skills they have learnt at school. The second pattern was of parents

who were less involved with their child's education due to barriers like familial or work stress.

The results were clear, high parent involvement had many positive outcomes: "compared to

children with less-involved parents, these children were observed to be more cooperative, self-

controlled, and pro-socially engaged in both home and school environments. These children evidenced greater achievement in reading and mathematics, as well as demonstrated greater academic motivation" (McWayne et al., 2004: p. 373). The study did not differentiate between mother and father involvement, which raises the gap for further research into the relationship between father involvement and the social and academic competencies of children.

An American study about family participation in early childhood education found that married parents were significantly more involved in both home–school conferencing and home-based involvement activities than either single parents or widowed, separated, or divorced parents (Fantuzzo, Tighe & Childs, 2000). The study did not focus on fathers' specific contribution or level of involvement and it therefore remains an area to be explored in future research.

Parental support is championed by the United Nations Millennium Development Goals Country Report (Jensen, 2010) and the Children's Act, 2005 (Act 38 of 2005) (DSS, 2005). Government supports, in policy, the notion that all families should have access to quality, affordable ECD programmes and prioritises the delivery of parenting support services. For example, beginning with support during the antenatal period, and including the provision of social protection to caregivers (Hall et al., 2016).

Parenting programmes are seen as a way of encouraging parents to be active participants in the wellbeing and early learning of their children (Bierman et al., 2017; Le Mottee, 2016; Ngcobo, 2005). Baker (2014) investigated the experiences of practitioners providing parent education and provided a comprehensive overview of parenting programmes in South Africa. Baker's research indicated that the following topics be given priority when developing a parenting programme: communication; building attachment with the child; developmental phases

of a child; and disciplinary strategies. Additional topics identified include: personal development of the parent; understanding the value of play; and anger management. Bierman et al. (2017) added to that programmes that promote positive parenting practices and parent-child relationships, home learning activities and effective teaching strategies, strengthen parent-teacher partnerships, and programmes that emphasise child physical health.

More recently, fathers' knowledge and experience with parenting programmes, and their preferences for programme content, features, and delivery methods were studied (Frank, Keown, Dittman & Sanders, 2015). Survey results showed that fathers' knowledge and experience of available parenting programmes was low. The topics rated most highly by fathers to include in a programme were building a positive parent–child relationship, increasing children's confidence and social skills, and the importance of fathers to children's development. The extent and quality of parenting programme provision remains an area for future research (Le Mottee, 2016).

Parents' beliefs about themselves have been found to influence their involvement in their children's education. Parents who consider themselves more effective, show greater involvement in their children's pre-school education (Pelletier & Brent, 2002). Researchers also found that parental beliefs are related to subsequent child development, i.e., there is congruence between what parents think is important and how their children's skills develop (Barbarin et al., 2008 in Belfield & Garcia, 2014). Parents are generally considered the primary agents of socialization of their children (Jackson & Dickinson, 2009; Mahoney & Wiggers, 2007). Taylor et al. (2004) summarised the literature on *academic socialization* (emphasis mine) of children within the family context. Academic socialization refers to "the variety of parental beliefs and behaviors that influence children's school-related development" (p. 163). The authors introduced a

conceptual model that described the process of academic socialization, including parental experiences in school, parental school-related thoughts, and specific parenting behaviors and how these are critical influences on children's own experiences of school. Puccioni (2015) set out to test the conceptual model of Taylor et al. (2004) and his findings were consistent: Parents who value school readiness were found to make more use of transition practices, with the result that their children performed better in the beginning of their school career.

Conversely, Belfield and Garcia (2014) found that even though parental beliefs indicated heightened expectations of what their children should be capable of for entry into school, there were only modest changes in their effort to facilitate their children's school readiness. Similar results regarding parent beliefs that do not translate in behavioural change was found in studies by Baldwin (2011) and Mendoza (2008). Further research is necessary to establish if and how fathers' beliefs about school readiness affect their behaviour.

Various studies compared parents' and educators' beliefs about school readiness. Some studies identified racial or cultural patterns to the beliefs about school readiness (Baldwin, 2011; Dotterer et al., 2012; Piotrkowski et al., 2001). For example, parents of mostly Hispanic and Black learners in a high-need community valued the child's ability to communicate in English above the child's approach to learning (Piotrkowski et al., 2001). They also rated academically-oriented skills higher than the teachers in the study. In an Australian study, parents were also more likely than teachers to focus on knowledge (Dockett & Perry, 2004). Teachers in the study placed most emphasis on children's adjustment to the school context and their feelings about being at school. A more recent American study demonstrated the shift in both parents' and teachers' views towards social and emotional factors as central to readiness, in combination with

the academic factors (Hatcher et al., 2012). The authors recommended that parents and teachers prioritise communication and sharing of information about expectations and concerns.

Belfield and Garcia (2014) identified that understanding how and when parental (and specifically paternal) expectations for school are formed, how important and accurate they are, as well as how they might be shaped by parent support programmes and school entry policies, remain a focus of further research. Stefan et al. (2009) concluded that, aside from formal assessments, parents rely on their common sense and accepted practices in their society to make decisions about the readiness of their children to enter formal schooling. It would thus be useful to gain understanding of the factors affecting parents'-, and specifically fathers'-, decision-making process.

According to the Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition, not only the child's competence in the classroom, but also the quality of the parents' relationship with the teacher, may be indicators of successful transition to school (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). Fathers' relationships with teachers remain an area to be investigated as participation in parent-school-interactions was traditionally associated with mothers (Thomas, 2008).

Parents can support their children's transition to school to the degree to which they understand: "the importance of education for their children; their own behaviours' impact on children's learning and development and success at school; and their support for children during early primary years" (Britto & Limlingan, 2012: p. 22). The authors proposed that assessment of the following areas would give an indication of families' school readiness: Firstly, parents' familiarity with the school system and their ability to develop and foster relationships with teachers. Secondly, parents' mindsets about their roles and responsibilities as primary teachers and partners in their children's development. Lastly, parents' expectations of their children's

school enrolment, progress and performance (Britto & Limlingan, 2012). As mentioned before, an indicator of a successful transition to school is the quality of the relationship between school and home, according to the Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). To create a better understanding of a fathers' role in this relationship, a discussion of fathers' involvement in early child development follows next.

<div align="center">**2.6 Fathers and School Readiness**</div>

2.6.1 Fathers' Involvement in Early Child Development

The literature points to a strong trend, in all developed countries, towards ideals and practices of more involved fatherhood (Hobson, 2002; Lamb, 2010 in O'Brien & Wall, 2017). The National Fatherhood Initiative found that the positive impact of fathers' involvement includes better peer relationships, less behaviour problems, reduced criminality and substance abuse, better education, empathy, better adult sexual relationships, increased self-esteem, and increased life satisfaction (Howard et al., 2006). Even when the mother takes on the role of primary caregiver, greater father involvement in early childhood has been linked with children's language skills, cognition, academic achievement, and social-and-emotional competence (Britto & Limlingan, 2012). Richter and Morrell (2006) provided a comprehensive overview of fatherhood in South Africa and emphasized that children benefit from the love, care and attention specifically from men, and that fatherhood should be given greater social credibility. From their meta-analysis on father involvement, McWayne et al. (2013) ascertained when it comes to father involvement, both quantity and quality matter. Aspects of parenting quality include "warmth, nurturance, and responsiveness reflecting positive parenting and, alternatively, harshness, punitiveness, and nonresponsiveness reflecting a negative parenting style" (p. 914). Quantity of

parent involvement is equally important in predicting children's social and academic success and refers to "the frequency of positive engagement activities (both general [e.g., playing] and learning specific [e.g., reading to the child])" (p. 914).

Several studies have linked father involvement with improved academic achievement and social-emotional wellbeing (Lamb, 2003, in Britto, 2012; Cabrera et al. 2007; Flouri & Buchanan, 2004; Jeynes, 2015; Morgan, 2009). Father involvement in schools was associated with the higher likelihood of a student getting mostly A's (Nord & West, 2001). This was found to be true for fathers in biological parent families, for stepfathers, and for fathers heading single-parent families. The long-term benefits of fathers' involvement have also been examined. For example, a longitudinal study found that fathers' involvement in their children's education at age seven significantly predicted educational achievement by age 20 (Flouri & Buchanan, 2004).

Allen and Daly (2007) examined key published articles on father involvement up to 2007. They highlighted the benefits of fathers' involvement on the cognitive-, emotional development and well-being, social development and physical health of children, as well as benefits of involvement for fathers themselves.

Fathers' involvement contributes to their children's lives in a way that other adults do not (Paquette, 2004; Thomas, 2008). Paquette (2004) refers to the father's specific role in developing a child's 'openness to the world'. The 'activation relationship', as he refers to it, develops in the context of an emotional bond. This is particularly evident in the unique way that fathers play with their children. Furthermore, he puts forward the view that children seem to need to be stimulated and motivated as much as they need to be calmed and secured, and they receive such stimulation primarily from men, primarily through physical play. This alludes to the important

and necessary difference between parental roles: mothers' as primary caregiver and fathers' as primary play partner.

Previous research found modern men still lag behind women in terms of their involvement in caregiving and parenting tasks (Craig, 2006; Kamp Dush, Yavorsky & Schoppe-Sullivan, 2017; McBride, Rane & Bae, 2001). Specific to school-related involvement, an Australian study set out to test a) whether mother involvement at a primary school was higher than fathers' and b) when fathers are involved, whether it's generally in gender stereotypical roles. They found that only an estimated one-fifth of volunteers at the schools were male, and sports, outdoor activities and security were the preferred areas of involvement (Fletcher & Silberberg, 2006).

Thomas (2008) found traditional gender roles at play when fathers considered providing financially for their children as a major gender role and responsibility of fathers. This remains an important contribution by fathers, as research indicates that fathers who are unable to provide financially for their families are more likely to disengage from involvement in many other aspects of their children's lives (Christensen & Palkovitz, 2001 in Allen & Daly, 2007). Research on the unique contribution of father involvement was growing, but there remained a need for the evidence to be integrated and synthesized. Harris (2016) asserted that before research can be translated into policies and programmes, there was a need for a unified view of what father involvement entailed, how it could be measured and what the implications were of such involvement in the lives of children.

2.6.2 Fathers' Role and Contribution in School Readiness

It was reported that in fathers' general involvement with their children's activities, the number of these activities are related to fathers' involvement in school activities (Nord, Winquist

& West, 1997 in Rimm-Kaufman & Zhang, 2005) and important for increasing their readiness for entrance to school (Pianta & La Paro, 2003; Piotrkowski et al., 2001). Due to traditional gender role division, one may not expect to see a father volunteering at the school tuck shop during any given day. However, their involvement at school may also provide some indication of their involvement in their child's educational activities at home as was found in a study of African-American fathers' involvement and their children's school readiness (Downer & Mendez, 2005).

One of the few studies including fathers in their examination of school readiness found that paternal supportiveness had its strongest associations with children's school readiness when maternal supportiveness was lowest (Martin, Ryan & Brooks-Gunn, 2010). The results suggested that fathers may influence child development most as potential buffers against unsupportive maternal parenting.

Fathers' involvement in school during the preschool years as well as their role in the transition to school remain largely understudied (Cowan & Cowan, 2009; Rimm-Kaufman & Zhang, 2005). Although fathers' perspectives about school readiness specifically have not been the topic of many studies, evidence is building that fathers have a unique and influential role to play in developing their children's skills along the various domains of school readiness (StGeorge & Fletcher, 2012). Research on fathers' influence specific to domains of school readiness is discussed below.

2.6.2.1 Social-emotional development. Both parents and teachers are increasingly noting the importance of a child's social-emotional development as a contributor to a child's school readiness (Hatcher et al., 2012; Ladd, 2009). Twenty-five of 29 participants in the Hatcher

et al. (2012) study associated kindergarten (Grade R) readiness with social-emotional maturity and the ability to interact successfully with peers and teachers.

The effects of fathers' sensitivity and support of their child's autonomy in infancy along with mothers whose parenting beliefs support self-directed child behavior, and an emotionally intimate relationship between parents, were visible years later in school. Teachers found these children to be the most competent and least problematic (NICHD, 2004). Similarly, Downer and Mendez (2005) found teacher-rated emotion regulation was greater for children whose fathers reported more involvement in childcare and home-based educational activities.

Paquette (2004) theorised that the father-child activation relationship, a stimulating, playful relationship, develops through play, especially rough-and-tumble play. He proposed that this is the relationship that facilitates children's opening to the world, which appears to help children be braver when they encounter new experiences and help them overcome obstacles, which breeds later success. This is a useful skill in new situations, such as starting school and could therefore enhance a child's readiness for the transition. Hagman (2014) further investigated father-child play behaviors during toddlerhood for their contribution to self-regulation skills, specifically emotion regulation and aggression. Results suggested that father-child play may be an important context for emotional regulation development in young children. Physical play along with father's use of humour and teasing, all may contribute to the development of the child's emotion management (StGeorge & Fletcher, 2012). More research is needed to better understand the unique roles that fathers may play in children's development of self-regulation, for programme development that leverage fathers' distinctive contribution in this area (McWayne et al., 2013).

2.6.2.2 Cognition and general knowledge. Researchers are finding mounting evidence that highly engaged fathers seem to enhance the cognitive functioning of their children (Tamis-LeMonda, Shannon, Cabrera & Lamb, 2004). One such study showed that fathers who engage with their children in positive ways have significant effects on their cognition, language and emotional development at two and three years (Cabrera et al., 2007). Recently, one of the few longitudinal studies found that father–child interactions, even from a very young age (i.e., three months), may influence children's cognitive development (Sethna et al., 2017). Again, the evidence points to the importance of the experiences of the first few years of a child's life on later prospects.

2.6.2.3 Language development. Literature suggests that fathers have the potential to make a unique contribution to children's language development. Fathers ask more "who, why, where, what" questions (Leech, Salo, Rowe & Cabrera, 2013). More advanced child communication and language skills result from input from fathers with higher levels of education, who use more sophisticated and stimulating language input during early childhood (Cabrera et al., 2007; Leech, et al., 2013; Pancsofar & Vernon-Feagans, 2006; Salo, Rowe, Leech & Cabrera, 2016).

Researchers investigated fathers' involvement in a family literacy programme and their home literacy practices with their young children (Morgan et al., 2009). A key finding illustrated the trend of contemporary fatherhood: most fathers in the study participated in shared literacy activities with their children. The programme was based on the ORIM conceptual framework that refers to four key aspects of the parent's role in advancing their child's literacy, namely, opportunities, recognition, interaction and modelling (Hannon, 1995; Nutbrown et al., 2005, in Morgan et al., 2009). Fathers reported to be involved in all four key aspects by providing:

Opportunities for literacy: giving children pens and paper, joining the library, making a space in the home where literacy can take place, and placing books and writing equipment in an accessible place. Fathers reportedly tended to be less involved in providing literacy opportunities than mothers.

Recognition of the child's achievements: displaying some writing, discussing with the child what they have achieved, e.g., 'you found all those letters yourself didn't you?'

Interaction with the child in literacy activities: reading a book together, playing an alphabet puzzle, writing a birthday card.

A *model* of literacy in everyday life: reading a recipe, doing a crossword, completing a form, writing a note.

A more recent study further highlighted the important effect of fathers' language input on children's problem solving skills and vocabulary acquisition during the transition to kindergarten (Baker, Vernon-Feagans & The Family Life Project Investigators, 2015). This evidence provides further motivation that investment in aspects of the home environment that advance early child development, such as encouraging father-child reading programs (Baker et al., 2015; Chacko, Fabiano, Doctoroff & Fortson, 2017), has positive effects on a child's school readiness. Father-child shared book reading does not only build a child's knowledge, language and literary skills, it also creates an engaging and strengths-based context to indirectly impart parenting skills to high-risk families (Chacko et al., 2017).

Cabrera (2017) made a case for low-income fathers who often speak and play with their children in ways that enhance school readiness, but don't feel valued for their role. She advised that policy makers recognise fathers not only for their economical support, but also their emotional support and recommended the provision of programmes that could support them.

2.6.2.4 Approaches to learning. Compared to the other dimensions of school readiness, the researcher found the literature about children's approaches to learning and specifically about fathers' involvement in this dimension, sparse. This could be due to what Gonida and Urdan (2007) described as the difficulty of controlling for the numerous variables that impact on this dimension of school readiness. They state that factors including "parents' and students' age and gender, their socio-economic status, ethnicity and other demographic variables all add complexity to the examination of parental influences on student motivation and achievement in school" (p. 3). One study suggested that fathers could play a role to favourably influence a child's attitude towards learning (Mansour & Martin, 2009). It was found that specifically home resources and parenting style play a critical role in predicting student achievement motivation and engagement. There is a gap for further such research in the South African context.

This component of school readiness is considered a very important factor in a child's success in school: "For the most part, studies consistently demonstrate that variables associated with the approaches to learning domain have unique contributions to children's achievement beyond other important cognitive and demographic variables such as intelligence, receptive and expressive vocabulary, parental income, and education" (Barbu, Yaden, Levine-Donnerstein & Marx, 2015: p. 3). Thus, the development of skills in this domain could help disadvantaged children overcome circumstances that would otherwise affect their success in school.

2.6.2.5 Physical health and motor development. From a physical perspective, for children to be considered school ready, they should be physically healthy and fit enough to be active and to participate in activities in the classroom and on the playground (Bruwer, et al., 2014). This domain also includes perceptual development and gross and fine motor development (Bruwer, et al., 2014). There is a growing awareness that physical activity improves the brain's

functioning and enhances learning (Hillman, Erickson & Kramer, 2008). It further builds healthy self-esteem and resilience (Make Time 2 Play, 2013). Lack of physical activity, particularly among children in the developed world, is one of the major causes of obesity (Hillman et al., 2008). Recent research suggested that fathers have a unique and important role in shaping their children's dietary and physical activity behaviors (Freeman et al., 2012; Hall et al., 2011; Morgan et al., 2014). More research on fathers' influence in this domain of school readiness is required, as literature specifically on fathers' involvement in the child's motor development is scarce.

2.6.3 Play, School Readiness and Fathers as Playmates

Play is not considered a dimension of school readiness, but it is included here because of two considerations: First, fathers' particular role as playmates (Paquette, 2004; StGeorge, Fletcher & Palazzi, 2016). Second, the upsurge in evidence supporting how play facilitates a child's development in the areas considered important for school readiness (e.g., Drew, Christie, Johnson, Meckley, & Nell, 2008; Gilbert, Harte & Patrick, 2011; Ginsburg, 2007; Goldstein, n.d.; Hirsh-Pasek & Golinkoff, 2008; Make Time 2 Play, 2015; Moyer, 2014; Pellegrini & Holmes, 2006; Smith, 2013). Play is so integral to optimal child development that it has been recognised by the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights as a right of every child (Ginsburg, 2007). The global focus on the benefits of play resulted in the formation of organisations that use play to engage kids in their education, to teach them health lessons and to show them how to build peaceful communities (e.g., Right to Play International, n.d., Let's Play, n.d., Let's Move, n.d.). Play England and the British Toy & Hobby Association (BTHA) highlighted the benefits of play, as well as the detrimental effects should children be deprived of play, in their report for the Make Time to Play campaign (2011). It is recommended that countries collaborate and review their curriculum in the light of others, and consider how play

and learning are talked about and supported (Pramling Samuelsson & Pramling, 2013). This could build on a more child-centred approach in early years.

Play provides an essential method of gathering and processing information, learning new skills and cooperation (Drew et al., 2008). Bredenkamp (2004) asserted that socio-dramatic play appears to be most effective in developing school readiness abilities. "Characteristics of sociodramatic play include make-believe that involves roles, objects, and situations; persists for at least 10 minutes; and includes language and social interaction" (p. 19). The ecology of transition (families, caregivers, and educators) can promote school success by providing high-quality early learning experiences for children through purposeful play in homes, programmes, and communities (Gilbert et al., 2011). The authors emphasize that the quality of play, not just the quantity, affects children's development and eventually their readiness for school.

The advantages of play in the development of children has been well-documented, For example, enhanced motor skills (Make Time 2 Play, 2013), improved academic performance (Moyer, 2014; Pellegrini & Holmes, 2006), prosocial behaviour in the classroom (Fantuzzo & McWayne, 2002), increased creativity (Howard-Jones, Taylor & Sutton, 2010), development of emotion understanding, emotion regulation and impulse control (Lindsey & Colwell, 2003), as well as enhanced learning readiness, learning behaviors, and problem-solving skills (Coolahan, Fantuzzo, Mendez & McDermott, 2000; Fantuzzo & McWayne, 2002). With so much focus on the benefits of play for child development, it is surprising that play remains highly undervalued, as "the poor cousin or fun alternative to 'learning'" (Make Time 2 Play, 2015). Kane (2016) explored parental perspectives on preschool play and found that while parents deemed play important, they also described it as peripheral to, and less important than, the acquisition of literacy and numeracy skills. Consequently, academic programming is replacing play in schools

and ultimately undermines child well-being. Ginsburg (2007) put forward that it is vital that play be included in academic and social-development for all children. He added that further research was needed to explore "the appropriate balance of play, academic enrichment, and organized activities for children with different temperaments and social, emotional, intellectual, and environmental needs" (p. 188).

Parents are encouraged to become aware of the gravitas of play and how they can ensure their child benefits from it (Make Time 2 Play, 2015). "Play is the ambient part of a child's education and is neither 'unaffordable nor inaccessible'. It is as key as formal education and should be treated as such by society" (p. 10).

One of the most noteworthy results of empirical studies on paternal involvement show that fathers are generally less involved than mothers in all aspects of parenting, *except* for physical play (Paquette, 2004). StGeorge et al. (2017) echoed these findings when they did an explorative study comparing fathers' physical and toy play and links to child behaviour. They further noted how the social movement of involved fatherhood has stimulated a lot of research, highlighting how fathers contribute in a distinct way in children's development and how their interaction is characterized by play.

2.6.4 Absent Fathers

The foregoing discussion highlighted the positive impact of involved fathers on children's school readiness, however, many children are not exposed to these benefits. Parental involvement in the lives of children seldom involves that of a father figure (Johnson, 2013 in Hebrard, 2017). The predicament of absent fathers in South Africa has been identified as a priority in the National development plan of 2030 as a threat to optimal early childhood development and active citizenship in later life (SA NPC, 2012). We don't know how many

fathers there are in South Africa, because such data has not been collected (Devey & Posel, 2006). Here, most empirical data about fathers has been collected in population-based studies for purposes other than parenting and specifically fathering (Hosegood & Madhavan, 2012). Still, statistics highlighted the absence of fathers in their children's lives: "42.5% of children aged below five years lived with their biological mother only; 36.4% lived with both their biological parents; 2.0% lived with their biological fathers only and 18.7% lived with neither of their biological parents" (Statistics South Africa (StatsSA), 2014: p. 25). This was also noted in the Recorded Live Births, where it was indicated that details of the fathers were missing in 66.6% of birth registrations (StatsSA, 2014). Furthermore, when fathers were present at the time of their children's birth, but not married to the child's mother at the time, only 20% were in contact with their children by the time their children reached the age of 11 years (Richter, 2004). However, some studies criticized conclusions drawn from studies on the extent of absent fathers as a misrepresentation of the role of fathers and what they do (Hosegood & Madhavan, 2012; Ratele, Shefer & Clowes, 2012).

A study conducted with African American fathers found that even though non-resident fathers may not be as involved with child-care activities, it is not a predictor of their involvement in home-based educational activities (Downer & Mendez, 2005). The authors suggested consideration for the total amount of interaction between children and fathers, regardless of residential status, is therefore likely to give a more holistic view of a father's contribution to child development. Literature consistently emphasized the importance of underscoring and validating the notion that men have an important role to play in preparing children for school through policies and father-friendly messages from early childhood education settings (McWayne et al., 2013; Sethna, 2017). Fathers' contribution to a child's school readiness,

specifically in the South African context where many fathers do not live with their children, remains and area for further investigation. Such investigation must pay careful attention to how the key variables are operationalized and defined.

2.7 Summary

The literature provided evidence for the substantial influence of school readiness on a child's success in school and ultimately their general success in life (Britto, 2012; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000; Van Zyl, 2011). Research in early child development contributed to an evolving perspective of school readiness. The focus has shifted from a child's attributes to include the dynamic relationships between environmental factors that influence a child's development (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). Researchers proposed that awareness is raised about the crucial role that parents play to support children's early learning (Van der Berg et al., 2013). Research on parents and school readiness focused mostly on mothers as they have traditionally been the main liaison with schools (Cowan & Cowan, 2009; Thomas, 2008). Despite the growing focus on fatherhood research in general, there remains a gap in the research specifically around fathers' subjective perspectives of school readiness.

Methodologically, most studies investigating parents' beliefs about school readiness were of a quantitative nature, for example, the analysis of national surveys or questionnaires (e.g., Belfield & Garcia, 2014; Downer & Mendez, 2005; Puccioni, 2015; Thomas, 2008; Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011). This leaves room for more qualitative studies to be conducted. Furthermore, the shortage of South African literature specifically about fathers' perspectives of school readiness permits further research in this area. The evidence in this chapter warrants an exploration of South African fathers' perspectives about school readiness. These perspectives are important

since they inform paternal engagement and behavior in respect of a child in the early years. Therefore, the present study attempted to contribute to the lack of research on fathers' involvement in their children's school readiness. The present study thus examined fathers' perspectives of school readiness.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3.1 Aim of the study

The overall aim of the study was to explore fathers' perspectives of school readiness.

3.2 Objectives of the study

a)   To explore fathers' understanding of what school readiness entailed

b)   To determine what fathers' perspectives were about the constructs and domains involved in school readiness

c)   To explore perceptions of the role or relative contribution fathers made in facilitating a child's school readiness

d)   To identify barriers to and facilitators of fathers' involvement in the facilitation of school readiness

3.3 Research design

An exploratory research design was selected for the present study. This design was deemed appropriate because the aim of the present study was to develop an understanding about an under-researched phenomenon (Burns & Grove, 2001). The perspectives of fathers have been under-researched and warranted an exploratory approach. Exploratory designs also favour qualitative methodologies, as the goal was to describe and understand (Verstehen) rather than to explain and predict the identified phenomenon (Langdridge, 2007). As such, the exploratory design using qualitative methods was deemed appropriate for the proposed study.

Reiter (2013) argued that exploratory research holds much potential when conducted in a transparent, honest, and self-reflexive way that increases its reliability. If conducted in such a

way, results can be deemed valid and it can provide new and innovative ways to examine data. It

has the advantages of being flexible, affordable and refutes the myth of completely neutral

research (Reiter, 2013). Exploratory research rests on "the explicit recognition that all inquiry is

tentative; that reality is, in part, socially constructed; that researchers are part of the reality they

analyse; and that the words and categories we use to explain reality grow out of our own minds

and not out of reality" (Reiter 2013: p. 3). It also provided a way to find new or overlooked

explanations by approaching research from a new angle and asking new questions (Creswell,

2007).

3.4 Research setting

Participants were recruited from Cape Town and surrounding suburbs as it offers a unique

combination of demographics e.g., lower and higher income and education groups and a mix of

race groups that makes for a varied population from which to sample. The City of Cape Town's

population was estimated to be 4 014 765 in 2017, of which children (0-14years) were an

estimated 1 044 963 (2016 Socio-economic Profile: City of Cape Town). The majority of the

population speak Afrikaans (34.9%), with isiXhosa (29.2%) and English (27.8%) being the other

main languages (StatsSA, 2012). The Coloured demographic group represents the majority of the

population (42.4%), followed by Black (38.6%), White (15.7%) and Indian/Asian (1.4%)

(StatsSA, 2012). In terms of levels of living, great disparities exist between suburbs. For

example, the Southern district of Cape Town is the best off with 22.2% of households earning

less than R19200 per annum, while the Mitchells Plain / Khayelitsha district is the worst off with

62.4% of households earning less than R19200 per annum (City of Cape Town, 2007).

3.5 Participants and sampling

3.5.1 Inclusion criteria and target group

Participants were selected from the target group of fathers who satisfied two requirements:

The first inclusion criterion was that they must have acquired full parental rights and responsibilities as per Section 21 of the Amended Children's Act of 2007 (DSS, 2007). Mahery, Proudlock and Jamieson (2010) stated that the father acquires full parental responsibilities and rights under two distinct sets of circumstance. Firstly, if he is living with the child's mother at the time of the child's birth in a permanent life-partnership. Secondly, regardless of whether he lived with the mother, he can also acquire rights if the following three conditions were present:

- He consented to be identified as the father or applied to the court to be recognised as the child's father or pays damages in terms of customary law;

- He contributed or has attempted to contribute in good faith to the child's upbringing for a reasonable period;

- He contributed or has attempted to contribute in good faith to the expenses in connection with the maintenance of the child for a reasonable period.

The motivation for this criterion was that fathers constitute a diverse group and the identified group will have direct and legal access to be involved in their children's lives. The second inclusion was that eligible participants must have a child who is in Grade R, i.e. a child who is of compulsory school starting age. The assumption was that they would have exposure to the most current issues related to school readiness. These two criteria were not assumed to imply involvement in or familiarity with their child's process of becoming school ready. Instead, it was

assumed to mean that the father was in a legal position to be attending to the child's needs in good faith as specified in Section 21 of the Children's Act.

3.5.2 Sampling strategy

Snowball sampling was used to recruit participants. The expressive linguistic and reflexive ability of participants were considered to procure richness of data. To start with, the researcher identified and interviewed two participants who fitted the inclusion criteria and then requested that they suggest eligible or potential participants from their network. The researcher followed up on introductions to potential participants from fathers in the study as described by Biggerstaff (2012). In practice, the researcher used the initial interaction with eligible candidates as an indication of their reflexive ability for recruitment. Three interviews were subsequently conducted with fathers of Grade R children in their network. Two participants were identified and recommended by each of the supervisors of the study. Another participant was recruited through a fellow counsellor in the researcher's network. The last participant was referred by a contact in the researcher's network at a school for learners from underprivileged environments. The final sample thus consisted of nine South African fathers. The sample size was deemed appropriate based on two considerations: 1) sample size guidelines for qualitative studies and 2) data saturation. The sample satisfied the recommended guidelines for sample sizes in qualitative studies. For example, Denzin and Lincoln (2011) recommended sample sizes between six and twelve for rich data that would lead to saturation. Considering the contentious issue of when saturation is reached (Baker, Edwards & ESRC National Centre for Research Methods, 2012), the researcher based the decision on when the content of interviews became repetitive. After nine participants were interviewed, there were several recurring themes. It was decided to make best

use of the remainder of time available for the study to focus on careful analysis and interpretation

of the data. Table 3.1 provides an overview of the demographic profile of the participants.

Table 3.1
Demographic profile of participants

Participants	Age	Highest level of education	Occupation	Marital status	Home Language	Area	Children under 7
F1	42	BA.Human Movement Science	Coach - foundation phase	Married	Afrikaans	Rondebosch	2
F2	49	T3 Tech.Dip. Electronic Engineering	I.T. Consultant	Divorced	Afrikaans & English	Parklands	1
F3	38	Bcom. Management Accounting	Property speculation & renovation	Married	Afrikaans & German	Eversdal	1
F4	44	Mechanical Engineering	Entrepreneur - IT, Finance, manufacturing (toys)	Married	English & German	Durbanville	2
F5	30	Ndip. Mechanical Engineering	Manager and maintenance at gym	Married	English	Blackheath	2
F6	46	Electrical Engineering	Entrepreneur - entertainment industry	Married	English & German	Pinelands	2
F7	28	Bachelor of Medicine	GP Community service year	Married	Venda, English, Xhosa	Brackenfell	3
F8	27	Grade 11	Merchandising at supermarket	Married	English	Kewtown	3
F9	39	BA Hons. Psychology	Shareholder in Marketing firm	Married	Afrikaans	Brackenfell	2

The demographic profile of the final sample was as follows: Ages ranged between 27 and

46 years. All except two fathers had reached a tertiary level of education. One father did not

matriculate and left school after Grade 11. All fathers were permanently employed and three of

the participants had experience working with children of school age. All fathers were married, except one father who was divorced and had sole custody of his child. The fathers spoke mainly Afrikaans or English and five of the fathers had multi-lingual households due to speaking a different language from the mother of the child. The spouses of three of the participants were German-speaking. Four participants were from the Northern suburbs of Eversdal, Durbanville and Brackenfell; two participants lived in the Southern suburbs of Pinelands and Rondebosch; one was from Parklands on the West Coast; one from Blackheath, a suburb in Blue Downs and one from Kewtown, a suburb in Athlone. All but two participants had other children under the age of seven years living in their household. For the purposes of this study, age, SES and race were not used as exclusionary criteria.

3.6 Data collection

Semi-structured individual interviews were used to conduct this study. Babbie and Mouton (2012) explained that a semi-structured interview is "essentially a conversation in which the interviewer establishes a general direction for the conversation and pursues specific topics raised by the respondent" (p. 289). Bowen (2005) reported that interviews can provide rich data. Alshenqeeti (2014) identified that interviews could be time-consuming regarding both data collection and analysis. In the present study, interviews were advantageous as it provided a flexible way of obtaining in-depth information through probing or observation of non-verbal reactions as described by Kumar (2011). According to Alshenqeeti (2014), it further offered an opportunity to clarify understanding by rephrasing questions or answers, which lead to more accurate data.

Kvale (2006) opposed the idea of the research interview as warm, caring and empowering dialogues. He provided an overview of the unequal power dynamics of the interview and concluded that "a research interview is not an open and dominance-free dialogue between egalitarian partners, but a specific hierarchical and instrumental form of conversation, where the interviewer sets the stage and scripts in accord with his or her research interests" (p. 485). Subsequently, Babbie and Mouton (2012) cautioned researchers to carefully consider how they word questions, as the way in which the question is asked could subtly bias the answer. These authors identified that undue pressure could inadvertently be placed on a participant if questions or prompts were framed in a way that potentially excluded certain answers.

The researcher attempted to heed these cautions in the following ways: The interviews were conducted along an interview schedule or guide (Appendix A). The purpose of the schedule was to ensure that important aspects for the study were covered whilst allowing further exploration in keeping with the recommendation by Stangor (2011). The questions were developed through discussion with the supervisors and based on a review of existing literature (e.g., Downer & Mendez, 2005; Thomas, 2008). The interview questions were open ended and non-threatening as per Creswell's (2011) recommendation. Lastly, the researcher attempted to evaluate the initial interview schedule by conducting a pilot interview. This was transcribed by the researcher which aided the process of reflecting on the questions. The study supervisors reviewed the transcription that acted as external auditing. Minor adjustments were made to facilitate more conversational than academic questioning. The resultant interview schedule was also translated into Afrikaans (Appendix B). Additionally, the researcher made voice-memos directly after the interview to aid reflection on the interview content and process.

Alshenqeeti (2014) highlighted that even if questioning is expertly executed, those being interviewed will only reveal what they are prepared to share about their perceptions and opinions. The researcher tried to establish rapport and build trust throughout the interview in order for the participants to feel confident in sharing their thoughts. Additionally, the researcher paid attention to non-verbal cues. However, relative to the level of the researcher's experience, there were instances where 1) observations were made, but not explored for fear of placing pressure; as well as 2) opportunities for follow up were lost that were only identified on review of the transcript.

During May to November 2016, the interviews were conducted at a time and place that were convenient for the participants (their office, home or a coffee shop in their neighbourhood). The duration of each interview was approximately 60 minutes. One interview, held at the participant's office, was less than 30 minutes, possibly due to the participant's work pressure. The interviews were conducted in either English or Afrikaans, as selected by the participants.

Interviews were conducted by the researcher, audio-recorded on both an iPhone and iPad as back-up, and transcribed verbatim by the researcher. The researcher is trained and registered as a counsellor, and has some previous work experience with focus groups, but had limited experience in the use of semi-structured individual interviews. As counsellor, the researcher had experience and training in conducting individual counselling sessions and could use her micro-skills such as establishing rapport, reflection of feeling and content, paraphrasing, etc., to facilitate the interview process. In keeping with Biggerstaff (2012), data collection and analysis happened in parallel. The researcher and the supervisors monitored the emergence of information to gain a sense of data saturation. The researcher reached a sense of saturation when the content of the interviews started repeating.

3.7 Data-analysis

The transcriptions were analyzed using thematic analysis (TA). Clarke and Braun (2013) defined TA as "a method for identifying and analyzing patterns in qualitative data" (p. 1). Creswell et al. (2007) explained that TA is a "flexible tool" that can be used across a range of theoretical approaches. Clarke and Braun (2013) shared this view of TA as theoretically flexible "because the search for, and examination of patterning across language does not require adherence to any particular theory of language, or explanatory meaning framework for the experiences or practices of human beings" (p. 120). According to Fertuck (2007), this method provided a means of interpreting the data in a conscientious and rigorous manner and involved careful reading and re-reading of the data. As stated by Clarke and Braun (2013), TA was found helpful in generating unanticipated insights.

Other benefits of using this method included that TA is accessible to researchers with little or no experience with qualitative research as it does not require a detailed theoretical and technical knowledge (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The researcher's limited experience therefore also influenced the selection of the method of data analysis. To further aid understanding of the rigorous process of data analysis, the researcher attended a TA workshop presented by a senior researcher in preparation for conducting the analysis. This was a useful method for a novice researcher to explore perspectives in a relatively unknown field of research such as fathers' perspectives of school readiness.

Braun and Clarke (2006) advised researchers to state explicitly which form of TA they chose for the study, namely, inductive or theoretical-, semantic or latent TA. In the present study, an inductive approach to the analysis was adopted to identify patterns in the data by means of thematic codes. "Inductive analysis means that the patterns, themes, and categories of analysis

come from the data; they emerge out of the data rather than being imposed on them prior to data

collection and analysis" (Patton, 1980 in Bowen 2005, p. 217). This study followed a

combination of Aronson's (1995) pragmatic description of the TA process and the recursive

process of Clarke & Braun (2013): The steps used in the process of conducting the TA are

illustrated in Figure 2 after which there is an explanation of how the steps were applied.

1. **Familiarizing yourself with your data**	2. **Generating initial codes**	3. **Searching for themes**
Transcribing data (if necessary), reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas.	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code.	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme.

4. **Reviewing themes**	5. **Defining and naming themes**	6. **Producing the report**
Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts (Level 1) and the entire data set (Level 2), generating a thematic 'map' of the analysis.	Ongoing analysis to refine the specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme.	The final opportunity for analysis. Selection of vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of selected extracts, relating back of the analysis to the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis.

Figure 2. Phases of thematic analysis (TA)

Phase 1: Familiarising yourself with the data. Firstly, data was collected by the

researcher as described in the previous section. The process of TA already began during the data

collection stage, when the researcher started to notice, and look for, patterns of meaning or areas

of potential interest in the data as put forward by Braun and Clarke (2006). Audio recordings of

the interviews were transcribed by the researcher and patterns of experiences were noted. These

activities enhanced the researcher's familiarity with the data. Clarke and Braun (2013) stressed

the importance of the researcher becoming intimately familiar with the data, reading and re-

reading it.

Phase 2: Generating initial codes. The next step involved coding, expounding on the existing patterns by identifying all the data that related to it. The transcribed data was coded sentence by sentence across all nine interviews. The researcher used a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet with a tab for each interview; and in each tab were columns for the quotations, notes (e.g., any thoughts that occurred when reading the quotes), and initial codes.

Phase 3: Searching for themes. Related emerging patterns were collated and catalogued into themes, each theme named after identifying its 'essence'. As initial 'codes' started re-occurring, they were colour-coded and considered as initial themes. These were then collated in a new spreadsheet with tabs for each theme that emerged. Here each tab contained the theme and a description of the theme along with illustrative quotations from each interview. Through a process of consultation with the study supervisors, the eight initial themes were reconstituted into three main categories.

Phase 4: Reviewing the themes. In this phase the entire data set was re-read for two purposes. The first was to ascertain whether the themes 'worked' in relation to the data set. The second was to code any additional data within themes that had been missed in earlier coding stages. The themes were checked and re-checked and during this process, attention was paid to the identification of new codes. Braun and Clarke (2006) advised that the need for re-coding from the data set is to be expected as coding is an ongoing organic process. After further consultation with the supervisors another theme was added during this process and brought the final total to nine themes.

Phase 5: Defining and naming themes. Then a process followed where the themes were defined and further refined by identifying the 'story' of each theme and the researcher had to reflect on whether the themes told a compelling story that was supported by the data. The themes

that emerged from the participants' stories created a comprehensive picture of their collective experience.

Phase 6: Producing the report. Braun and Clarke (2006) proposed that the sort of questions that need to be asked towards the end phases of analysis, include: "'What does this theme mean?' 'What are the assumptions underpinning it?' 'What are the implications of this theme?' 'What conditions are likely to have given rise to it?' 'Why do people talk about this thing in this particular way (as opposed to other ways)?' and 'What is the overall story the different themes reveal about the topic?'" (p. 94). The last step was writing up, building coherent arguments for the themes. This was done by linking the literature with the findings to prepare the thesis.

Braun and Clarke (2006) maintained that many of the disadvantages of TA were not due to the method itself, but due to poor analysis or inappropriate research questions. They believed when applied rigorously, a thematic approach can produce insightful analysis that answer specific research questions. The researcher attempted to achieve this by constructing the themes through an iterative process that included consultation with the supervisors to strengthen the trustworthiness of the data analysis. Below is a brief report on the strategies applied for enhancing trustworthiness.

3.8 Strategies for enhancing trustworthiness

Lincoln and Guba (1985; 1989) proposed four means for assessing the trustworthiness of qualitative research, namely, credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability. In 1994 they added a fifth criteria, namely, authenticity (Elo et al., 2014). This will be discussed below

after the matter of reflexivity, which further contributed to the trustworthiness of qualitative research.

3.8.1 Reflexivity

One of the ways in which researchers can account for themselves is through the practice of reflexivity. Reflexivity refers to "assessment of the influence of the investigator's own background, perceptions, and interests on the qualitative research process" (Ruby, 1980 in Krefting, 1991: p. 218). Scholars suggested that the researcher engage in self-critical reflection about their experience throughout the process, and problems should be noted in the write-up: "Because these dimensions are so pervasive and important for obtaining truthful accounts, they should be implicitly or explicitly addressed in the report" (Altheide & Johnson, 2011 in Denzin & Lincoln, 2011: p. 591). Reflexive practice and reporting of research problems and experiences were recommended, as the researcher's personality and subjective perceptions could affect the analysis process (Elo et al., 2014). As mentioned before, one of the ways in which I analysed my own behaviour was by making voice notes after each interview. Reflecting on my own characteristics and examining how I influenced data gathering and analysis was important, especially when entering a different culture, as Krefting (1991) advised. I gathered the data using semi-structured interviews and received ongoing guidance from my supervisors.

Throughout the research process, I considered how my subject position and identity signifiers might impact the study, particularly the data collection process. I am a White, Afrikaans-speaking woman, wife and mother of a toddler and infant. I am a Counsellor and Psychometrist in Independent Practice, registered with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) since 2015. My formalised interest in early child development and school readiness began with a research project during my Honors year of my psychology degree. I was

visibly pregnant during the latter half of 2016 and this may have had unintended consequences, even if unconsciously, on the fathers interviewed.

I grew up in a very traditional Afrikaans family, where the father was the main breadwinner and whose involvement with the children included a lot of playfulness and emotional support, but excluded assistance with household duties. I certainly had some stereotypical, preconceived ideas about fathers' involvement in their children and specifically about their preparation for school. Additionally, as a mother, I am aware that I have certain expectations of my husband's role as the father of our children. We share parenting and household tasks, taking equal responsibility for raising our children. Listening to participants relating how the roles are divided within their families, I became aware of my own feelings about similar situations in our household. I tried to respectfully hold the views of the participants without influencing the data collection process. However, I found it hard not to be visibly impressed when fathers showed a higher level of involvement with their children. Reflecting on my interviews, being visibly impressed did lead me into an uncomfortable position. One of the fathers seemed to enjoy the power of having a woman nod, smile and appreciate his views about the equality of parental roles. This may have encouraged him greatly to express his opinions and I did not challenge him later when he made statements, in contrast with facts about school readiness and its effects on a learner's school trajectory. Kvale (2006) proposed, in contrast to these harmonious conversations, "Actively confronting interviews", where the interviewer critically questions what the interviewee says. In hindsight, I could have addressed the discrepancy at a more appropriate time during the interview. I shall keep this in mind for future research projects.

During the transcription of the interviews, I became aware of how often I made responses to please or make participants feel better, rather than giving them a moment to reflect on what they said, or paraphrasing what they said. I contribute this partly to inexperience, as it became less of a problem with later interviews, and partly due to the value I place on harmonious social relationships and how that subconsciously influenced my decision-making process. I wanted participants to feel comfortable to express their honest opinions. Also, I was in the position where I needed something from the participants, which upon reflection, makes my response of "being nice" manipulative, something I am resistant to admit. The other problem with this kind of response from me is that it is a missed opportunity for a father who has been too busy with work or a father who has been putting undue academic pressure on his child, to reflect on the effect of his own behaviour.

I utilized my attentive listening skills as a counsellor and was very aware of the transference between myself and the participants. I noticed that some fathers initially may have felt intimidated not only by my role as a researcher, but also by the field of psychology. When I noticed that they perceived my role as that of expert, I tried to reframe my position as there to learn from them, and attempted to empower them with my belief that they know more about their own child than anyone. I believe the strategies I employed resulted in establishing rapport in a short space of time, a change in the nature and quality of participation, and deepening rapport during the interview.

3.8.2 Credibility

Lincoln and Guba (1985) saw this as one of the key factors in establishing trustworthiness. Guba (1981) referred to credibility as "truth value". Krefting (1991) added to this by stating: "In qualitative research, truth value is usually obtained from the discovery of

human experiences as they are lived and perceived by informants" (p. 215). Others suggest that credibility is enhanced when researchers ensure that those participating in research are identified and described accurately (Elo et al., 2014). Merriam (1998, as cited in Shenton, 2004) maintained that this criterion addressed the question of how congruent findings are with reality.

For the present study, the researcher used guidelines provided by Shenton (2004) in an attempt to attain credibility in the following ways: the selection of semi-structured interviews seemed the most appropriate method to fit the purpose of the study and have been utilized effectively in other qualitative studies (e.g., Pelletier & Brent, 2002; Sahin, Sak & Tuncer, 2013). Participants were reminded of the voluntary nature of their participation and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without reservation. The researcher often rephrased questions, or returned to matters raised by the participants during the course of the interview, in an attempt to clarify understanding of the father's perspectives. For instance, when a father referred to some of the domains of school readiness in the beginning of the interview, he was later asked to elaborate on it. Reference to the researcher's experience is detailed in the reflexivity section. Through reviewing the literature, the researcher attempted to get a thorough understanding of aspects related to the study such as, early child development in South Africa, school readiness, the effects and status of father's involvement with their children and their school readiness preparation. In the findings discussion, direct quotes were provided so that the interpretations can be critically assessed as proposed by Krefting (1991). Findings were also continuously discussed with the supervisors of the study, who are intimately familiar with the topic of research. The NRF was also acknowledged for their funding that supported the study.

3.8.3 Dependability and Transferability

These two criteria are discussed together, as they were addressed similarly in this study. Guba (1981) explained the difficulty of establishing dependability with humans as instruments and how this differed from quantitative reliability: "The naturalist thus interprets consistency as dependability, a concept that embraces elements, both of the stability implied by the rationalistic term *reliable*, and of the trackability required by explainable changes in instrumentation" (p. 81). In other words, *dependability* referred to the constancy of data over time and in other situations and is enhanced through thick descriptions, whereas *transferability*, as distinguished by Lincoln and Guba (1985), referred to the potential for findings to be transferred to other contexts.

Leung (2015) addressed the issue of consistency in qualitative data: "A margin of variability for results is tolerated in qualitative research provided the methodology and epistemological logistics consistently yield data that are ontologically similar, but may differ in richness and ambience within similar dimensions" (p. 325). This chapter was an attempt to provide a dense description of the research design and implementation, the operational detail of data gathering, and a reflective appraisal of the effectiveness of the approach undertaken. The researcher attempted to provide sufficient detail, should other researchers want to replicate the study, they would be able to do so. However, due to the nature of qualitative enquiry, they might not generate the exact same findings (Shenton, 2004).

3.8.4 Confirmability

Confirmability, according to Shenton (2004), referred to the qualitative researcher's concern with objectivity. That is, the potential for congruence between two or more independent people about the data's accuracy, relevance, or meaning (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; 1989). It is advised that the researcher should provide documentation for every claim or interpretation from

at least two sources to ensure that the data support the researcher's analysis and interpretation of the findings (Guba, 1981; Krefting, 1991). Shenton (2004) advised that triangulation and the extent to which the researcher acknowledged his or her predispositions, would help to reduce investigator bias. To this end, the researcher followed Shenton's (2004) guidance to explicitly state the following: "the beliefs underpinning decisions made and methods adopted within the research report, the reasons for favouring one approach when others could have been taken explained and weaknesses in the techniques actually employed admitted" (p. 72). Moreover, the analysis and findings were continuously audited by both research supervisors throughout the process.

3.8.5 Authenticity

Elo and colleagues (2014) stated that authenticity refers to the extent to which researchers, fairly and faithfully, showed a range of realities, not only those aspects that supported their ideas. To support authenticity peer review was used. For example, the pilot and subsequent interviews were critically analysed by the supervisors and the researcher implemented their recommendations in subsequent interviews.

In addition, those steps that were undertaken to enhance the skills of the researcher in the specific project were documented as advised by Krefting (1991). The researcher further attended the following University of the Western Cape (UWC) workshops for post-graduates and seminars to enhance her skills, namely,

- Qualitative Data Analysis Research Development Program - 14 May 2016,
- Synthesizing findings and developing conclusions - 28 May 2016,
- Writing articles for publication - 4 June 2016,
- The role of theory - 10 September 2016,

- Synthesising findings and developing conclusions - 8 April 2017,

- the JVR Academy School Readiness Workshop - 23 September 2016,

- the 5th annual CHS Research Symposium at UWC - 14 September, 2017.

These training opportunities broadened the skills of the researcher and assisted in facilitating a reflexive process throughout the research process.

3.9 Ethics considerations

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Research Ethics Committee at the University of the Western Cape (Appendix C). Ethics clearance and project registration number was HS/16/5/41.

Due to the personal nature of qualitative interviews and potentially powerful knowledge produced, Brinkmann and Kvale (2005) considered ethics as important as methodology in interview research. In the present study, the researcher attempted to remain conscious of the delicate relationship between interviewer and interviewee, as explained by Kvale (2006):

> If we go beyond a conception of interviews as dialogues good in themselves, a series of ethical issues appears in the private conversations for public use. On a micro level, this concerns, in particular, the ambiguity of the interview relationship between a close personal and an instrumental relation, with the interviewer being both a participant in, and an observer of, the interview relationship. The dominant position of the interviewer may lead to an invasion of the subject's privacy, with a temptation to masquerade as a friend to get the information the researcher needs. A conception of research interviews as egalitarian dialogues may further gloss over conflicts of interests between interviewers and subjects (p. 497).

DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) highlighted four ethical issues related to the interview process, namely, "(1) reducing the risk of unanticipated harm; (2) protecting the interviewees' information; (3) effectively informing interviewees about the nature of the study, and (4) reducing the risk of exploitation" (p. 319). The way in which these concerns were addressed in the present study is discussed below.

3.9.1 Reducing the risk of unanticipated harm

Gathering rich data in ways that cause no harm is at the core of qualitative research such as interviewing (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The interview process can develop in unforeseen ways. For example, DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) illustrated that nurses from India who had been working in the USA were overcome with unexpressed grief about their separation from their families when the interviewer reflected their narratives back to them. In the present study, it was therefore explicitly stated that should the interviews result in unforeseen emotional distress for the fathers participating in this study, they would be referred to appropriate professionals for support.

3.9.2 Protecting the interviewees' information

The anonymity of the interviewee in relation to the information shared must be maintained, as failure to do so could jeopardise the participant's position in a system (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Each father's identity was anonymized through codes and confidentiality was ensured, especially as some of these fathers knew each other. Names of the interview participants are confidential and they were provided with pseudonyms (e.g., F1 refers to the father of the first interview, F2 to the father of the second interview and so forth). Children were not part of the interview process, but when fathers referred to the name of their child (or

any other person's name) during in the interview process, it was not captured in the transcription. Audio recordings and transcriptions are kept secure in password protected files to which only the researcher and her supervisors have access.

3.9.3 Effectively informing interviewees about the nature of the study

DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) asserted that another important ethical issue concerns ensuring participants received adequate communication of the intent of the research. Fathers who showed an interest in the present study were first contacted telephonically, then supplied with an information sheet via e-mail (Appendix D). The information sheet provided participants with a brief background-; an outline of the aims of the study; a summary of their rights and an explanation of the lines of communication to provide feedback or raise concerns about the research. It was explained that participation was voluntary and participants were reminded that they could withdraw from the study at any time, without fear of negative consequences or loss of benefits. None of the participants withdrew from the study. Participants were asked to complete a consent form before being interviewed, including permission to make audio recordings (Appendix E). The information sheet, consent form and interview guide were also translated to Afrikaans (Appendices F, G, and B respectively).

3.9.4 Reducing the risk of exploitation

Lastly, interviewees should not be exploited for personal gain (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Participants were acknowledged for their contributions to the research process in the thesis as well as any subsequent dissemination of the study.

This chapter provided a detailed description of the methods undertaken to explore fathers' perspectives of school readiness. The results have been tabulated and are presented and discussed in *Chapter Four*.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The overall aim of this chapter is to report on the findings of the exploratory investigation into fathers' perceptions of school readiness. The researcher set out to explore fathers' understanding of what school readiness entails, what their ideas are about their role in preparing their child for school, as well as any perceived barriers and facilitators that affect their involvement in the facilitation of school readiness.

This chapter is presented as an integrated results and discussion chapter. Quotes were extracted from the transcripts to illustrate each theme. The findings of each of the three thematic categories will be illustrated and discussed as follows: The first table in each category will present a synopsis of the identified theme(s). Subsequent tables will provide illustrative quotes from the fathers per theme. A short summary of the main findings per category will conclude the discussion of the category.

Three categories were identified from the thematic analyses of the data, namely, 1) Perspectives on school readiness, 2) Feedback, and 3) Roles and Responsibilities. Each category entails themes (and sub-themes) that will be presented in tabular form and described qualitatively. Table 4.1 reflects the categories and the thematic content of each category.

Table 4.1

Categories and themes identified in the analysis of the data

Categories	Themes
1. Perspectives on school readiness	Understandings of school readiness
	Components of school readiness
	Context colours understandings
	School readiness and age
	Breadth of knowledge and impact on decision-making
2. Feedback	Who provides feedback?
	How is it actioned?
3. Roles and responsibilities	Responsibilities
	Roles

4.1 Thematic Category One: Perspectives of school readiness

This thematic category included fathers' perspectives or views of school readiness. This category included the following five themes: 1) Fathers' understandings of school readiness, 2) Components of school readiness, 3) Context colours understandings, 4) School readiness and age and 5) Breadth of knowledge and impact on decision making. Table 4.2 illustrates the first thematic category.

Table 4.2.
Thematic Category One

Category	Theme
Perspectives of school readiness	Understandings of school readiness
	Components of school readiness
	Context colours understandings
	School readiness and age
	Breadth of knowledge and impact on decision-making

4.1.1 Theme One: Understandings of school readiness

Fathers were not able to give clear-cut definitions of school readiness that they used in their own understanding of parenting and engagement with the schooling system. Fathers stated that they were uncertain about the exact meaning of the term "school readiness". The reported understandings of school readiness ranged from not knowing what school readiness means to having some familiarity with the term. Table 4.3 provides illustrative quotes from fathers about their understandings of school readiness.

Table 4.3.

Fathers' understandings of school readiness

[F1]: "If I must think about it, then I don't know exactly, I'm not a hundred percent sure what I should consider, I don't have a list to tell me exactly where my child should be" … "So school readiness, I know the term, I think it should be that children should be ready to go into this phase. What exactly "ready" is, that I don't know."

[F6]: "Uhm, (pause) no. It's not a term I-, it's a straightforward term but it's not a term I've heard referred to before."

[F3]: "If a child is on a level to make a success of Grade 1 I think is the basic meaning. If he'll be comfortable in Grade 1."

[F7]: "To me, it means about the child development to see is he ready for Grade 1. So, I'd check his performance and the report from the preschool and I can see that he's doing well and ready for it."

[F4]: "I just think if they're ready to go to school, from both a learning perspective, but also emotional perspective. Ja, so that's what I would say."

From the illustrative examples, it is noticeable that fathers used references to inform their understanding of school readiness e.g., feedback and performance ("the report"); growth and developmental milestones, etc. From the fathers' responses, it appeared that the terms are not easily defined, but have a clear value meaning and application. Thus, fathers seemed to have an implicit understanding of the term school readiness rather than an explicit definition or reference. That is to say, fathers had an understanding of the notion of readiness to enroll in Grade 1, but did not necessarily have an explicit theoretical explanation for school readiness *per se*. Fathers reportedly based their understanding of readiness for school primarily on the information available to them, their subjective experience and societal discourse. The understandings reported by fathers were varied and there was no clear consensus in their relative understanding of school readiness. The variation noted in fathers' understanding is also mirrored in the literature where there is currently no uniform definition of school readiness (Mohamed, 2013). Similarly, Moore (2008) reported that differences in the definition of school readiness remain despite researchers highlighting the need for congruent ideas and practices of school readiness. The lack of clarity on what school readiness entails and the variation reported have implications

for how preparation for school readiness is facilitated by all stakeholders, from researchers and academics to educators to parents or fathers (Texas Early Learning Council, 2011).

4.1.2 Theme Two: Components of school readiness

The participants were able to identify components of school readiness when prompted. Fathers identified numerous aspects that could be organized thematically into seven components of school readiness. The groups or components are presented in order of the areas that were referred to more often, and not to suggest that one is more important than the other. First, fathers identified considerations that related to emotional development, e.g., confidence and assertiveness. Second, fathers reported on components subsumed in social development e.g., the ability to make and relate to friends. Third, they often referred to their children's academic abilities and performance, e.g., their performance in mathematics or knowing colours, and this was grouped in the cognition and general knowledge category. Fourth, references to speech were grouped in the language development category. Fifth, reading and writing elements were captured in the literacy component. The next component contains references made to their children's physical development, e.g., being a "competent mover" or appearing similar in size to peers. Lastly, fathers identified aspects relating to children's motivation, e.g., their enthusiasm to learn or having a thirst for knowledge and was grouped in the attitudes to learning component. Each of these components are presented below and illustrated with selected quotes in Tabular form.

Component One: Emotional development

Participants identified emotional development as a component of readiness. Six of the nine participants specifically referred to emotional readiness for school. The other fathers all

alluded to this when they described some of their children's behaviour at school. Five of the six fathers who specifically referred to emotional readiness were white and of higher socio-economic status. Three of the six children attended government schools and three attended private schools. Table 4.4 contains illustrative quotations of participants' references to the emotional component of school readiness.

Table 4.4.

References to the emotional component of school readiness

[F1]: "With me specifically, the reason why he stayed behind for a year was because of emotional reasons, because we thought he was not yet ready to go to Grade 1, that he needed another year. Cognitively he was fine, physically he was fine, but emotionally he was not yet ready to take that step."
[F2]: "Then, the next thought about school readiness is whether he is emotionally ready for school" … "he doesn't have that separation anxiety of kids who start school straight from home"
[F9]: "I used to think school readiness is about whether you can read and write. I didn't value the fact that you also had to be emotionally ready to go to school. I think that's important in the way I look at it now."

From the illustrative quotes, it becomes evident that fathers identified capacities associated with emotional processing, emotion regulation and emotional readiness. Fathers attributed their awareness of emotional readiness to two main sources: First, five fathers reported that teachers alerted them to a concern with their children's emotional readiness. Thus, it seems like feedback on emotional readiness was provided within the schools that participants' children were attending. Second, two fathers were aware of emotional readiness from their previous work experience as teachers. The fathers' awareness of emotional readiness resonated with the findings of Ladd (2009), who indicated that societal discourse has shifted to focus on social-emotional skills. Furthermore, the results suggest that the reported links between emotional readiness and scholastic achievement shown in research has been adopted and is being applied (e.g., Hatcher et al., 2012).

The fathers were explicit in their acknowledgement that their awareness was in response to external feedback. Thus, it might not have emerged as a finding if there was no feedback. This

finding does not necessarily contradict the finding in literature that caregivers mainly give preference to cognitive and academic abilities as predictors for school readiness, rather than a focus on social and emotional school readiness (Raver, 2003; Rimm-Kaufman & Sandilos, 2017). The findings of the present study might support the predisposition to focus on cognitive aspects and added that parents are receptive to feedback on other aspects such as, emotional readiness. An exploration of the awareness of emotional readiness across demographic and contextual settings remain an area for further exploration in the South African context.

Component Two: Social development

The participants identified social development as a component of school readiness. Fathers considered their child's ability to use social skills to build friendships and engage in a larger social network to be an indicator of how well they would adapt to Grade 1. Table 4.5 contains illustrative quotations of participants' references to the social component of school readiness.

Table 4.5.
References to the social component of school readiness

[F1]: "he must have the ability to play with his friends"
[F3]: "Maybe [*he'd be comfortable in Grade 1*] if in his environment-, if he has peers whom he can relate to, friends whom he can connect with."
[F4]: "Getting him to find friends." … "So all the things that we had to work on was finding friends, encouraging him to get onto the play field, all that kind of stuff. And we've had to really work hard at that."
[F6]: "The only thing that comes up to me, two things I guess, social and aptitude."… "Well social just to integrate with and make friends and, and be accepted as part of the class."

From the above quotations, it becomes evident that fathers were aware of the importance of social skills in order to become integrated into school. The need for mastery of social skills was placed as an important component alongside scholastic aptitude. Participant F6 articulated it well and framed the importance of having sufficient social skills to be integrated or "accepted as part of the class." Participant F4 reported how the parents needed to "work really hard at"

compensating or accommodating the deficits in social development in order to assist the child

with adjustment. One father [F4] identified social competence or development, but referred to it

as "the emotional side". The father did not link the lack of social skills to emotional sequelae, but

inferred it. In this study, fathers seemed to be well aware of the impact of both social and

emotional abilities on the child's successful transition to school. The literature points to the

significant ways in which fathers contribute to the development of a child's social skills through

their warmth and sensitivity, sense of humour, and school- and home-based educational

involvement (Allen & Daly, 2007; NICHD, 2004; Paquette, 2004). Children's self-regulatory

skills, shown to be enhanced by rough-and-tumble play with fathers, has been strongly

associated with their social functioning (Hagman, 2014; Paquette, 2004).

Component Three: Cognition and general knowledge

Fathers identified general academic abilities and scholastic performance as indicators of

readiness. This theme was termed cognition and general knowledge. Table 4.6 contains quotes

that illustrate the theme of cognition or general knowledge as a component of school readiness.

Table 4.6

References to the cognition and general knowledge component of school readiness

[F2]: "The first thing about school readiness is whether he's academically developed to fit with the school"
[F3]: "I think, it's important to me, that a child has good general knowledge, good logic." … "That he would be able to cope academically" … "So I'll probably measure him in those terms, if I think it would be a struggle, whether academically, or, I'm just talking in general, whether it's emotional, I think those two, that's probably the most important elements in my opinion."
[F5]: "So all I'm programmed is, she has to know maths and physics and all that" … "the way they think and how they approach the problem."
[F1]: "Then cognitively, sure, that would be a bit more difficult, because I don't actually have any knowledge about what is expected of them."
[F4]: "I think from an educational perspective, the basic hand functions, and cognitive functions… But specifically, for school readiness, we do homework together. When the kids were younger we did colours and shapes. "D" builds puzzles, we have colourful blocks. I make a block pattern and she has to copy it."

Fathers identified that children's cognitive abilities were an indicator of school readiness. Fathers reported that children should display a minimum cognitive competence that would allow them to "cope academically" i.e. readily achieve the outcomes as prescribed by the school curriculum. The extracts further illustrate that fathers consider academic performance an indication of a child's school readiness. Some fathers gauged this from their children's school reports.

This study did not attempt to measure fathers' involvement, but it is worth noting that all but one of these fathers have been present since their children's birth and all continue to play an active parenting role in their children's lives. One father [F3], who valued general knowledge, reported going on outings to teach his child "about the world, countries and how things fit together". Some fathers [F3, F4] also intentionally played games with their children that stimulate children's ability to focus on a task, remember information and reproduce new-found knowledge, like chess or making patterns with blocks which the child must copy. Research showed that highly engaged fathers seemed to enhance their children's cognitive functioning (Cabrera et al., 2007; Sethna et al., 2017; Tamis-LeMonda et al., 2004).

The idea that the child must fit in with the school as highlighted by F2, has been contested in recent years. The current movement toward "ready schools" is shifting more responsibility to schools to create an environment in which all children can thrive (Britto, 2012).

Component Four: Language development

Participants identified the child's language and communicative abilities as an important component. For some fathers, speaking fluently and confidently were important indicators of a child's school readiness. There also seems to be an element of admiration for other children who speak fluently and confidently, especially when English is not their home language [F5, F7]. One

father [F5] linked proficiency in the language competency to general level of cognitive functioning or intelligence. Table 4.7 contains references to the language development component of school readiness.

Table 4.7

References to the language development component of school readiness

[F5]: "Speech. That's also very important. Automatically when she speaks properly, I would say she sounds more competent. It's sad, it's just one of those things, our African generations as well, when they speak well automatically you'd think "ah, this one's intelligent" and that would boost her confidence because she knows how to voice her opinions. So, that for me is also very important."
[F1]: "I think, in terms of language, the feedback we received, even though he speaks English and he's absolutely fine with it, in his heart he is an Afrikaans child. He thinks in Afrikaans, and, so, he doesn't think in English and do his tasks."
[F7]: "I think he was ready by the way. The way he did the performance, you know, talking, not shy."
[F6]: "Well, ah, definitely there's a language barrier for me. So, that's an obvious kind of situation, although I understand most of the stuff now, because you learn as you as time goes on, but I do definitely foresee that as a problem going higher [in school] as well. Because now you're talking terms that I wouldn't know: subtract or add or whatever you're doing. So, that could be a potential barrier."

The quotes illustrate that the fathers considered a child's language development to carry meaning beyond the general development of a skill. For participant F5 a good command of language is an indication of competence, intelligence and a confidence booster. Like F5, F7 considered the level of confidence with which a child communicates as an indicator of their school readiness. F1 makes language a deeply personal matter; and alludes to language being a link to a person's identity.

Fathers also highlighted some of the unintended consequences of bilingualism and how language could become a barrier. For instance, F6 speaks English and his spouse speaks German. Their children are fluent in both languages and attend a German school. For this father, language was a barrier to his involvement with his children's school or school work. In another example, F1 describes that language could be a barrier to school readiness if a child's home language differs from the language of educational instruction. This participant reported that his family

opted to have their child repeat Grade R in their home language in the hopes of improving his school readiness and academic performance.

Fathers contribute to children's language development in a unique way through their questions (Leech et al., 2013), their level of education and use of vocabulary (Cabrera et al., 2007; Pancsofar & Vernon-Feagans, 2006; Salo et al., 2016) and their involvement (Cabrera, 2017; Chacko et al., 2017). Pancsofar and Vernon-Feagans (2006) found that in families with two working parents, fathers had a greater impact than mothers on their children's language development. More research is required to explore this effect when the father's language differs from the child's language of education in the South African context.

Component Five: Literacy skills

Fathers reported that early literacy skills were an indication of their children's readiness for school. Fathers readily recognised their children's literacy abilities and were quite specific in their ideas about what this should entail. For example, being able to write their own name, letter naming, counting to ten, sounding four-letter words, etc. Fathers reportedly encountered these specific abilities as specific indicators on the children's report cards. This information from the schools therefore informed fathers' understanding of measurable aspects that constituted early literacy skills that would be required for their children to become ready for school. Table 4.8 contains references to the literacy component of school readiness.

Table 4.8
Literacy skills

[F9]: "She can already write her own name, she can recognise and sound four-letter words. To me, that means she is now ready to take the next step.
[F2]: "I think they should at least be able to write down the entire alphabet, read words, not necessarily sentences, read words, and do calculations up to 10."
[F3]: "I think a child should at least have a measure of hand-skills, he must be primed to be able to write."
[F8]: "Ja, she's drawing and writing her name and such." … "we put her drawings on the fridge or in the hall."

Most fathers reported being involved in activities that stimulate early literacy and provided early literacy opportunities. For example, fathers reported that they read to their children [F3, F5, F8, F9]; and modelled the importance of reading [F1, F3]. Fathers also reported that they played literacy games like Junior Scrabble [F2, F8]. Fathers further reported that they acknowledged their children's achievements such as, putting their schoolwork up on the wall [F8], and celebrating their report card [F7]. Fathers reported that they assist their children with homework [F1, F9]. Thus, it becomes evident that fathers believed that early literacy skills are important for school readiness and in turn engaged actively and intentionally with their children in activities that promoted the acquisition of early literacy skills. The intentional behavior reported above aligned with Morgan et al. (2009) who reported that almost all fathers are involved to some extent in home literacy events with their children.

Component Six: Physical and motor development

The participants identified physical prowess and mastery of motor skills as important indicators of readiness for school. Fathers mostly referred to their children's physical development in terms of participation in sport, which refers to their gross motor development [F1, F4, F6, F9]. A few fathers could identify specific coordination and motoric functions like cutting with scissors [F4, F6]. Table 4.9 contains quotations of fathers' references to physical and motor development as a component of school readiness.

Table 4.9
The physical and motor development component of school readiness

[F1]: "I think on a physical level; the child must be a competent mover."

[F4]: "I think also from a physical, sport perspective, there needs to be that kind of stuff. You need to be able to catch a ball hopefully, you need to be able to do whatever."

[F6]: "And I suppose coordination as well for sport or something like that, ja, development or coordination. Ja just coordination, playing like with a bat and ball, doing things like that so they can get a bit more hand-ball-eye-coordination. Because I guess at the end of the day that helps with something."

[F9]: "I would like for her to take part in sport. She does ballet, she's been doing it for three years now"

Fathers further linked physical development and abilities to healthy social skills. For example, F1 considered being a "competent mover" important, because it enables a child to make and play with friends. Thus, mastery of physical skills facilitated social interaction. Fathers also reported comparing their children's abilities in the physical and motor realm to classmates. For example, F1 found it comforting that his child fitted in with his classmates on a physical level in terms of his size and ability to keep up with his friends during play.

Awareness of sensorimotor skills was reported to be a function of feedback from teachers. For example, F2 reported that he started focusing on the process of school readiness in earnest after feedback from the class teacher. This finding indicated that sensorimotor abilities were less readily identified as an important skill by fathers, but that they responded well to initiate intervention when it is pointed out to them. Thus, sensorimotor functions as part of physical development are often framed in deficit terms based on feedback from professionals rather than identified as normal developmental milestones by parents.

Notably, during the interviews, only one father [F1] made reference to physical play, such as wrestling (rough-and-tumble play) when questioned about the activities or games they play with their children. He mentioned that they wrestle often, that it is one of his kids' favourite things to do with him. Perhaps due to the nature of the topic of investigation, that the other fathers did not spontaneously reference physical play. This might suggest that the value of play activities was not seen in educational or developmental terms. They mostly referred to reading and educational games that they enjoy together, for example, building puzzles or playing Junior Scrabble (a spelling board game). When pressed about activities other than educational, they mostly referred to fun outings to the beach, parks or play-centres (e.g., Bugs or Stodels), and outdoor sport. Despite this, research indicates that rough and tumble play is a common form of

play between fathers and children (Flanders, Leo, Paquette, Pihl & Séguin, 2009). About one-third (1/3) of fathers engage in rough-and-tumble with their children daily and only 4% to 16% of fathers never do (Paquette, Carbonneau, Dubeau, Bigras, & Tremblay, 2003). Flanders et al. (2009) provided a comprehensive overview of literature in which physical play was linked to areas of children's social-emotional development, for example self-regulation. Both boys and girls enjoy physical play, especially with their fathers (Ross & Taylor, 1989 in Flanders et al., 2009). Leidy, Schfield and Parke (2013 as cited in Gray and Anderson, 2015) reported that teachers found boys more popular whose fathers engaged in physical play, but without excessive direction. The benefits of rough-and-tumble play was not explicitly identified as preparing children for school by the participants. Thus, it remains an under-acknowledged and under-valued element in the way in which fathers facilitate a child's development.

Component Seven: Attitudes to learning

Here the importance of a child's attitude to learning is recognised; being willing and able to receive teaching [F1]. Fathers related how evident their children's enthusiasm for learning is [F8, F9] and considered it an indication of their readiness for school. Table 4.10 contains quotations of fathers that illustrate the attitude to learning as a component of school readiness.

Table 4.10
References to attitudes to learning

[F9]: "The more I get to do with her thirst for knowledge, the more I realise she is now ready. She's incredibly curious and has an insatiable thirst for knowledge. She just wants to know how everything works."
[F1]: "So, maybe less about being able to count to ten or know all the colours and more about a way to see that, should I want to teach him something like that, that he's in the right space to receive it."
[F8]: "Teacher told my wife she always has something to say in class. Always open, excited to learn and to learn (teach) others."

Fathers identified that the attitude to learning or interest in learning is an important component of readiness. Some fathers reported that it was noticeable when a child develops

motivation and eagerness learn, moving into a space where the child is ready to receive teaching. Participants reflected that they noticed a definite shift in their child's attitude to learning as they become more ready for school. The participants' influence in this regard was not explored. Researchers found this component of school readiness to be an important factor for a child's success in school, which could overcome less favourable circumstances (Barbu et al., 2015; Duckworth et al., 2009 in Emerson et al., 2012). It is considered one of the core school readiness domains, specifically significant in the prediction of school readiness in mathematics and language in preschoolers from low-income families (McWayne, Fantuzzo & McDermott, 2004). Mansour and Martin (2009) reported that home and parental factors play a critical role in predicting student achievement motivation and engagement. Physical play was also linked to the development of self-regulation, a competency that influences a child's attitude to learning (Flanders et al., 2009) Thus, fathers' contribution to the development of this component remains an area for future research.

4.1.3 Theme Three: Context colours understandings

This theme identified the subject positions of fathers and how their particular contextual signifiers coloured their construction or understanding of school readiness. Fathers' history and life experience (e.g., relationship with his father; training and work experience) seem to have an impact on their parenting style and –beliefs and ultimately how they approach their child's readiness to enter to school. Table 4.11 provides illustrative quotes on fathers' perceptions of the origins of school readiness.

Table 4.11
Context colours understandings

[F1]: "I did a degree in Human Movement Science at Tuks and a postgrad at the Business School GSB… I have a business that coaches foundation phase sport… OK, perhaps I should start with the physical because that's more certain ground for me"
[F2]: "I could read and write before I went to school" … "For example, he has a Junior Scrabble. So, I focus more on playing that game with him than the other."
[F5]: "I was afraid to talk to my father and I don't want that with my kids…So communication for me will be key… Because I never had that. It really took its toll on me. It affected what I studied, because this is what my father wanted me to do."
[F7]: "Don't ever talk bad about the teacher with your child… I learned it from my mom… My relationship with the school is the best. It's the best ever."

The extracts illustrate how a father [F1] with a background and career in sport constructed his ideas about school readiness first and foremost around the physical aspect of a child's development. A father [F2], whose mother taught him to read and write before he started school, focused his leisure activities with his son on pre-literacy games. Another father [F5] who feels that he followed the wrong career path because of bad communication between him and his father, focused on developing good communication with his children. Participant F7, whose mother taught him to value and respect teachers has built such excellent relationships with his son's pre-school teacher that she arranged his son's application and acceptance into a private school and he has already built relationships with the new principal and teachers. The father [F7] has established a positive pattern of interactions with the Grade R teacher that is developing further with the Grade 1 teacher and new school principal.

The extracts therefore demonstrate that fathers' understanding of and approach to school readiness, as well as their involvement with the school is influenced by their personal experience. Considering the father's personal context is therefore important when observing how he engages with or approaches the development of his own child in general. This finding resonated with research that has shown that a father's own developmental history in part influences his

involvement in his children's care and development (Coley & Hernandez, 2006; Madhavan, Richter, Norris & Hosegood, 2014). This is but one of many dynamic and reciprocal processes by which fathers influence children's development over time. Researchers highlight the multiple potential influences on fathers' parenting behaviour. For example, his current characteristics, as determined by his biological, cultural, and rearing history; his personality characteristics; family characteristics and behaviours; family relationships; household socioeconomic status; his social network; his employment, and current social, political, and economic circumstances in the society (Cabrera, Fitzgerald, Bradley & Roggman, 2014).

4.1.4 Theme Four: School readiness and age

Fathers provided mixed responses to the question about the age at which children should be ready to be enrolled in school. Fathers identified that chronological age was not the best indicator of readiness. Table 4.12 provides illustrative quotes of fathers' perceptions on when children become ready for school.

Table 4.12
When do children become ready for school?

[F2] "I'm talking about the year in which you turn seven, that's the ideal age"
[F1]: "As it stands now, I'd say later rather than earlier… I think the only thing-, I mean I don't have the solution, but to my mind it makes sense that child must be ready, rather than be old enough." … "I often think, if only chronological age is used as a measure that you, you know, if the child is not ready to go then the child must first have the opportunity to catch up before going… But I don't know how practical that is, but it would actually be ideal to, if a child is not physically ready, that he almost, first gets the opportunity to get to that place. Because I think it's really important, because, at that age, if you were to use age, if he's emotionally not ready, it could be very difficult for the child to fit in with his peers. If he's physically not at the right level, it could be very difficult and if he's cognitively not ready, also difficult. So, if I had a "checklist" then one could of course spend the time to put things in place. Whether it's to go and take part in something, a programme, or just to do something at home, then you could at least make sure that he's more or less in that-, ready to go to school."
[F7]: "So I'd prefer, if it was me I was going to say early, at the age of five. Ja, it also must depend on your intelligence."

Some fathers reported that children are ready at age seven. For example, F2 identified it as the ideal age and F1 indicated that children were more ready when they are older. Two of the

fathers in the present study felt that going to school at a younger age holds some benefits. For example, F7 identified age five as the preferred age. Most fathers felt that children develop at a different pace and factors such as their physical, cognitive and emotional development should be considered alongside chronological age. Fathers did not feel that age was a sufficient indicator of school readiness. Thus, the fathers were conscious of other factors at play, such as physical, emotional and cognitive development, as well as the child's environment.

The findings of the present study echoed the strands in the existing literature. First, readiness at age seven concurred with the Department of Basic Education (2006) that mandate children to be admitted to Grade 1 in the year that he or she turns seven. This reflects the principle of maturation that is linked to chronological age as a necessary indicator. This assumes readiness is rooted in developmentally predetermined physical and social maturation processes. Meisels (1999 in Dockett & Perry, 2002) explained that time is all that is needed for children to develop emotionally, socially and intellectually. In other words, becoming school ready happens automatically with age and cannot be accelerated.

Second, age it is not a reliable predictor of success in school. McTurk et al. (2011) reported that age was not a reliable indicator of school readiness. Rimm-Kaufman and Sandilos (2017) reported that age has been the deciding factor of a child's readiness for school entry for many years, albeit a poor predictor of later school success. Other researchers suggested that children starting school at younger ages might not be ideal (Dee & Sievertsen, 2015; Dockett & Perry, 2002; Fredriksson & Öckert, 2006; Herbst & Strawinski, 2016; Ponzo & Scoppa, 2014). Kim et al. (2005) reported that some parents want to keep their children at home to avoid early failure in school.

4.1.5 Theme Five: Breadth of knowledge and impact on decision-making

This theme related to the breadth of knowledge fathers had about school readiness. Fathers reported that they had to make decisions about enrolling their children, but lacked information as to what school readiness entailed. Table 4.13 provides quotes that illustrate fathers' view of their breadth of knowledge on the subject.

Table 4.13

Breadth of understanding

[F5]: "School readiness, that one was, especially for my daughter, you know you want the best for your kids, right? But the thing is I just didn't know how to tackle it."
[F2]: "You see, the problem with preparing *(for school)* is that you don't have a measure. I am a layman, I'm not in Education"
[F1]: "And interesting you should ask, because I think as it stands, I don't even know exactly what school readiness is, so it's actually topsy-turvy, actually parents are supposed to know exactly what's going on and what is expected…So, I think perhaps more knowledge about what is important in that phase of your child's life would be good. I think it's a hindrance that one doesn't know exactly what school readiness is, what it entails."

From the quotes above it becomes evident that fathers did not necessarily know what was formally required for a child to be considered school ready. For example, F1 and F2 expressed a desire for more information, such as a checklist of school ready requirements, and how they can contribute to their children's school readiness. This lack of knowledge caused anxiety and concern about their ability to facilitate school readiness in their children as expressed by F1.

This finding resonated with McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGennaro, and Wildenger (2007) who reported that the majority of families wanted more involvement and more information about readiness, including academic and behavioral expectations. Similarly, the findings of the present study concurred with Hatcher et al. (2012) who found that most parents had a general feeling of anxiety about their children's readiness for kindergarten including academic preparation, social skills, and ability to adapt to school routines or programmes.

Five of the fathers reported that they received feedback about challenges their children were experiencing that might impact school readiness. For example, F5 was alerted to his child's

lack of confidence and advised to send her for play therapy; F2 was notified of his child's

sensory processing difficulties; F3's child's teachers felt he was emotionally too immature to

proceed to Grade 1. This feedback was usually provided by the Grade R teacher. Fathers reported

that they lacked the knowledge and insight to fully comprehend and interpret feedback from

teachers. For example, F3 stated that *"the school's feedback wasn't necessarily critique, but it's*

difficult to accept it, but it taught me to look at the situation from a different angle." Fathers

reported that many emotions were elicited in response to this situation such as anxiety,

desperation and a sense of urgency to act as illustrated by participant F5, *"My main thing was, at*

the time, we just wanted to sort her out for school, because we know it's so difficult to place a kid

in school. It's stressful." Fathers reported that they turn to a range of professionals to manage the

situation such as psychologists, occupational therapists etc. or even other parents for guidance.

What emerges here is that the lack or limited breadth of knowledge about school readiness and

developmental milestones, left fathers feeling inadequate and out of their depth. Similarly,

feedback provided by professionals was not optimally understood and often deferred to in an

uncritical manner, because fathers were limited by their fund of knowledge in these areas.

Moreover, not all actions taken by fathers (and parents) resulted in positive outcomes. For

example, one father [F5] sent his Grade R child for advanced mathematics classes. The child

reportedly became more anxious, less confident and the child had more emotional outbursts in

class. This action was well-intentioned, but reflected the father's lack of knowledge of child

development.

4.1.6 Summary of Thematic Category One

The first thematic category in summary highlighted the following findings on fathers'

perspectives of school readiness: First, none of the fathers were confident in their knowledge

about school readiness and were unable to define it. They illustrated their understanding by referring to some of the components of school readiness. Second, fathers could identify elements related to emotional-, social-, cognition and general knowledge-, language-, literacy-, physical development and attitudes to learning components. One of the notable findings is that the benefits of physical play for becoming school ready was only identified spontaneously by one father. Third, fathers' understandings of school readiness were informed by their subjective experiences, such as their childhood, careers or experience with their own Grade R children. Fourth, some fathers thought that becoming school ready developed automatically with age, yet none of the fathers felt age alone should be a determining factor of a child's readiness for school entry. Lastly, fathers were left with the predicament of not knowing exactly what school readiness entails, but having to make decisions that affect their children's school success.

4.2 Thematic Category Two: Feedback

The second thematic category identified that external feedback forms an important part of how fathers make sense of their children's readiness for school. This category thematically explored who provides the feedback and how it is actioned. Table 4.14 illustrates the second thematic category, namely, Feedback, and the themes contained therein.

Table 4.14
Thematic Category Two

Category	Theme
Feedback	Who provides feedback?
	How is it actioned?

4.2.1 Theme One: Who provides feedback?

Fathers reported that their awareness of school readiness was largely informed by feedback from external people or systems. In most cases teachers, as the representatives of the education system, provided such feedback. Table 4.15 provides illustrative quotations from the

interviews.

Table 4.15

Who provides feedback?

[F6]: "So, but ja, the term school readiness… I suppose that's maybe the first time you really start thinking about it because there maybe she was not quite ready for school… It was mostly, I think, recommended by the, eh, teachers" … "and I suppose you do take into consideration comments from other family members as well you know."
[F2]: "He has from the beginning of the year-, we never really had a problem before, from the beginning of the year the school called us in, and they're familiar with the problem and had seen it before, so they could identify it and sort of said we should send him to a psychologist for assessment."
[F3]: "We don't feel he's quite "there" yet… It was actually something that the school brought up; that emotionally, he's too young for Grade 1, or at least they think he is, and they recommend that he remains another year in kindergarten... they informed us about the situation, otherwise we would have never realized it."
[F5]: "So now I'm at a point where I can't really say, I'm just getting advice from other people" … "So, that's what I'm learning now ... we only established that recently, we got advice from someone, so we're trying to get that mindset… but we would probably need professional help just to let us know what's the way forward" … "ja normal parent feedback, we weren't aware of this.

The extracts show that fathers received feedback from sources external to the nuclear family. These sources included the school or teachers who alerted parents to an area of concern that could impact on their child's school readiness. Some fathers may not have realized that there was a problem if it were not brought to their attention by the school. Fathers also received feedback from other parents [F5], family members [F6] and professionals [F2]. Thus, feedback was the catalyst that moved most fathers to become involved in their child's process of becoming ready for school. Communication, interaction and collaboration between teachers and parents are thus vital for the child's successful transition to Grade 1. Thomas (2008) pointed to the need for schools to reach out more to fathers and encourage participation in parent school interactions and the benefits of this partnership.

4.2.2 Theme Two: How is it actioned?

Fathers reported that they were advised to seek support for their children's identified challenges. Acting on advice, remain the parents' responsibility. It is thus up to the family to

contact various professionals (counsellors, psychologists, occupational therapists, paediatricians, etc.) and coordinate the subsequent intervention. Table 4.16 provides illustrative quotations from the interviews.

Table 4.16

How is it actioned?

[F2]: "In my case it's a little different because we've been through therapy and school-readiness-sessions with a therapist, apart from C. *(the School Counsellor)*, he's also been evaluated by a clinical psychologist because they suspected he has a sensory sensitivity … How an Occupational Therapist will approach it, he'll probably have to go for sessions for the next two-to-three months. I haven't identified one *(Occupational Therapist)* yet.
[F3]: " He has all the knowledge and we've just been through a process with a psychologist specifically with regards to school readiness."
[F5]: "So that's where I'm in a place where I'm not too sure what exactly. So, I have received some good advice, leave the maths, the teacher advised us to put her in some, I don't know is it speech? *(Interviewer: Play therapy?)* Something like that, just to boost the confidence, because she's also lacking that as well.

One father [F2] described how he had to locate and contact various professionals to assist his child. The fathers related how families, teachers and professionals (counsellors, psychologists, occupational therapists, paediatricians, etc.) all contribute by identifying potential barriers to a child's school readiness and by providing interventions to aid school readiness. Preparing a child for school is therefore a consultative, but hereto uncoordinated process. Fathers reported that their families had to seek referrals and were responsible for actioning interventions that are more easily facilitated by a multi-disciplinary team. What emerged from fathers' contributions here was that the approach to school readiness was not entirely supportive or holistic. The findings suggest that fathers (and parents) experienced challenges in accessing systems.

The finding in this theme resonated with Brown (2016) who identified collaboration and communication between school and home as an important factor in children's successful transition to formal school. Similarly, Bierman et al. (2017) recommended that communication between families and schools or systems be improved in order to facilitate optimal success in

education. Laher and Cockroft (2014) identified that services of professionals to assess developmental- and learning difficulties are inaccessible for the majority of the population in South Africa. What emerged additionally is that the individuals who do manage to access services may not have the fund of knowledge to optimally use the service and make sense of the feedback.

4.2.3 Summary of Thematic Category Two

Fathers reported becoming aware of and involved in the school readiness process when teachers highlight potential problems. Fathers do not always know how to best proceed after they've received such feedback. They are often referred from one professional to another and they could benefit from a coordinated and collaborative process. In this study, fathers were able to access services that are not generally accessible, but were not able to optimally make sense of the feedback provided by professionals due to a lack in their fund of knowledge.

4.3 Thematic Category Three: Roles and responsibilities pertaining to school readiness

The third thematic category identified that roles and responsibilities in relation to the facilitation of school readiness were assumed along gendered patterns. Most fathers felt that both parents share the responsibility. Fathers acknowledged, as caregivers, they are ultimately responsible for their children's school readiness, but acknowledged that in practice, the mother most often steps into the role of liaison between school and home. The themes subsumed in the third thematic category were summarized in Table 4.17 below.

Table 4.17
Thematic Category Three

Category	Theme
Roles and responsibilities pertaining to readiness	Who is responsible?
	Roles

4.3.1 Theme One: Who is responsible?

Most fathers felt that it is primarily the parents' responsibility to prepare the child for

school, but it is a conundrum, because they don't know exactly what is required for their child to

be school ready. Table 4.18 provides illustrative quotations from the interviews.

Table 4.18
Who is responsible?

[F4]: "Parents. First and foremost, I actually believe parents. And to a lesser degree teachers. I believe that parent involvement in school is vital and hugely lacking in our country."
[F1]: "I think the parents play the most important role."
[F3]: "I think the parents for sure. I think the parents probably have the greatest impact on shaping the child's character, maturity, readiness. Yes, teachers, school, friends, peers, family, extended family- In our case, my mom is very involved with him and likes playing games with him, whether they're educational or not. So, I think there are many role-players, but the primary responsibility lies with the parents.
[F6]:"I suppose it's a dual responsibility between the parents and the current teacher at the kindergarten. Ja. It's a dual because the one, the teachers are seeing a different side of her to what the parents would see and I think you would have to put those two sides together to come up with an answer. Ja."

From the above quotes it became evident that there were three views on who was

responsible for supporting the development of the child's school readiness. First, most of the

fathers in this study acknowledged parents' responsibility as primary agents in the facilitation of

their children's school readiness. Second, the education system in the form of the reception year

and teacher, was considered primarily responsible for the facilitation of school readiness. For

example, participant F2 was the exception and nominated the Grade R school as the most

important role player in getting the child ready for school. A possible explanation for this

exception might be that F2 has sole custody of his child and thus relies more heavily on the

education system. Third, parents and the education system in the person of the Grade R teacher

(reception year) were jointly responsible for facilitating school readiness.

Britto and Limlingan (2012) proposed that one of the ways of establishing a family's

readiness for school is by evaluating parent's mindsets about their roles and responsibilities as

primary teacher and partner in their child's development. However, despite some fathers in the present study engaging in early literacy activities, most fathers' intentional involvement was not commensurate with the acknowledgement that they have a responsibility, primary or secondary, to facilitate school readiness. Some studies found that there was no strong consistency between parents' beliefs and their efforts with their children at home as it relates to school readiness (Belfield & Garcia, 2014; Kim et al., 2005). Puccioni (2015) had a different finding in that in his study, parent's school readiness beliefs did influence their use of transition practices, which in turn, positively predicted children's academic achievement at the onset of kindergarten. Moore (2008) suggested further research could address the types of activities and frequency of activities as they relate to parents' perceptions and beliefs of school readiness.

4.3.2 Theme Two: Roles

Almost all the participants readily gave their wives credit for taking the lead with their children's education. Other caregivers, typically mothers, step into the gender-stereotypical-role as main liaison between home and school. In instances where both fathers and mothers work full-time, roles seemed to be less traditionally defined. Table 4.19 provides illustrative quotations from the interviews.

Table 4.19

Roles

[F3]: "My wife is amazing in terms of where he is with his development. She is very encouraging, she encourages me too if we need to get things done or achieve things. She's actually the driving force, I'm not going to give myself credit for that… If it weren't for her, if it weren't for the school, for me it would have just been a process, he just goes to school."
[F5]: "To be honest with you, I'm not going to lie to you. Like I said, I was not that involved. So, my wife was the one who was fully involved with everything. So, she would just call me and tell me something and I would be like "Yes, just go ahead with it, it's fine" … "But school readiness from my side I was not that much involved. Sadly, I was not involved."
[F6]: "I kind of take her *(wife's)* guidance. If she comes with a decision, I kind of ja I guess she's 80% and I'm 20%. You know, her knowledge there is, she's right on it, she knows what's going on there ja."
[F7]: "She helps a lot. When I'm not around, also when I'm around we do it together."

Fathers reported that they mostly still relied on mothers to initiate and manage educational activities and interaction with the school [F3, F5, F6, F7]. Mothers, for the most part, became involved with school activities such as parent meetings or volunteer work and relay feedback from the school to the fathers. Most of the fathers were actively involved with their children in many other ways, but still assumed a secondary role when it came to their children's education. Fathers identified their work responsibilities as a barrier to their involvement with their children's school readiness. These findings support previous studies that found fathers to lag behind mothers in caregiving and embracing the traditional breadwinner role of the family (Fletcher & Silberberg, 2006; McBride et al., 2001; Thomas, 2008).

Two fathers have not conformed to gender-stereotypical parenting roles; they have deliberately constructed their lives around their family's requirements; both parents work from home and share parenting tasks. Table 4.20 provides illustrative quotations from the interviews.

Table 4.20
Non-traditional gender roles in parenting

[F9]: "Well, I think traditionally it used to be the mom because she used to spend more time with the kids and the dad worked, but that role division doesn't take place at our house. We share everything 50/50. Both of us work from home. My wife does more, I'd say it's a 60/40 split just because she has a lot more patience than me!"
[F4]: "I'm fortunately not very stereotyped in this manner. I'm not convinced there are father roles and there are mother roles. I believe there are parental roles and I would never say that there are things that my wife must deal with and there are things that I must deal with."... "But I don't think there's something a father should be doing for school readiness. I think a father should be involved with the children, they should be working hard with the kids."

Participants F9 and F4 believe they made decisions and sacrifices to be available to their children and share parenting and household tasks equally. As discussed earlier, this is far from the norm in South Africa where patterns of female-headed households dominate.

Traditional gender roles were still upheld in the present study, where fathers are playmates and disciplinarians. For example, participant F8 reported *"I'm the fun dad and I'm the strict dad".* Fathers' role as playmate became evident when they talked about leisure activities

they enjoyed with their children: where they were hesitant in their responses about school

readiness, they became visibly confident and spoke freely. This seemed to be their specialty,

where they comfortably embrace their role as Father. They shared about *"outings to parks like*

the one in Greenpoint", or local attractions like *"Bugs Family Playpark"*, *"going to the beach"*,

to *"Killarney to watch car races"*, *"playing sport"* or *"cycling"* and *"making an outing of going*

to the library". At home, they enjoyed *"card games"* or board games like *"chess"* and

"Scrabble", *"dominoes"*, *"Lego"*, *"puzzles"*, *"playing with the dog"*, *"jumping trampoline"*, or

"computer- and television-games". Three fathers talked about watching television or movies

together. Only one father mentioned entrepreneurial activities like selling cat litter and chopping

wood together to sell to neighbours. Of particular interest, as mentioned in the section on

physical development, only one father said that they playfully wrestled and chased each other a

lot – a form of play known as rough-and-tumble-play that has strongly been linked to social and

emotional development (Flanders et al., 2009, StGeorge et al., 2016).

Research seems to validate the view of fathers' unique role as playmate (Paquette, 2004;

StGeorge et al., 2016). Through play, men's sense of humour, their tendency to excite and

surprise children, and their encouragement to take risks whilst also providing safety and security,

teaches children to be braver and more confident in unfamiliar situations (Paquette, 2004). The

present study supports findings by Hebrard (2017), in that although some fathers in his study

were not involved much in school, or in communication with teachers, they showed keen

involvement with their children in other ways. Participants did not necessarily link their fun

activities to preparing their children for school, but research has shown that the number of these

activities are related to fathers' involvement in school activities (Nord, Winquist & West, 1997 in

Rimm-Kaufman & Zhang, 2005) and important for increasing their readiness for entrance to

school (Pianta & La Paro, 2003; Piotrkowski et al., 2001). Along the same way, in a study of African-American fathers' involvement and their children's school readiness, fathers who were more involved with educational activities at home, were also more involved with activities at school (Downer & Mendez, 2005).

4.3.3 Summary of Thematic Category Three

The third thematic category addressed who takes on the responsibility of children's' school readiness and how fathers see their role in the process. Traditional gender roles were upheld with few exceptions. Fathers reported that they mostly still relied on mothers to initiate and manage educational activities and interaction with the school. Findings underscored the role of the father as breadwinner, playmate and disciplinarian. Although fathers underplayed their role as playmate in earlier themes, the literature identified this as a legitimate and important role and function fulfilled by fathers and contributed to the facilitation of school readiness.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

5.1 Executive summary

The overall aim of the study was to explore fathers' perspectives of school readiness. Fathers were identified as an often-overlooked partner in the task of providing conditions for optimal development of children. The objectives for the study included: 1) to explore fathers' understanding of what school readiness entailed; 2) to determine what fathers' perspectives were about the constructs and domains involved in school readiness; 3) to explore perceptions of the role or relative contribution fathers made in facilitating a child's school readiness; 4) to identify barriers and facilitators that exerted influence on fathers' involvement in the facilitation of school readiness.

An exploratory design using qualitative methods was used in the study. Participants were selected from the population of fathers in Cape Town and surrounding areas who satisfied two requirements: The first inclusion criterion was that they had to have acquired full parental rights and responsibilities as per Section 21 of the Amended Children's Act of 2007 (DSS, 2007). The second inclusion was that eligible participants must have a child who is in Grade R. Participants were recruited using snowball sampling. The final sample consisted of nine South African fathers. Their ages ranged between 27 and 46 years. All except two fathers were graduates and only one father did not matriculate. All fathers were permanently employed and all but one father were married.

The researcher conducted and transcribed semi-structured individual interviews between May and November 2016. The transcripts were analysed through a process of inductive Thematic Analysis that led to the identification of categories and themes (Clarke & Braun, 2013). Reflexivity, credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability and authenticity, as

described by Lincoln and Guba (1985; 1989), as well as Elo et al. (2014), were used as strategies for enhancing the trustworthiness of the data. In keeping with Biggerstaff (2012), data collection and analysis happened in parallel until information started to repeat itself in interviews. The researcher and the supervisors monitored the emergence of information to gain a sense of data saturation. Three categories were identified from the thematic analyses of the data, namely, 1) Perspectives on school readiness, 2) Feedback, and 3) Roles and Responsibilities. Each of the categories included themes.

The first thematic category described fathers' perspectives or views of school readiness. This category included the following five themes: 1) Understandings of school readiness, 2) Components of school readiness, 3) Context colours understandings, 4) School readiness and age and 5) Breadth of knowledge and impact on decision making.

In the first category, it emerged that none of the fathers were confident in their knowledge about school readiness. The reported understandings of school readiness ranged from not knowing what school readiness meant to having some familiarity with the term. They illustrated their understanding by referring to some of the components of school readiness, which were organized thematically into seven components, namely emotional-, social-, cognition and general knowledge-, language-, literacy-, physical development and attitudes to learning components. The fathers were well aware of the impact specifically of social- and emotional abilities on the child's school readiness. They acknowledged that their awareness of the social- and emotional-components of school readiness was in response to external feedback. Fathers' understanding of and approach to school readiness, as well as their involvement with the school, was influenced by their personal experience. Their history and life experience seemed to have impacted their parenting style and –beliefs, and ultimately how they approached their child's readiness to enter school. Fathers felt that age was not a sufficient indicator of school readiness. Most fathers felt

that children develop at a different pace and other factors should be considered alongside chronological age, such as their physical, cognitive and emotional development. The last theme that emerged in this category related to fathers' lack of knowledge about school readiness, developmental milestones and limited understanding of feedback provided from professionals, which left them feeling inadequate and out of their depth because they were limited by their breadth of knowledge in these areas.

The second thematic category identified external feedback as an important part of how fathers made sense of their children's readiness for school. This category thematically explored who provided the feedback and how it is actioned. Fathers reported that their awareness of school readiness was largely informed by feedback from external persons or systems. In most cases Grade R teachers, as the representatives of the education system, provided such feedback. Thus, feedback was the catalyst that moved most fathers to become involved in their child's process of becoming ready for school.

The fathers related how families, teachers and professionals (for example, counsellors, psychologists, occupational therapists and paediatricians) all contributed by identifying potential barriers to a child's school readiness and by providing interventions to aid school readiness. Fathers did not always know how to interpret feedback from teachers or how to move beyond the feedback stage to initiate intervention when teachers suggested it. Coordination and collaboration seemed to be lacking, as they were often referred from one professional to another. Preparing a child for school, was therefore a consultative, but often an uncoordinated process. The findings suggest that fathers (and parents) were not able to make sense of the feedback they received from professionals due to a lack in their fund of knowledge.

The third thematic category identified that roles and responsibilities in relation to the facilitation of school readiness were assumed along gendered patterns. Most fathers felt that it is primarily the parents' responsibility to facilitate their child's readiness for school. This belief seemed to cause cognitive dissonance for two main reasons. First, fathers did not know exactly what was required for their child to be school ready. They were thus reliant on the feedback from teachers and other professionals regarding their child's school readiness. Second, most of the fathers were actively involved with their children in many other ways, but still assumed an indirect role when it came to their children's education. Almost all the participants readily gave their wives credit for taking the lead with their children's education. Mothers thus stepped into the gender-stereotypical role as main liaison between home and school. In instances where both fathers and mothers work full-time, roles seemed to be defined less traditionally. Ultimately, traditional gender roles were still upheld in the present study, where fathers reportedly primarily engaged in the role of breadwinners, playmates and disciplinarians.

5.2 Discussion

The first objective was to explore fathers' understandings of school readiness. The fathers reported a lack of clarity on what school readiness entails and the understandings reported were varied. It emerged that fathers' understanding of and approach to school readiness, as well as their involvement with the school were influenced by their personal history and experience. Considering the father's personal context is therefore important when engaging with fathers about their involvement at school or about the development of his own child in general.

The second objective was to determine what fathers' perspectives were about the constructs and domains involved in school readiness. Fathers identified numerous aspects that

could be organized thematically into seven components of school readiness. Their awareness specifically of social and emotional aspects of school readiness were reportedly based on feedback they received from teachers. The results may reflect current societal discourse and focus on these skills.

Fathers' understandings of school readiness were mainly centered on children's skills. This understanding is based on the maturational view, focused on the skills or abilities of the child. It is a widely-used, but limited method of evaluating a child's school readiness. There was evidence of the involvement of different systems, but less attention to the interrelationships and relative responsibility for facilitating school readiness. This is further reflection of the maturational view that school readiness is a function of age. The findings indicated that fathers had an awareness that this default position was not enough. The findings of the present study begins to resonate with the global movement toward locating responsibility in multiple systems, such as school and the community, to create an environment in which all children can thrive.

The third objective was to explore fathers' perceptions about their role or the relative contribution they make in facilitating a child's school readiness. Fathers acknowledged their ultimate responsibility for their children's school readiness. Some fathers in the study engaged in early literacy activities, but most fathers' intentional involvement was not commensurate with the acknowledgement that they have a responsibility, primary or secondary, to facilitate school readiness. They acknowledged that in practice, the mother most often steps into the role of liaison between school and home. Although some fathers in this study were not actively involved in school, or in communication with teachers, they showed keen engagement with their children in other ways. Fathers seemed to undervalue their role as playmates and its contribution to the development of skills that facilitate their children's school readiness.

The fourth and final objective was to identify barriers and facilitators of fathers' involvement in the facilitation of school readiness. One reported barrier was if fathers were not fluent in the language of instruction at school, it curtailed their involvement with the child's school and school work. The most frequently reported barrier was fathers' limited availability due to their work constraints. When combined with their limited understanding of what school readiness entails, it is to be expected that fathers were reliant on mothers, teachers and various professionals to guide their children's school readiness. Fathers reported that they became aware of challenges in response to the feedback from teachers. Thus, feedback was the catalyst that moved most fathers to become involved in their child's process of becoming ready for school. Fathers reported that their families had to seek referrals and were responsible for actioning interventions that is more easily facilitated by a multi-disciplinary team. What emerged from fathers' contributions here was that the approach to school readiness was not entirely supportive or holistic. Moreover, lack of knowledge in one system affects the other system. Fathers' ability to make effective decisions about readying their children for school is curtailed or limited by the extent to which they understand what readiness entails, and comprehend and action feedback from the school or professionals. They could benefit from stronger relationships and collaboration between the systems to facilitate a successful transition to Grade 1. Interaction between the two systems, family and school, thus becomes an important facilitator of a child's school readiness. This remains an area of development in South African schools.

5.3 Theoretical formulation

The theoretical framework chosen for this study was the Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition. It was developed by Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) specifically to guide

empirical research on the transition to formal schooling, thus fitting the purpose of the present study. It extended the focus of earlier models on the child's competence only, as a measure of and basis for school readiness. The authors proposed that the child's competence cannot be completely understood without recognising the interconnectedness and interdependence of the relationships between the child and the multiple systems that influence the child's development.

The home, school, peer, family and neighbourhood contexts all constitute systems that the child is in relationship with. Specifically, it is important to examine how the relationships between the child and these systems change over time. LoCosale-Crouch et al., (2009) stated that the recognition of the influence of these relationships can improve our understanding of the interactions between the multiple systems that influence a child's development, and ultimately, school readiness. In the present study, fathers' perspectives of school readiness are understood or formulated in terms of the dynamic interaction between the systems that influence a child's school readiness.

Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) summarised the theoretical model in four key points: First, recognise the influence of multiple contexts on the child's capabilities. Second, investigate the links among the contexts that impact children's transition to school, such as home, school, peers, and neighbourhood. Third, examine the relationships among contexts and social systems and how changes over time influence school readiness. Fourth, examine risks associated with the transition to formal schooling and integration into the new school context. The themes that emerged address or represent these four components and are briefly discussed below from the perspective of the model.

1.   Multiple contexts: Fathers identified several systems or contexts in the present study. The developmental or biological system that refers to the child's skills and abilities, was

most readily identified. The findings suggest that fathers' understandings of their child's school readiness were still focused on child characteristics, skills, and chronological age or level of maturation. This appears to be a primary focus for assessing readiness that is located within the child. The disproportionate focus on the physiological system is consistent with the maturational view underpinning the current policies regarding school enrolment/ readiness still in effect at most South African schools. Similarly, it reflects the current assessment practices that focus on the abilities of the child whilst excluding an assessment or even noting of the state of other systems at play. Thus, there remains work to be done to shift the focus from the child's skills and attributes to consider the impact of the relationships that support the child's school readiness.

The second system identified was the family system. Fathers acknowledged that parents were primarily responsible for the child's preparation for school. Within the family system, the emphasis fell on the roles occupied by the fathers. The findings suggested that fathers understood that they have a responsibility, but that their roles were indirect and informed by stereotypical gender role assignments in the context of heterosexual marriages. The findings illustrated that fathers had a limited understanding of school readiness and by extension limited insight into the processes that could facilitate school readiness. The findings highlighted the need to engage fathers more deliberately as active agents in the child's transition to school.

The third system identified was the school system. The interaction and relationships between these systems, such as that of father-teacher, are dynamic and have a reciprocal impact on the child. In this study, it emerged that fathers were reliant on external systems (e.g., teachers) to provide feedback regarding their children's school readiness, but they seemed to underestimate the value of their own involvement in building relationships within these systems.

Fathers reported that they relied mainly on their wives to forge relationships between home and school.

Systems such as the cultural, political, economic and geographic contexts in which the family is embedded also potentially influence fathers' involvement in their children's school readiness. The sample contained three South African fathers who married German women. Their Grade R children were attending a German school which had a significant effect on these fathers' involvement due to the language barrier.

2.   Links between contexts: The fathers did not spontaneously reflect on the interconnectedness between these systems, which suggests that they do not necessarily track the influence of these relationships on school readiness. Interaction and relationships between the child, parents, schools, community and government form an interconnected web, where over time, changes in one system affect the other. Changes in one system, for instance, the economy could affect a father's work environment, influence his time, availability and the family resources, which could all impact the child's school readiness process. For example, one father [F5] worked on oil rigs for years which took him away from home for months at a time. He tried to orchestrate his Grade R child's school readiness from afar by insisting on advanced mathematics classes. The nature of his involvement was informed by his perceptions that a good foundation in science and mathematics is the best head start he could give his child. After a downturn in the economy, he was retrenched and is following a new career path. It is only now that he is spending more time at home and building a relationship with his child's school teacher, essentially fostering a link between home and school, that he realised that there were different ways of investing in the child's success and supporting the transition. He shifted from prioritizing the child's ability to learn and cognitive skills to prioritizing the building of a

relationship between the parental and school systems. This will ultimately foster improved communication about the child and a more coordinated facilitation of the child's transition and adjustment.

3.   Development of and changes in the relationship between systems: In the present study, longitudinal insights into the development of relationships were gained from the reflections of fathers rather than prospective observations. There was evidence illustrating how fathers' perspectives were mainly influenced by their own experiences and their cultural beliefs. For example, one father [F7] related how his mother instilled in him a great respect and appreciation for teachers. He has personally established a positive pattern of interactions with teachers at his child's Grade R school that he proactively started developing with the Grade 1 school as well. In doing so, he followed the example set by his mother. His current relationships with his child's teachers started with his mother's manner of engaging the school system when he was a child. This is likely to have a positive effect on his child's transition process. Here, the parent-teacher involvement, as well as the influence of the father's childhood experience, emerged as an example of how the development of relationships over time affect a child's school readiness.

4.   Risks associated with the transition to formal schooling: The strength of the relationships and quality of communication between fathers and teachers serve as a link that indirectly affects the child's school readiness. In the present study, teachers, professionals and parents (fathers) are identified systems. In their relationship, the teacher is the expert on the child's transition and readiness. The teacher expert holds a position of authority not only in relation to the child, but also to the parent, based on the relative differences in their respective funds of knowledge and roles. The teacher authorises the professionals through the referral

system and the professional in turn performs further specialised functions. Thus, another position of authority. The fathers in the study reported receiving feedback from both these sources (teacher and professional), but were limited in their understanding of the feedback or engagement, ability to action and act on recommendations, as well as to coordinate the process of intervention/ remediation. The nature of the communication between these partners was such that it was limited and not optimal. The way that teachers and professionals communicate come from their training and the formal nature of the profession. This gap in knowledge translation poses a risk to the success of the interventions and by extension the child's successful preparation and transition to school.

5.4 Conclusion

The overall aim of this thesis was to report on the findings of the exploratory investigation on fathers' perspectives of school readiness. The findings suggested that fathers did not have a good fund of knowledge about school readiness and child development. Personal context and subjective experiences impacted or informed their views and beliefs about school readiness. Fathers focused on children's abilities as primary indicators of readiness that reflected the traditional maturational view of school readiness. Feedback from teachers and professionals was highly valued and was a primary source of information about their children's school readiness and more so challenges or problems in this realm. Thus, other systems in the child's context held a more authoritative position in relation to tracking the progress of the child and identifying problems. The relationship between fathers and teachers, and the communication between the systems emerged as a potential risk to a child's successful transition to school.

The findings of the present study indicated that facilitating school readiness involved different systems and role players of which fathers are important role players. Their membership to different systems add different insights and values to the facilitation of the transition of the child to school. It emerged that in some ways the role of fathers remains undervalued and in others, fathers' ability to participate is diminished due to their fund of knowledge, gendered patterns to child rearing and engagement with school systems.

5.5 Limitations of the study

The researcher's limited experience in interviewing did have an impact on the quality of the data. Some opportunities for exploration were lost. For example, some fathers reported a noticeable shift in their children's desire to learn, which they interpreted as an indication of their child's school readiness. However, the father's perceptions specifically about their role in developing their children's attitude or motivation to learn (the approaches to learning domain) was not explored here.

The researcher concluded that a sense of saturation was reached when the content of the interviews started repeating. This is possibly due to the homogenous nature of the sample of fathers interviewed. If a more diversified sample were selected, it may have resulted in a wider range of subjective perceptions and experiences.

The researcher selected the theoretical framework based on its conceptualization to specifically guide research about the transition to school. However, the framework was only partially applied in the formulation of the objectives, which in turn informed the line of questioning in the semi-structured interviews. Fathers thus referred to various systems involved

in the child's transition to school, but it was not established whether they viewed it as a multidimensional process involving multiple interconnected systems.

5.6 Recommendations for future study

- Replicate the study with a larger sample that includes participants from a more diverse background.

- The fathers in this study were particularly aware of the emotional component of a child's school readiness. An exploration of the awareness of emotional readiness across demographic and contextual settings remain an area for further study in the South African context.

- Replicate the study with an expanded inclusion criteria, e.g., non-resident fathers.

- One of the findings was that fathers lacked knowledge about what school readiness entails. Further studies could examine the exact nature of the deficits in knowledge or include ways to augment or increase fathers' knowledge about school readiness.

- Another finding indicated that fathers were well-intentioned but lacking in knowledge about child development. Future studies could include an exploration of fathers' knowledge of child development or ways to improve fathers' knowledge of child development.

- The findings suggest that fathers do not realise the importance of their role as playmates and how it affects the development of child competencies considered necessary for successful transition to school. Further research into the understanding of the role of play in preparation for school, linked to fathers' specific role therein, could provide more insight.

- Gendered patterns of parents' involvement emerged in this study. Further exploration of the impact of gender role assignment on the facilitation of school readiness or engagement in the school system is recommended.

- Examine the content of feedback from schools/professionals regarding children's school readiness and how it is provided.

- Research into how parents understand and construct feedback given by teachers/professionals regarding their child's school readiness.

- The fathers did not spontaneously reflect on the interconnectedness between the multiple systems identified, which suggests that they do not necessarily track the influence of these relationships on school readiness. Further studies could more explicitly examine their understanding of the interrelationships between systems affecting a child's school readiness.

- With the theoretical framework's focus on how relationships in the child's environment change over time, further study to more explicitly and comprehensively examine higher levels of the framework is recommended.

- The framework could also be applied to longitudinal studies, which could for example interview fathers before Grade R, during Grade R and again in Grade 1 to further our understanding of relationship development between fathers and schools during the transition process.

5.7 Significance of the study

The primary contribution of this study is that it adds to the South African literature on ECD and fatherhood, with a specific focus on the topic of fathers' perspectives of school

readiness. Previous research focused on the impact of absent fathers. The study further provides evidence that fathers are not a homogenous group and that there are various levels and forms of involvement that might be related to the type of care and contact that fathers have acquired as part of their parental rights and responsibilities. This study confirmed that fathers' involvement is a nuanced and complex process to understand.

The study makes an important contribution to the importance of the role of fathers in ECD and the child's preparation for school in the context of traditional gendered roles. The study also underscored the disconnect between the home and school, as well as the disconnect between professionals (teachers and health professionals) and fathers.

The results of the study identified several additional foci for exploration that will aid in understanding fathers' roles in facilitating school readiness. The study fulfilled its exploratory nature. The resultant findings suggested several unanticipated aspects to explore further.

The study also made a contribution at the theoretical level where it identified ways in which the theoretical framework can be used to formulate or articulate objectives for future study that will reflect the four levels of the framework. The levels include 1) the identification of multiple contexts, 2) the links among the contexts, 3) how the relationships develop and change over time and 4) identification of risks. This can articulate into a greater level of alignment between the framework, objectives and the interview schedule. Such an integrated process reduces the relative impact of the skill level of the interviewer.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide

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Interview Guide

I. Opening

Interview Schedule for father of Grade R learner.

(Establish Rapport) [shake hands] My name is Celesté.

(Purpose) I would like to ask you some questions about *your* ideas about school readiness.

(Motivation) I hope to use this information to understand what your personal views are about school readiness.

(Time Line) The interview should take no longer than 90 minutes.

(Transition): Let me begin by asking you some general questions about your family and where you live.

II. Body

A. (Topic) General demographic information

1. How long have you lived in….?

2. How many children 7 years or younger live in your house?

3. What is/are the main language/s spoken in your household?

B. (Topic) Education and occupation

1. What is the highest level of education that you completed?

2. What is your occupation?

C. (Topic) School readiness

1.   Fathers' understanding of what school readiness entails

a.   Are you familiar with the term school readiness?

b.   What do you understand by the term?

c.   How did you first learn about it?

d.   What age do you consider as being the optimal age for school entry?

2.   Constructs and domains that underpin school readiness

a.   What things are all involved in making up school readiness?

3.   Perceptions about fathers' contribution to school readiness

a.   Who are the key role players in facilitating school readiness in children?

b.   What do you think a father's contribution is to a child attaining school readiness?

c.   How have you thought about your own role in facilitating your child's attainment of school readiness?

4.   Barriers and facilitators to fathers' involvement

a.   Can you identify things that help fathers (you) to play an active role in facilitating your child's readiness for school?

b.   Can you identify things that get in the way of fathers (you) playing an active role in facilitating your child's readiness for school?

(Transition): Well, it has been very informing finding out more about your perspective on school readiness. Let me briefly summarize the information that I have recorded during our interview.

III Closing

A. (Summarize)

B. (Maintain Rapport)

I appreciate the time you took for this interview. Is there anything else you think would be helpful for me to know?

C. (Action to be taken)

I should have all the information I need. Would it be alright to call you at home if I have any more questions? Thanks again.

Appendix B

Onderhoud Gids

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Onderhoud Gids

I. Inleidend

Onderhoud gids vir Vaders van 'n Graad R leerling.

(Vestig verstandhouding) [skud hande] My naam is Celesté.

(Doel) Ek wil graag meer weet oor u eie idees/ sienings van skoolgereedheid.

(Motivering) My hoop is dat hierdie inligting vir my 'n beter begrip van u persoonlike opinie oor skoolgereedheid sal gee.

(Tydsberekening) Die onderhoud behoort nie langer as 90 minute te neem nie.

(Oorgang): Kom ek begin deur u 'n paar algemene vrae te vra oor u familie en waar u woon.

II. Hoofdeel

A. (Onderwerp van bespreking) Algemene demografiese inligting

1. Hoe lank woon u al in ….?

2. Hoeveel kinders onder die ourderdom van 7 jaar is in u huis woonagtig?

3. Wat is moedertaal/ hoof huishoudelike taal?

B. (Onderwerp van bespreking) Onderrig en beroep

1. Wat is die hoogste opvoedkundige vlak wat u voltooi het?

2. In watter studieveld is u hoogste naskoolse kwalifikasie?

3. Wat is u beroep?

C. (Onderwerp van bespreking) Skoolgereedheid

1.   Vaders se siening oor wat skoolgereedheid behels:

     a.   Is u bekend met die term skoolgereedheid?

     b.   Kan u vir my verduidelik wat u verstaan onder die term?

     c.   Hoe het u aanvanklik daarvan te hore gekom?

     d.   Watter ouderdom beskou u as die ideale ouderdom om skool te begin?

2.   Komponente (take wat belangrik is) vir u kind om skoolgereedheid te wees

     a.   Wat beskou u as al die komponente waaruit skoolgereedheid bestaan?

3.   Persepsies oor Vaders se bydrae tot skoolgereedheid

     a.   Wie is die belangrikste rolspelers wanneer dit kom by die fasilitering van skoolgereedheid in kinders?

     b.   Wat dink u is die bydrae wat 'n Vaders kan lewer om 'n kind skoolgereed te kry?

     c.   Hoe sien u u eie rol in die fasilitering van u kind se skoolgereedheid?

4.   Hindernisse en faktore wat Vaders se betrokkenheid vergemaklik

     a.   Kan u 'n paar dinge noem wat Vaders (vir u spesifiek) help om 'n aktiewe rol te speel om u kind skoolgereed te kry?

     b.   Kan u 'n paar dinge noem wat Vaders (vir u spesifiek) hinder om 'n aktiewe rol te speel om u kind skoolgereed te kry?

(Oorgang): Dit was so insiggewend om te luister na u perspektief oor skoolgereedheid. Ek gaan gou opsom waaroor ons gesels het.

III Slotsom

A. (Opsomming)

B. (Bly in noue voeling)

Ek waardeer die tyd wat u afgestaan het aan hierdie onderhoud. Is daar enigiets anders wat u dink ek moet weet?

C. (Volgende stappe)

Ek behoort nou al die inligting te hê wat ek nodig het. Sal dit in orde wees as ek dalk nodig het om u te skakel by die huis as ek dalk verdere inligting benodig? Weereens baie dankie vir die tyd wat u opgeoffer het om deel te wees van die projek.

Appendix C

Ethics Certificate

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR: RESEARCH
RESEARCH AND INNOVATION DIVISION

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25 August 2016

Ms C Meyburgh
Psychology
Faculty of Community and Health Sciences

Ethics Reference Number HS/16/5/41

Project Title: An exploratory investigation into fathers' perceptions of school
                 readiness.

Approval Period: 29 July 2016 – 29 July 2017

I hereby certify that the Humanities and Social Science Research Ethics Committee of
the University of the Western Cape approved the methodology and ethics of the above
mentioned research project.

Any amendments, extension or other modifications to the protocol must be submitted
to the Ethics Committee for approval. Please remember to submit a progress report in
good time for annual renewal.

The Committee must be informed of any serious adverse event and/or termination of
the study.

Ms Patricia Josias
Research Ethics Committee Officer
University of the Western Cape

PROVISIONAL REC NUMBER - 130416-049

FROM HOPE TO ACTION THROUGH KNOWLEDGE.

Appendix D

Information Sheet

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E-mail: 3355991@myuwc.ac.za

April 2016

Information Sheet

Project Title: An exploratory investigation into fathers' perspectives of school readiness.

What is this study about?

This is a research project being conducted by Celesté Meyburgh, Erica Munnik and Mario Smith at the University of the Western Cape. We are inviting you to participate in this research project because you are a father of a child who will be enrolled in Grade 1 in 2017. The purpose of this research project is to explore fathers' perspectives of school readiness.

I would like to ask you some questions about *your* ideas about school readiness.

What will I be asked to do if I agree to participate?

You will be asked to participate in an individual interview of approximately 60-90 minutes. The interviews will be conducted in a neutral and safe space and will be audio-recorded and then transcribed. The interviews will be conducted in your preference of English or Afrikaans.

Would my participation in this study be kept confidential?

To ensure your anonymity, information regarding the interviews is anonymous and will not contain information that may personally identify you.

This research project involves making audio recordings that will be transcribed. The reason for this is because the method of data analysis involves the search for and examination of patterning

and requires a verbatim transcript. Participants' verbatim accounts are further helpful in enhancing the credibility of the study. To ensure your confidentiality, audio recordings and transcriptions will be kept secure in password protected files to which only the researcher and her supervisors will have access.

When a report or article about this research project is written, your participation and personal information will be kept confidential.

In accordance with legal requirements and/or professional standards, we will disclose to the appropriate individuals and/or authorities information that comes to our attention concerning child abuse or neglect or potential harm to you or others. *In this event, we will inform you that we have to break confidentiality to fulfil our legal responsibility to report to the designated authorities.*

What are the risks of this research?

All human interactions and talking about self or others carry some amount of risks. We will nevertheless minimise such risks and act promptly to assist you if you experience any discomfort, psychological or otherwise during the process of your participation in this study. Where necessary, an appropriate referral will be made to a suitable professional for further assistance or intervention.

What are the benefits of this research?

This research is not designed to help you personally, but the results may help the researcher learn more about father's perspectives on school readiness. The study could contribute to the field of research on school ready families within the framework of early childhood development (ECD), with a specific focus on paternal involvement. It also offers you the opportunity to reflexively engage in your understanding of the process of becoming school ready for your child. Thus it could potentially enhance the capacity of parents to nurture their children's development.

Do I have to be in this research and may I stop participating at any time?

Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You may choose not to take part at all. If you decide to participate in this research, you may stop participating at any time. If you

decide not to participate in this study or if you stop participating at any time, you will not be penalized or lose any benefits to which you otherwise qualify.

What if I have questions?

This research is being conducted by Celesté Meyburgh from the Department of Psychology at the University of the Western Cape. If you have any questions about the research study itself, please contact me at: 083 648 5606 or email: 3355991@myuwc.ac.za.

The study is being supervised by Erica Munnik and Mario Smith. Should you wish to consult with my supervisors, you can contact them at Tel. +27 21 959 2283/2454 or emunnik@uwc.ac.za or mrsmith@uwc.ac.za.

Should you have any questions regarding this study and your rights as a research participant or if you wish to report any problems you have experienced related to the study, please contact:

Head of Department: Dr. Michelle Andipatin
Department of Psychology, University of the Western Cape
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Fax. +27 21 959 3515
Email. mandipatin@uwc.ac.za

Dean: Prof José Frantz
Faculty of Community and Health Sciences
University of the Western Cape
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This research has been approved by the University of the Western Cape's Research Ethics Committee. Reference number: HS/16/5/41.

Appendix E

Consent Form

UNIVERSITY OF THE WESTERN CAPE

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Consent Form

Title of Research Project: An Exploratory Investigation into Fathers' Perspectives of School Readiness.

The study has been described to me in language that I understand. My questions about the study have been answered. I understand what my participation will involve and I agree to participate of my own choice and free will. I understand that my identity will not be disclosed to anyone. I understand that I may withdraw from the study at any time without giving a reason and without fear of negative consequences or loss of benefits.

This research project involves making audio recordings that will be transcribed. The reason for this is because the method of data analysis involves the search for and examination of patterning and requires a verbatim transcript. Participants' verbatim accounts are further helpful in enhancing the credibility of the study. To ensure your confidentiality, audio recordings and transcriptions will be kept secure in password protected files to which only the researcher and her supervisors will have access.

___   I agree to be audio recorded during my participation in this study.

___   I do not agree to be audio recorded during my participation in this study.

Participant's name …………………………………………………………………………………

Participant's date of birth …………………………………………………………………………

Participant's signature ………………………………………………………….………………….

Date ………………..………………

Appendix F

Inligtingsbylaag

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April 2016

Inligtingsbylaag

Projek titel: 'n Verkennende ondersoek na die sienswyse van vaders oor skoolgereedheid.

Waaroor handel hierdie studie?

Hierdie navorsingsprojek word aangevoer deur Celesté Meyburgh, onder leiding van Erica Munnik en Mario Smith by die Universiteit van Wes-Kaapland. As Vader van 'n kind wat in 2017 sal begin met Graad 1, wil ons jou graag uitnooi om deel te wees van hierdie studie. Die doel van hierdie navorsing is om vaders se perspektiewe oor skoolgereedheid te verken.

Wat sal van my verwag word indien ek instem om deel te neem aan die studie?

U sal gevra word om aan 'n onderhoud deel te neem van ongeveer 60-90 minute. Die onderhoud sal gevoer word by 'n veilige, neutrale plek wat vir ons albei geleë is. U toestemming word benodig vir 'n stemopname en transkripsie wat gemaak moet word van die gesprek. U kan kies of u die onderhoud wil voer in Afrikaans of Engels.

Sal my deelname aan die navorsing vertroulik bly?

Tydens die onderhoud bly u naamloos en enige inligting wat tydens die onderhoud ingevorder word verseker dus vertroulikheid deur anonimiteit. Enige identifiserende inligting bly ook daartydens ongenoem.

Die navorsingsprojek vereis dat 'n stemopname en transkripsie gemaak word van die onderhoud. Die rede daarvoor is dat die metode van data analise behels dat al die vaders se antwoorde ondersoek word om temas te identifiseer. 'n Deeglike ondersoek verseker akkuraatheid en

verhoog die geloofwaardigheid van die studie. Om verder vertroulikheid te beskerm sal die stemopname en transkripsie gestoor word in dokumente wat wagwoorde vereis op die rekenaar. Slegs die navorser (Celesté) en haar studieleiers (Erica en Mario) sal toegang tot hierdie dokumentasie hê. Wanneer 'n verslag of artikel oor hierdie navorsing geskryf en gepubliseer word, sal geen melding gemaak word van u persoonlike inligting nie.

In ooreenstemming met die wetlike en etiese vereistes van die sielkundige professie is daar sekere inligting wat ons moet verklaar aan die owerhede. Dit sluit in inligting aangaande kindermishandeling of –verwaarlosing asook enige inligting aangaande iets wat ander of u-self kan skaad. *Sou dit die geval wees, sal ons u eers in kennis stel dat ons vertroulikheid moet verbreek om ons wetlike verantwoordelikhede na te kom deur dit te rapporteer aan die owerhede.*

Is daar enige risiko verbonde aan die navorsing?
Soos met alle menslike interaksie, maak 'n mens jouself kwesbaar wanneer daar self refleksie of opinies oor ander gelug word. Ons sal egter hierdie risiko probeer minimaliseer deur spoedig vir u die nodige ondersteuning te gee, indien dit vereis word. Ons onderneem om u te verwys vir professionele hulp vir verdere bystand indien nodig.

Wat is die voorsiende voordele van hierdie navorsing?
Hierdie navorsing is nie noodwendig ontwerp om vir u persoonlike voordeel in te hou nie, maar die resultate sal die navorser help om 'n beter begrip te vorm oor vaders se perspektiewe oor skoolgereedheid. Die studie kan moontlik 'n positiewe bydrae maak tot die veld van vroeë kinderontwikkeling. Hierdie studie sal poog om 'n bydrae te maak tot navorsing oor skoolgereedheid in families, met 'n doelgerigte fokus op vaders se betrokkenheid, binne die raamwerk van vroeë kinderontwikkeling. Dit bied aan u die geleentheid om refleksief na te dink oor wat u eie proses behels om skool gereed te word vir u kind. Die studie kan moontlik lei tot nuwe insigte wat tot voordeel mag wees vir die ontwikkeling van u kind.

Moet ek deel wees van hierdie navorsing en kan ek enige tyd onttrek?
U deelname aan hierdie studie is geheel en al vrywillig. U kan kies om glad nie deel te neem nie. Indien u wel besluit om deel te neem, kan u ook op enige stadium van plan verander en u deelname beëindig. Hetsy u kies om nie deel te neem nie, of op 'n latere stadium in die proses u

deelname wil beëindig, kan u dit doen sonder dat u enigsins gepenaliseer sal word of enige voordele verloor wat u andersins voor sou kwalifiseer.

Wat as ek vrae het?

Hierdie navorsingsprojek word aangevoer deur Celesté Meyburgh van die Departement van Sielkunde by die Universiteit van Wes-Kaapland. Kontak my asseblief indien u enige vrae het ten opsigte van die navorsingstudie: 083 648 5606 of epos: 3355991@myuwc.ac.za.

Die studieleiers op hierdie projek is Erica Munnik en Mario Smith, Tel. +27 21 959 2283/2454 of emunnik@uwc.ac.za of mrsmith@uwc.ac.za.

Sou u enige verdere vrae hê oor die studie of u regte as deelnemer aan die navorsing, of as u enige ongeruimdhede ten opsigte van die studie wil rapporteer, kontak asseblief:

Departementshoof: Dr. Michelle Andipatin

Departement van Sielkunde, Universiteit van Wes-Kaapland

Tel. +27 21 959 2283/2454

Faks. +27 21 959 3515

Epos. mandipatin@uwc.ac.za

Dekaan: Prof José Frantz

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Privaatsak X17

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Hierdie navorsing is goedgekeur deur die Senaat Navorsings Kommittee asook die Etiese Kommittee van die Universiteit van Wes-Kaapland. Verwysingsnommer: HS/16/5/41.

Appendix G

Toestemmingsvorm

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Toestemmingsvorm

Projek titel: 'n Verkennende ondersoek na die sienswyse van die Vader oor skoolgereedheid.

Die navorsingsprojek is aan my beskryf in 'n taal wat ek verstaan. My vrae oor die studie is beantwoord. Ek verstaan wat my deelname behels en ek bevestig dat ek vrywillig besluit om deel te neem. Ek verstaan dat my identiteit nie aan enigiemand bekend gemaak sal word nie. Ek verstaan dat ek op enige stadium kan onttrek, sonder dat daar enige verduideliking van my sal vereis word en sonder enige vrees dat dit vir my negatiewe gevolge sou inhou of dat ek moontlike voordele sou verloor.

Die navorsingsprojek vereis dat 'n stemopname en transkripsie gemaak word van die onderhoud. Die rede daarvoor is dat die metode van data analise behels dat al die deelnemende Vaders se antwoorde gefynkam word vir enige temas. 'n Woordelike verslag verseker dus akkuraatheid en verhoog die geloofwaardigheid van die studie. Om verder u vertoulikheid te beskerm sal die stemopname en transkripsie gestoor word in dokumente wat wagwoorde vereis op rekenaar. Slegs die navorser (Celesté) en haar studieleiers (Erica en Mario) sal toegang tot hierdie dokumentasie hê. Wanneer 'n verslag of artikel oor hierdie navorsing geskryf en gepubliseer word, sal geen melding gemaak word van u persoonlike inligting nie.

____ Ek gee toestemming dat 'n stemopname gemaak kan word tydens my deelname aan die studie

____ Ek stem nie in dat 'n stemopname gemaak word tydens my deelname aan die studie nie

Deelnemer se naam en van: …………………………………………………………………………

Deelnemer se geboortedatum: …………………………………………………………………..

Deelnemer se handtekening: ………………………………………………..……………

Datum: …………….…………………