Children's Perspectives of Kindergarten and Grade One: Analysis of Narratives and Drawings

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ABSTRACT

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It is widely supported that the transition to school is exceptionally important in establishing positive and healthy relationships which may have long-term implications on the rest of children's school experiences (Entwisle & Alexander, 1998; La Paro & Pianta, 2000; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2005; Pianta, Belsky, Vandergrift, Houts, & Morrison, 2008). As such, transition to school could be viewed as embedded in the various relationships children develop prior to and during this period (Entwisle & Alexander, 1998). In Canada, few studies have examined children's perspectives on starting school and the role that their relationships take on during this process (Di Santo & Berman, 2012). This study examined children's perceptions of kindergarten and grade one, and the social support they received throughout. Results indicated that children perceived a distinct shift from a play-oriented nature in kindergarten to an academic-oriented nature in grade one. They reported missing play and creative arts in grade one. Attitudes towards homework were mixed; while some children reported liking homework, many children reported that homework took away from their out of school play time. Children reported that their parents helped them get ready for school, helped them with homework, and provided affection and emotional support; whereas their teachers were mostly providers of directives (e.g., telling them what to do), and their peers and siblings were mostly providers of companionship. Overall, the children offered new insight by describing aspects they liked, disliked or missed during this transition, as well, by describing the role their parents, teachers, siblings and peers played in supporting this process.

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"How you spend your days is how you spend your life." This has been my motto throughout this meaningful and enriching experience. I am truly happy to have been realizing this motto every day by being a child study student and by learning about issues in child development that I am passionate about.

DEDICATION

To Emma, for waiting …

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CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

There is a body of literature that suggests that entry to school sets the groundwork for the rest of children's school experiences (Entwisle & Alexandre, 1998; Kagan & Neuman, 1998) and that this transition occurs within the context of the relationships that children have with important people in their lives (Morrison, Rimm-Kauffman, & Pianta, 2003; Pianta, 1997; Saft & Pianta, 2001). During this time, a relationship is formed between home and school to further help facilitate this transition (Fan & Chen, 2001; Hoover-Dempsey, Walker, Sandler, Whetsel, Green, Wilkins, & Closson; 2005). Understanding how children perceive their entry to school provides a unique lens through which to examine school transition. However, very few Canadian researchers have sought children's perceptions on this matter. Alternatively, research on transition to school has been examined extensively from parents' and teachers' perspectives (Di Santo & Berman, 2012; Wilson, Pianta, & Stuhlman, 2007).

Recently, there has been an increased interest in children's perspectives most prolifically in countries such as Iceland and Australia. These researchers have introduced a number of child-centered methods to gain access to children's perspectives, including drawings, digital photographs, storybooks, and group interviews, thus providing children the option of verbal and non-verbal ways to articulate their thoughts. In ways that are appropriate for them, children are skilled and competent in their ability to contribute to research on transition to school.

During their entry to school, children develop new friendships with their peers and teachers (Entwisle & Alexandre, 1998). Moreover, their parents play an important role in helping to facilitate their transition. Few studies (i.e., Franco & Levitt, 1997) have examined how children perceive these relationships and whether they feel supported by them.

Rationale for the Study

In many ways, by expressing their perspectives, children provide a fresh angle from which to examine some of the issues that have been extensively studied with parents and teachers in previous research. The current study employed child-centered methods to involve children in the research process. The children were encouraged to draw a picture about school and their social support and provide a narrative description; they were also asked a set of interview questions to learn about their perceptions. The use of these methods to explore children's feelings, thoughts, and attitudes towards starting school was expected to inspire new directions for transition to school practices. Specifically, the investigation of how children view the supportive roles that teachers, parents, siblings and peers may take on during their start of school may have implications for whether the children feel supported during this period of change.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to explore whether children liked school, their perceptions of kindergarten and grade one, as well as their views on the roles different people in their lives took on during this period (including how children viewed the joint effort put forth by parents and teachers). Furthermore, we were

interested in learning about the issues that were important to the children by examining the emerging themes from the children's interviews, drawings and descriptions.

Research Questions

1) What are children's perceptions of school in kindergarten and grade one?

    Sub-questions:

    Do the children like school?

    What do children like and dislike about kindergarten and grade one?

    What challenges do children face as they make the transition to school?

    What are similarities and differences between kindergarten and grade one?

2) What are children's perceptions of the social support they receive (or do not receive) from the different people in their lives (parents, siblings, teachers, and friends)?

    Sub-questions:

    What types of social support do these various people (parents, siblings, teachers, and friends) provide (as perceived by the child)?

3) How do children perceive the home-school relationship?

CHAPTER 2 – LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to provide a summary of the research and the theoretical framework that has guided this study. An overview of the research on transition to school, children's role in research, and the ways researchers engage children in the research process will be considered, and a detailed rationale for this study will be provided. Finally, research on children's perceptions of their transition to school and of their social support systems will also be reviewed.

Transition to School

Researchers and policy makers have emphasized entry to school as pivotal to children's development, setting the groundwork for the rest of their school experiences (Entwisle & Alexander, 1998; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Petrakos & Lehrer, 2011). Literature on school transition has taken into consideration the multiple stakeholders involved in the process, including parents (Dockett & Perry, 2004b; Morrison, Rimm-Kauffman, & Pianta, 2003), teachers (e.g., Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2005; Saft & Pianta, 2001), and children (e.g., Dockett & Perry, 2004a; Einarsdottir, 2011; Loizou, 2011). Dockett and Perry (2004a) state that "promoting a successful start to school for children requires that educators focus on the perspectives, experiences and expectations of all involved in the process" (p.187), including the perspectives of the children undergoing the transition to school. Children are knowledgeable about their transition to school as they are the ones living through

their experiences and they are also capable of sharing and expressing their views thus contributing to research (Einarsdottir, 2011; Dockett & Perry, 2004a, 2004b).

Entwisle and Alexander (1998) suggest that the first few years of school is a "critical period" during which children are placed in environments they have not been previously exposed to. Children's experiences in grade one are marked by a drastic change in daily routine and classroom schedule; there is an increased focus on academics, and less (if any) time for free play. In grade one, students are expected to respond to their teacher, an adult who is not their parent, and they are expected to sit at their desks, raise their hands to speak, ask teachers to use the washroom, and remain quiet. In addition, there is a push for academics as they are learning to read and write, amongst other newly inherited responsibilities (Entwisle & Alexander, 1998). While some children may perceive certain aspects of these changes as stressful, some may also interpret the new challenges and changes as empowering (Einarsdottir, 2003; Loizou, 2011; Margetts, 2002, 2003, 2005) Most children feel empowered by the novelty of the setting, the hard work that is required of them, the independence they are given in the larger school playground and their newly formed friendships. However, some children may worry about keeping up with the highly structured school day, following the rules and the teachers' stricter approaches to teaching using a persistent lesson-work model (Dockett & Perry, 2004a; Loizou, 2011).

The present study is part of a larger research project that examined children's transition to school (Petrakos, Fontil, Khatchadourian, Bergmame & Charbonneau, 2011; Petrakos, Fontil & Khatchadourian, 2010; Petrakos & Lehrer,

2011). In the current study, we investigated children's perceptions of their experiences and support from significant others as they made the transition from kindergarten to grade one. As educators, it is important to take into account what children are feeling during this period of transition and how they perceive the changes they are experiencing, especially when considering that children and adults experience the transition differently and may be concerned about different aspects of starting school (Dockett & Perry, 2004a).

Children as Active Participants in Research

Recently, in the field of education and psychology, increased efforts to include children as active participants in research have surfaced. Children are actively involved in their own learning and development; they are considered to be experts and "contributing members of society" (Einarsdottir, 2011, p. 739) and their voices have a place in research particularly when issues of school transition are concerned. Therefore, researchers are using innovative methods to gain access to children's perspectives, thoughts and their knowledge on pressing issues in education and psychology (Andreou & Bonoti, 2010; Dockett & Perry, 2005; Einarsdottir, 2011; Einarsdottir, Dockett, & Perry, 2009; Harrison, Clarke, & Ungerer, 2007; Parkinson, 2001). Such child-centred methods have included individual and group interviews (Dockett & Perry, 2004a; Einarsdottir, 2011; Parkinson, 2001), oral and written journals (Dockett & Perry, 2005), digital photographs (Smith, Duncan, & Marshall, 2005), and drawings (Einarsdottir, 2011).

From a human rights perspective, children should be treated with integrity, respect, and their voices should be heard and valued. According to article 12 of the

Convention of the Rights of the Child, children are capable of formulating their own opinions and understanding of the world and as a result, it is their right to express their views freely (Johansson, 2005). Moreover, article 5 of the convention stipulates that it is the duty of the adults who are responsible for the child to protect that child's rights; therefore, as educators and researchers, children's contributions are encouraged through the use of various avenues of expression in order to obtain their views in a way that is suitable for them.

Drawings

Researchers must be creative in the process of generating data with children (Einarsdottir et al., 2009). Some approaches used provide both verbal (e.g., interview) and non-verbal (e.g., drawings) ways of communicating ideas to ensure that children feel competent and comfortable with the research process. Therefore, drawing provides children with a non-verbal way to articulate their ideas, thoughts, and feeling. Along with interviews, researchers are finding it valuable to use children's drawings as an avenue of expression and an activity that is familiar to them (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1982), thus providing something to do while they are being interviewed by a researcher (Dockett & Perry, 2009). Some view children's drawings as a "non-intrusive tool for exploring the child's inner world" (Madigan, Ladd, & Goldberg, 2003, p.19). The interview process might be intimidating to some children as the potential hierarchy between children and adults might interfere with their ability to respond to unfamiliar adults. Offering the children the opportunity to draw and tell about their experiences might be a less intimidating activity for them for many reasons. Firstly, when drawing, children are not obliged to maintain eye

contact with the researcher. Secondly, drawing seems to be an activity that places the child in a position of control. Finally, drawing also encourages children to take their time answering interview questions, resulting in more thoughtful responses (Einarsdottir et al., 2009).

The current study used drawing as a "meaning-making" (Einarsdottir, 2011, p. 745) tool to learn about children's perspectives. In light of Piaget's (1969) stage theory, the children in this study were in the pre-operational stage, during which language is paramount. During this stage, children learn about objects in the world, and they begin to represent these objects symbolically through the use of images, words, and drawings (Piaget & Inhelder, 1969). Therefore, the use of drawing as a methodology to engage children was well-suited to their age and subsequently, to their developmental level.

Although we did not use drawings to examine the children's developmental level; it is nevertheless noteworthy to provide a brief overview of Lowenfeld's (1982) stage theory of children's artistic development. Lowenfeld's theory suggests that children develop their artistic abilities in a predictable, stage-like order, beginning with scribbles between the ages of 18 months and four years and approaching the "preschematic stage" between the ages of four and seven by drawing forms and symbols that represent the outside world (Lowenfeld & Brittain, 1982). According to Lowenfeld's stage theory, the children in the current study are all in the preschematic stage of artistic development. Around this age, children first choose to represent people, usually by drawing a round circle representing the person's head with hands and feet attached. This suggests that children's

relationships with the people in their lives are exceptionally important during early childhood and thoughout development. Lowenfeld and Brittain (1982) also postulate that at this stage, adults are better able to understand children's drawings. While Lowenfeld and Brittain's work focused on understanding typical drawing patterns and subject matters represented in children's drawings, the current study focuses primarily on the children's narratives attached to their drawing. By focusing on children's descriptions of their drawings, the researchers of the current study were better able to represent children's views and perspectives during data analyses rather than simply imposing adult views regarding social support during transition to school. More specifically, the descriptions that children add to their drawings (i.e., their narrative) are valuable and telling of children's thoughts, views, and experiences. Throughout this study, narratives refer to children's drawings and descriptions of their social support and of their perceptions of school. In other words, narratives go beyond simply answering questions; rather they involve children's drawings and descriptions.

Einarsdottir et al. (2009) provide a compelling argument for focusing on children's narratives when using children's drawings in research on school transition. They state that "focusing on drawing as meaning-making moves away from the discourse of drawing as representation and, instead, focuses on children's intentions, considers the process of drawing and recognises children's drawing as purposeful" (Einarsdottir et al., 2009, p.218). For this reason, together, the drawing, accompanying descriptions, and the interview process serve as an interesting lens

through which to examine children's perceptions of the social support they receive as they make the transition to school.

Children's Perspectives on Transition

Transition to school has been studied extensively from the perspective of adults (e.g., Kagan & Neuman, 1998), including both teachers and parents. Research from the children's perspective has recently emerged in countries such as Iceland (e.g., Einarsdottir, 2011), Cyprus (e.g., Loizou, 2011) and Australia (e.g., Dockett & Perry, 2005; Murray & Harrison, 2005). Additionally, research from a sociological lens has also surfaced collaboratively in Italy and the United States (e.g., Corsaro, Molinari, Hadley, & Sugioka, 2003) also examining children's perspectives during the period of transition. Interestingly, there are very few known Canadian researchers who have examined transition to elementary school from children's perspectives, with the exception of studies that have focused on children's perspectives of play as they make the transition to school (e.g., Di Santo & Berman, 2012; Lehrer & Petrakos, 2011). Most Canadian and US researchers have focused on parents' and teachers' perspectives on their children's transition to school practices and beliefs within the realm of the home-school relationship (e.g., Rimm-Kauffman & Pianta, 2005), and in terms of "school readiness" (e.g., Janus, Hughes, Carter, & Walsh, 2006; Janus, Kopechanski, Cameron & Hughes, 2008; Rouse, Brooks-Gunn, & McLanahan, 2005; Rock & Stenner, 2005). Research on "school readiness" relies on the skill and deficit-based notion that children who enter school "ready" are more likely to succeed in school than students who are not "ready" (Rock & Stenner, 2005). Farran (2011) challenges this philosophy by stating:

> School readiness defined as children being ready to learn in school often involves assessing 'deficits' in children ... This sort of assessment is looking backwards and is actually more an assessment of the learning environments of children prior to school entry than of the learning capabilities of the children themselves. Nevertheless, for programs, assessing deficits is seductive, because it is so easy, and has led to a current emphasis in preschool curricula to 'fix' children before they enter school (Farran, 2005, p. 5).

In the current study, children's entry to school will be viewed from children's perspectives, thus emphasizing the issues and aspects of this period that are important to them. Rather than taking a "school readiness approach", I was interested in learning about children's views on the relationships that are supporting their transition to school and whether they perceive they are navigating and adapting to school successfully. The following sections will review the studies that have focused on children's perspectives of the process of transition from home to school or from pre-school to school.

Einardsottir (2011) examined Icelandic children's perspectives of their transition from preschool to grade one. In Iceland, *playschool* is equivalent to daycares or any pre-kindergarten program in Canada, and *primary school* is the equivalent to elementary school. Playschool involves free play, child-centered activities, and is less structured than primary school. In primary school, the focus becomes learning how to read and write, and the activities are mostly teacher-led. Therefore, while this study is of Icelandic children, similarities with the Canadian education system can be made. Accordingly, transition to primary school (i.e., grade

one) is a period of adjustment to children as they change environment and routine and as they experience "the culture of the new school" (p. 741). Einarsdottir (2011) suggest that a successful transition can have long-term benefits to children's academic progress including increased school motivation and positive expectations for their abilities to succeed in school. The sample comprised 40 grade one students from two primary schools in Reykjavik, Iceland. Guiding questions referred to what they felt they learned in playschool and what they felt was useful for primary school, as well as differences between the two schools. After the interview, children drew pictures reflecting their memories of playschool, specifically, what they liked about it. Once the child finished drawing the picture, a researcher asked the child to tell him or her about the picture and wrote it on the back of the drawing. Focus was placed on the process of drawing and on the children's narratives rather than the finished product.

Common themes that emerged in the children's drawings included the mention of increased responsibilities (e.g., to put on their jackets to go outside) and autonomy in primary school (e.g., learning to read, write, and do math). Some children reported on their change of status (e.g., from being the oldest in playschool to being the youngest in primary school) and how learning to sit down and be still in playschool was useful to them in primary school. Children discussed changes in curriculum (i.e., stronger emphasis on academics), changes in the approaches to teaching, and the shift in their status and their responsibilities.

Similarly, Australian researchers, Dockett and Perry (1999, 2004a, 2004b, 2005) have employed various approaches to involve children in research

throughout their *Starting School Research Project,* including "photographs with accompanying text, transcripts of conversations, drawings of school, videotapes of interactions – all of which convey children's perspectives, understandings, experiences and expectations of school" (2005, p.517). In order to include all stakeholders involved in the transition to school, Dockett and Perry (1999, 2004a, 2004b, 2005) incorporated multiple perspectives into the project, thus obtaining a multi-faceted understanding of transition to school. In 1999, Dockett and Perry published a paper from their pilot investigation of the *Starting School Project.* The pilot included interviews with 50 children (aged between 4.5- and 5.5- years old) from New South Wales, Australia. To capture children's perspectives, children were interviewed in small groups (three or four children) about their experiences and reactions to their new school, their experiences and expectations before starting school, and what they would tell other children who were about to start school (Dockett & Perry, 1999, p.110). More specifically, the children were asked the following questions: "What do you have to know when you start school?" and "Suppose you know someone who will start school next year. What will you tell them about starting school?" (Dockett & Perry, 1999, p. 111). The interviews were transcribed and coded in various categories using a grounded theory approach. Eight themes/categories were identified in the pilot study from the children's responses and included: (a) knowledge, (b) adjustment, (c) skills, (d) disposition, (e) rules, (f) physical, (g) family issues, and (h) educational environment. Overall, Dockett and Perry (1999) found that children expressed concern for the unknown, including not knowing where to go, or who their teachers would be, or where to

keep their belongings. Children tended to focus on their efforts to become familiar with rules and avoid negative consequences (e.g., being sent to the principal's office). While children made references to learning how to read and write, they also expressed concerns for making friends and worried about their interactions with older children, referring to them as "Big Kids" (p.116).

In 2004a, Dockett and Perry published another study from *The Starting School Project* that focused more heavily on incorporating parents', teachers', as well as children's perspectives into a multi-faceted analysis. Children who had just started school or who were about to start school took part in small group conversation-like interviews during which they spoke about the issues about school that were important to them.

Grounded theory was used to analyze and code the teachers' and parents' responses to the questionnaires and the children's responses to the interviews. Similarly to previous findings (see Dockett & Perry, 1999), children viewed their adjustment to school related to knowing and following *rules*. Children expressed that they had to follow *rules* in order to operate effectively within the classroom. Dockett and Perry (2004a) claim that through *rules*, children learn about what is expected of them and about how to operate within the boundaries of the new setting. While parents indirectly mentioned *rules*, not many parents explicitly mentioned the importance of following them. In terms of *disposition,* children expressed positive sentiments specifically involving their relationships with their friends and negative feelings towards fears of the unknown; some also expressed a preference to stay at home as opposed to attending school. *Knowledge* was not

frequently mentioned; however, some differences in the degree to which it was mentioned emerged amongst stakeholders. The term *knowledge* bares resemblance to the notion of 'school readiness' and includes academic abilities such as knowing alphabets, shapes and colors (Dockett & Perry, 2004a, p. 181). Of all three stakeholders, children mentioned *knowledge* most often. Teachers mentioned the use and acquisition of *knowledge* more often than parents did. The *"skills"* category involves more specific and practical abilities such as dressing for school, tying shoe laces, and motor skills (using scissors to cut and using pencils). Children made reference to *physical* issues in their responses; this code was quite general as it encompassed issues such as the physical space of the school (e.g., bigger school yard), what was expected of the children physically (e.g., in gym class) and physical activities that they would participate in. Children also mentioned many aspects of *family issues*, including whether their sibling would help them adjust to school, what their parents' role in school would be, and their parents' expectations for them in school. Interestingly, some children spoke about the home-school relationship. During one of the focus group interviews, when the researcher asked the children "who helped you start school?" the children expressed how their siblings and their mothers help them with reading. Some children worried about liking or not liking their teachers.

Dockett and Perry (2004a) found that children and adults differed in their perceptions of school transition, but had similar concerns as well. Children seemed mostly concerned with following rules, having a positive disposition (i.e., being happy), and making friends, while parents and teachers placed most emphasis on

their children`s social adjustment and "fitting in" at school. While parents and children generally seemed concerned about similar issues, children and adults presented different aspects and interpretations of these issues. Engaging children as active participants in research provides insight into how children experience transition to school more directly.

Social Support

The relationships that develop between children, parents, and teachers produce the context from which transition to school occurs (Morrison et al., 2003; Rimm-Kauffman & Pianta, 2005); therefore, children's transitions can be viewed as embedded in and shaped by their relationships with significant others in their lives (Dockett & Perry, 2004a; Einarsdottir, 2011). While research has examined how children experience the changes that occur between pre-school, kindergarten and grade one (e.g., Loizou, 2011, Einarsdottir, 2011), there have been few research studies that focus specifically on how children view the social support they receive during their transition to school. Dockett and Perry's work describe that children expressed the importance of having friends and feeling happy, therefore, the social environment seemed to play an important role in their view of starting school. This is consistent with the ecological view that the home and school contexts are the first and most influential contexts in which children learn (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Moreover, in the literature, social support refers to the degree to which an individual feels cared for and valued based on the support received from others (Cobb, 1976). Throughout the transition process, the support children receive from important people in their lives will have an impact on their attitude towards school

and their long-term school success (Entwisle & Alexander, 1998; Morrison et al., 2003). There is some evidence to suggest that support during this time will influence whether children experience continuity from one setting to another (Kagan & Neuman, 1998), and this may indirectly influence their academic outcomes (Morrison et al., 2003). In the current study, transition to grade one will be examined in light of the relationships that are most influential to young children, including their relationships with their parents, siblings, teachers and other important individuals in their lives.

Franco and Levitt (1997) are among the few who examined social support during early childhood; they examined which social support networks are deemed important from young children's perspective and whether these children's perspectives differ from parental perspectives. The sample comprised 56 pre-school children (26 boys), ages 4-to-5- years old and their mothers. One-on-one interviews were conducted with the children and then separately with the mothers at the child's pre-school. Examples of questions included: "Who plays fun games with you?", "Who makes you feel happy?", and "Who loves you?". The results from the child interviews suggest that there were similarities and differences between adult and child views of social support. When asked, "Who loves you?," children reported an average of 8.15 people as compared to their mothers who reported an average of 13.66 social support providers in their child's life. Mothers seemed to perceive a greater number of social support providers in their children's lives than reports obtained by the children themselves. Children reported that they received the most support from their parents; more specifically, that they received nurturance from

them. While mothers reported more social support providers in general, they actually reported friends less frequently than the children did. In other words, although children reported their parents, siblings, and extended family primarily as their primary social support network, they also reported friends as social support providers more than their mothers did. At a young age, the children differentiated among the functions of the different support providers; for example, children perceived their friends as providers of companionship and their parents as providers of nurturance and reassurance. The investigation of social support during early childhood merits attention because young children are not passive in attaining social support from important individuals in their lives, but are actively seeking support from different sources and for different reasons (Franco & Levitt, 1997). Franco and Levitt also add that while parents might be able to provide accurate and informative reports regarding their child's home life, they might not do too well as reporters of their children's school life. As such, children may be better equipped to provide self-reports regarding school-related issues. Findings from this study suggest that children are capable of providing reliable information about the important people in their lives; and that actually, they may be better able to provide information because they are experiencing those relationships first-hand.

Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition

Bronfenbrenner's systems-ecological theory exemplifies the complexity and interrelatedness of children's multiple systems. Beginning at a very young age, children are part of various relationships and involved in various social groups, including their immediate and extended family, neighbors, friends, as well as

religious and cultural affiliations, sports groups, and other communities. Accordingly, Kraft-Sayre and Pianta's (2000) ecological and dynamic model of transition, which borrows from Bronfenbrenner's (1986) ecological model, will be used in the current study as the framework from which to examine children's perspectives of the transition to school, which can be viewed as embedded in the various contexts and relationships children are involved in. Pianta's model of transition is based on the view that the relationships that children develop with their parents, siblings, teachers, and peers will have an impact on how they adjust and adapt to school. Moreover, the collaboration between the various contexts, for example, between the home and school, can also serve as a source of support during the process of transition. Research focusing on children's relationships with teachers and parents during their transition to school has focused on adults' perspectives. Children's perspectives of these relationships during this period may also add to our understanding of their early school experiences.

Child-Teacher Relationships

There is research pointing to early childhood as a period during which close and conflict-free relationships with teachers have the most lasting and influential impact on a child's adjustment to school and as a relationship that sets the stage for future interpersonal relationships with teachers and peers (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Meehan, Hughes, & Cavell, 2003). In the context of relationships with adults, children learn interpersonal skills and patterns of behavior that may lay the groundwork for future interactions (Birch & Ladd, 1998). High quality child-teacher relationships have been associated with school adjustment (Meehan et al., 2003)

and positive emotional, behavioral, and academic outcomes (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Moreover, it has been suggested that in some instances, positive child-teacher relationships act as protective factors for children who are at risk for emotional and behavioral problems (Baker, 2006; Howes, 2000; Meehan et al., 2003).

The effects of high quality child-teacher relationships appear to be studied widely in early child care settings when teachers tend to focus on emotionally nurturing children at a time when they are beginning to develop social and relational skills (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Hamre and Pianta (2001) found that children's ability to form positive, high-quality relationships with their teachers in kindergarten predicted future behavior and academic outcomes on standardized measures (i.e., Iowa Test of Basic Skills). On the contrary, children who formed negative relationships with their teachers early in their education were more likely to experience academic and behavioral difficulties in upper elementary and middle school (Hamre & Pianta, 2001).

Though research supports the argument that positive child-teacher relationships predict developmental trajectories, it is critical to understand how children view the role of their teacher and how they interpret their interactions with teachers with whom they may or may not have a positive relationship. Obtaining children's insight may provide teachers with information about how to engage children and how to foster a warm and safe classroom climate (Howes, 2000).

Investigating child-teacher relationships from children's perspectives provides another angle from which to understand children's school experiences.

There is a growing body of literature that examines children's perspectives of their relationships with their teachers and their teaching style and approaches. In a study conducted by Daniels, Kalkman, and McCombs (2001), 66 elementary school children (kindergarten to grade 2) were asked to complete a 4-point likert scale (using smiley faces) to rate (a) their feelings of the emotional support they received from their teachers, (b) their interest in schoolwork, and (c) how their teachers made them feel, including good about themselves, happy, liked or worried. The children were also asked to explain their answers (researchers asked them "why?"). Structured interviews were conducted in which the students were asked the following questions: 'How often does your teacher give you interesting work and things to do?", "What is a good teacher like?", and "What is the best way to learn?". Using a 4-point likert scale, students were also asked to rate how good they were at reading, schoolwork, and math. While this study did not look specifically at the student-teacher relationship, it provided insight into how children viewed and assessed their classroom experiences and highlighted how children were valuable informants regarding their school experiences. Students across grades reported that good teachers provided socio-emotional support and assistance, and incorporated interesting and stimulating activities into the curriculum. The data was re-analysed comparing the children according to the following categories: (a) high support, (b) low/moderate support, and (c) high stimulation group. Students in the high support and high stimulation group also reported greater satisfaction with school. While social support was not the primary focus of this study, the importance of social support in children's motivation and in their educational experience surfaced in this

study. Moreover, this study revealed that at a young age, children showed awareness of effective teaching approaches that motivate them to learn. These findings also suggest that children may need a balance between high support and high stimulation in order to be motivated and enjoy school. Understanding how children describe teacher support may inform our understanding of children's perceptions of their transition to school and whether they are perceiving the process as empowering, stimulating or stressful (Margetts, 2002, 2003, 2005).

Parental Involvement in School

The relationship between children's family and their school has been of strong interest to researchers in educational psychology (Christenson, 2003; Olympia, Sheridan, & Jenson, 1994). Accordingly, the home-school relationship that first develops during the transition to school may pave the trajectory for future school experiences (Rimm-Kauffman & Pianta, 2005). For example, positive relationships between home and school have been associated with positive academic outcomes in different academic domains such as math and reading achievement (Dearing, Kreider, Simpkins, & Weiss, 2006; Fan & Chen, 2001; Galindo & Sheldon, 2012; Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005). Policy makers and researchers have focused on home-school interactions from the parents' and teachers' perspective (Morrison et al., 2003); however, there is limited research on children's perceptions of the relationship between home and school or how children view the home and school as contexts of support for learning.

Recently, Sormunen, Tossavainen, and Turunen (2011) have examined the perspectives of 173 ten- to 11- year old Finnish children, and their parents',

teachers', and principals' perceptions of the home-school relationship. For the purpose of this review, only the child reports will be described. The children completed structured questionnaires developed by the authors of the study regarding parents' involvement in their children's school. For example, the children checked off whether they 'agree', 'cannot say', or 'disagree' with the following item on the questionnaire: 'I would like to have my parents help at school clubs and/or break sometimes'. Sormunen et al. (2011) found that the children "had positive attitudes towards parental participation, but many of them did not have a clear opinion of it" (p.198). Overall, their findings on children`s perspectives was clearly limited. Perhaps alternative methods such as semi-structured interviews and drawings would have elicited more information on children's perspectives and awareness of their parents' involvement in their school. Nevertheless, research on children's perspectives regarding home-school collaboration is lacking and would add to our understanding by providing children a voice to express their understandings of this relationship. The current study explored children's perspectives of the home-school relationship, and how children may perceive any support that parents and teachers provide together. Ultimately, the goal was to examine children's perceptions of parental support using children's narratives and drawings, thus providing another lens with which to understand whether and if the home-school relationship is a meaningful support system for children as they make the transition to formal education.

Current Study

The primary purpose of the current study was to examine (a) the children's perspectives of school in kindergarten and grade one, (b) whether they liked school (c) their perceptions of the transition and changes they experienced between kindergarten and grade one, (d) their perceptions of the social support they received as they made the transition to kindergarten and to grade one, and (e) how they experienced and interpreted the home-school relationship.

The following research questions guided the study:

1) What are children's perceptions of school in kindergarten and grade one?

   Sub-questions:

   Do the children like school?

   What do children like and dislike about kindergarten and grade one?

   What challenges do children face as they make the transition to school?

   What are similarities and differences between kindergarten and grade one?

2) What are children's perceptions of the social support they receive (or do not receive) from the different people in their lives (parents, siblings, teachers, and friends)?

   Sub-questions:

   What types of social support do these various people (parents, siblings, teachers, and friends) provide (as perceived by the child)?

3) How do children perceive the home-school relationship?

CHAPTER 3 - METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The current study employed a child-centered approach to gaining access to children's perspectives of their transition to school. The children were individually interviewed by a researcher about their transition experiences across three time points (once in kindergarten and twice in grade one), and were asked to draw about their experiences during two of the three encounters, to elicit rich and detailed accounts of their experiences.

Participants

The sample consisted of 86 children (49 males, 37 females) who were followed over a two-year period (kindergarten and grade one) and were recruited from eight French Immersion elementary schools in suburbs surrounding Montreal, in Quebec, Canada. Children were between the ages of 4- and 6- (M = 5.4, SE = .67) in kindergarten and between the ages of 5- and- 7 (M = 6.26, SE = .07) when they were in grade one. Ninety percent of the children were born in Quebec, 6% were born in other provinces of Canada (i.e., Ontario), and the remaining 4% percent were born in the United States, Europe, Asia or the Middle East. Eighty percent of the children lived in a two-parent household. Twenty-one percent of the sample included only-children, 40% of the children were the oldest in the family, 15% were middle children, 24% were the youngest of the family.

Although only children's perceptions were explored, the following descriptive information on the children's parents provide context to the current study. Parents' first language was most commonly English (53% of mothers, 64% of

fathers) or French (29% of mothers, 21% of fathers); however, 17% of mothers and 16% of fathers spoke other languages, including Portuguese, Chinese, Dutch, Spanish and Italian (to name a few). Some mothers had a bachelor's degree (42%) and some fathers had a professional certification (28%); however, there was a range of different levels of education.

Procedure

The current study was part of a larger 2-year research project examining children's transition to school (Petrakos, Fontil, Khatchadourian, Bergmame & Charbonneau, 2011; Petrakos, Fontil & Khatchadourian, 2010; Petrakos & Lehrer, 2011). In the spring of 2007, the researcher with the assistance of research assistants who were graduate students in child study, sought and obtained consent from school boards, local school governing boards, families and teachers for the students to participate in the study (See Appendix A). See Appendix B for a list of the measures that were administered to the children, parents, and teachers throughout the larger study. At three time points, the children met individually with the research assistants (once in kindergarten and twice in grade one). During each session, the children who completed various measures, were interviewed by the research assistants, and were asked to draw about their experiences (See Appendix C for the list of interview questions). The drawing and interview activities served as a way to engage the children and allowed them to become familiar with the researcher, as well to elicit their perceptions about school and their relationships with their teachers, their friends/classmates and parents. During the first interview, the children were asked questions about what they liked and disliked about

kindergarten. The drawing component was added to the second interview to allow for an open-ended and creative task that would engage the children in the activities. The second interview that took place when the children were in grade one, included questions about the children's likes and dislikes about *grade one*, and questions about the similarities and differences between kindergarten and grade one. The children were interviewed and encouraged to draw a picture and tell the interviewer what they liked to do in grade one. The children were then asked to describe their picture. Combined, the drawing and description formed the narrative. During the third interview, the children were once again interviewed, asked to draw about who helps them with school work and were also asked to provide the researcher with a description of their drawing.

The purpose of the interview and drawing activities were to capture the children's perspectives through their narratives and drawings in unity and not to assess or analyze their aesthetics (Dockett & Perry, 2005). Therefore, the drawings and narratives were coded by subject, for example, the person/people in the child's drawing and the content of their narratives provided an initial context from which to understand the interview.

Description of Qualitative Analyses

The exploratory nature of the current study was well suited to a qualitative design (Strauss & Corbin, 1998), allowing for the emergent understanding of children's perspectives of the social support they received during their transition to school, a research topic that has not been widely investigated in Canada. Moreover, the aim of the current study was to tap into how children were feeling towards

starting school (i.e., whether they liked or disliked it, what they liked or disliked and why), an area of interest that "[is] difficult to extract or learn about through more conventional research methods" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 11). In line with the effort to remain true to the children's voices and to represent their perspectives as accurately as possible, the analytical and systematic process was exceptionally delicate and important and involved numerous cycles of coding and discussions. As expressed by Saldaña (2009), "qualitative codes are essence-capturing and essential elements of the research story that, when clustered together according to similarity and regularity - a pattern - they actively facilitate the development of categories and thus analysis of their connections" (p.8). Initially, open codes were applied to the transcripts to sort, organize, link, and explore the data so that once they were coded, the researchers could further analyse them by looking for patterns among the codes (Saldaña, 2009). Coding was a cyclical process in that many cycles of coding were necessary to arrive at an accurate and well thought out analysis. The current study employed three rounds of coding.

The data was coded using HyperResearch©, a qualitative coding computer program that helped to organize, store, and analyse qualitative codes. I coded the whole data set, a research assistant coded 30% of the transcripts as well, and I had weekly meetings with Harriet Petrakos, supervisor of this thesis to discuss the assigned codes, their patterns and emerging themes. This process will further be discussed in the following paragraphs (i.e., Dependability section).

Grounded theory. The current study used the method of grounded theory to explore the research questions. In grounded theory, the ultimate goal is to identify

emerging themes, and as the name implies, arrive at a theory that has been 'grounded' from the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). As stated by Strauss and Corbin (1998), for the purpose of this qualitative study, "the unit of analysis is the concept" (p.280) and the primary purpose of this study was discovery. Analyses involved various techniques and processes to facilitate a thorough, systematic, and detailed explorations and understanding of the data. Strauss and Corbin (1998) refer to multiple forms of data, including interviews, observational field notes, videos, journals, and pictures, to name a few, that can be analysed through grounded theory. Accordingly, the children's responses and narratives from the second and third interview were analyzed through grounded theory to address the current research questions, for example, "What types of social support do these various people (parents, siblings, teachers, and friends) provide (as perceived by the child)?" While the research questions that guided the current study were open-ended and derived from the literature (i.e., What are children's perceptions of kindergarten and grade one?), they were continually refined as themes emerged throughout data analyses, a common occurrence in qualitative research (Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

A microanalysis of the data was conducted by way of a "line-by-line analysis" (Strauss & Corbin, p.57) during which the children's interview transcripts were thoroughly analyzed by word, phrase, and paragraph (Strauss & Cobin, 1998). Strauss and Corbin refered to the term "microanalysis" or "microscopic analysis" as an approach that allows for the establishment of initial categories through open-

and axial- coding. In the following paragraphs, the process of open- and axial-coding will be further described.

Open-coding. Open coding allows for the identification of categories, and involves the process of establishing their properties (characteristics and definition to a category) and their dimensions (specifying the ranges and variations of a category). Throughout open-coding, the use of memos served as a tool to record the analysis, during which, I kept track of my "thoughts, interpretations, questions, and directions for further data collection" (Strauss & Corbin, p. 111) by way of adding annotations to my codes and having discussions with the supervisor and research assistant involved in the current study. Conceptualization, another term used in grounded theory, refers to "the process of grouping similar items according to some defined properties and giving the items a name that stands for that common link" (Strauss & Corbin, p. 121). Conceptualization was used to manage the rich and large amount of data into smaller, meaningful units in order to incorporate axial coding to the transcripts and drawings.

Axial coding. Axial coding was used to link categories to subcategories by their properties and dimensions with the goal of relating categories and adding depth and structure to them (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Again, properties refer to the characteristics of a category and dimensions refer to the variation or the range of a category. Together, the combination of open and axial coding were used to open up the text and systematically code and identify categories. Strauss and Corbin (1998) define 'coding' as "the analytic process through which data are fractured, conceptualized, and integrated to form theory" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 3). The

properties and dimensions of each category and the relationships between them were then examined to understand the data and establish a grounded theory. Rather than a step-by-step method, this type of analysis involved a free-flowing and creative process of moving back and forth from open- to axial- coding.

Selective coding. Open and axial coding allowed for an in-depth, microanalytic investigation of the data; however, the categories were then merged and interrelated in order to facilitate the construction of a theory. Selective coding refers to the "process of integrating and refining the theory" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 143) and involves the reduction of the data into a set of concepts and "relational statements" (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 143) and ultimately into a central category that captures the essence of the theory.

Dependability

The children's transcripts and drawings were coded and verified for "dependability", a qualitative term that is similar to the quantitative term "reliability". A research assistant coded 30% (N = 26) of the data by applying open coding to the transcripts. Those transcripts were also coded by the primary researcher and monitored by the supervisor of the thesis. Initially, the research assistant was trained on how to use HyperResearch© and was given an outline of the project's research questions. Together, the primary researcher, the research assistant and the thesis supervisor met after the first 5% were coded and then, after each 10% of the transcripts were completed to review the codes assigned by each of the researchers and to discuss any discrepancies that may have emerged as a result of different interpretations of the data. Since the research assistant employed open-

coding and did not have a coding scheme to follow, at times, the researchers used different words (e.g., "likes school" and "satisfied with school") to imply similar meanings and understandings of the children's responses and narratives. During these instances, the researcher assistants discussed and agreed on a single term and adjusted these labels for the following 10% of coding. Discrepancies occurred when the two coders had a different interpretation of the child's response, and resulted in an intensive open discussion involving the supervisor and the two coders until all three researchers reached consensus. The researchers kept track of the discrepancies and obtained 93% dependability. Saldana (2009) posit that an agreement rate in the range of 85-90% is highly satisfactory; therefore, the current study has obtained excellent dependability.

Confirmability

In attempt to represent the data of the children's voices accurately, confirmability was obtained. Confirmability entailed the primary researcher of this thesis and a research assistant reviewed the patterns that emerged from 30% of the interviews. Merriam (2009) refers to this as an "audit trail" in that the primary researcher documents all phases of data analyses (open-, axial- and selective – codes, and memo-ing) to track the process. Any issues or disagreements were discussed and monitored by the supervisor of this thesis and consensus was attained.

Overview of Analysis

Children's perceptions of school during the period of transition, whether they liked or disliked school, what they liked and disliked and why, and the differences

and similarities between kindergarten and grade one as they perceived them, were examined qualitatively. Their perceptions of the social support they received from the various people in their lives (parents, friends, classmates, and teacher) as expressed during the interviews and in their drawings, were also analyzed qualitatively through grounded theory. Finally, the current study qualitatively investigated children's perceptions of the home-school relationship.

In 1999 and 2004, Dockett and Perry used a grounded theory approach and eight themes emerged when children spoke about transition to school (see Appendix D). With knowledge of previous research findings, I was cautious when analyzing the data to allow the children of the current study to inspire new emerging themes and not limit the analyses to what had previously been found in research, as there has not been extensive work in this area.

As you will see, the current findings share some parallels with those of Dockett and Perry's; however, the current study has not attempted to replicate their study but rather to explore new emerging themes in a different context and using a different methodology.

CHAPTER 4 – RESULTS

The results will firstly be organized by research questions and secondly, by theme. Selected excerpts of the children's responses will be embedded in the analysis of the themes and patterns that emerged in the current study to allow for the children's experiences and perspectives to be represented. To protect anonymity, pseudonyms are used throughout.

Research Question 1: What are children's perceptions of school in kindergarten and grade one?

(This research question includes the following sub-questions: Do the children like school? What do children like and dislike about kindergarten and grade one? What challenges do children face as they make the transition to school? What are similarities and differences between kindergarten and grade one?)

Perceptions of School in Kindergarten and in Grade one

All of the interview transcripts were examined qualitatively (by child across the three interviews and then across all the children); open codes were applied to their responses by way of a thorough line-by-line analysis to exhaust the data. Once the open-coding process was complete, the data were further analysed by way of axial and selective coding. As indicated above, axial coding involves linking and relating codes to form patterns and to gain an understanding of the children's perceptions across the sample and selective coding involve narrowing down the

codes into key themes. In this first section, open-coding allowed for the identification of whether or not children liked school and axial-coding enabled me to open up the data and explore further themes that surfaced when children expressed their attitudes towards their experiences in school (i.e., what they liked or not liked and why). Please note that these codes are not mutually exclusive; for example, sometimes, children reported multiple reasons for liking or disliking school. I will first provide some descriptive data to give an overall picture of the children's attitudes towards school.

In kindergarten, 70 of the 86 children reported that they liked school while 16 of them reported that they did not. However, when these children were in grade one, seventy-seven of them reported that they liked school and nine reported that they did not. Across both grades, similar themes emerged explaining why these children liked or disliked school. They will be described, through the combined use of the children's words and by adding possible interpretations of their responses based on the context and pattern of responding using their narratives and drawings.

Results also indicated that of the 86 children who participated in the study, 65 of them liked school both in kindergarten and in grade one, five liked kindergarten but disliked grade one, twelve disliked kindergarten but liked grade one and four children disliked both kindergarten and grade one.

What children liked about kindergarten. When asked, "What do you like about school?" 75 of the children reported that they liked to play. Specifically, most reported that they liked to play outdoors (n = 38, as shown in Table 1) and that they liked to play with friends (n = 35). During recess and lunchtime, children reported

that they were given free time to run freely in the school yard and time to be alone with their classmates and peers. It seemed as though the children enjoyed this aspect of their school day when they could focus on playing and their friendships.

Twenty-four of the 86 kindergarten children reported that they liked engaging in creative arts (i.e., drawing, coloring, painting, and music), mostly because they felt competent in their artistic abilities; in their words, they were "good at it". Only two kindergarten children reported that they disliked creative arts; one of these children expressed an overall dislike for school and added that he also disliked engaging in arts and crafts activities. The second child who disliked creative arts perceived he was "not good" at it. For those children who did express positive sentiments towards the creative arts, perhaps they felt positively because in many ways, the arts could be unstructured, open-ended and an avenue of expression and exploration for young children.

Interestingly, the children also mentioned that they enjoyed being involved in other play and academic activities, including story book time, writing numbers and letters, and also playing on the computer (see Table 1). Most children reported that they enjoyed and felt competent in a variety of these activities in kindergarten; they demonstrated this by listing all the aspects of kindergarten they enjoyed, as this child did:

> Marisa: I like playing with friends, I like to play outside, I like it when we go to music class, I like doing activities, I like collecting leaves outside. I like working with my teacher. I like working hard.

In Marisa's drawing, she drew herself reading and described that she "lov[ed] to read" (See Figure 1). Marisa's narrative depicts a child who was satisfied with her school, teacher, and peers, and who was adapting well to the transition to school. Many children responded in a similar fashion in that they provided various examples of different activities they enjoyed in kindergarten. Thirty-five children reported three or more activities they liked to partake in at school.

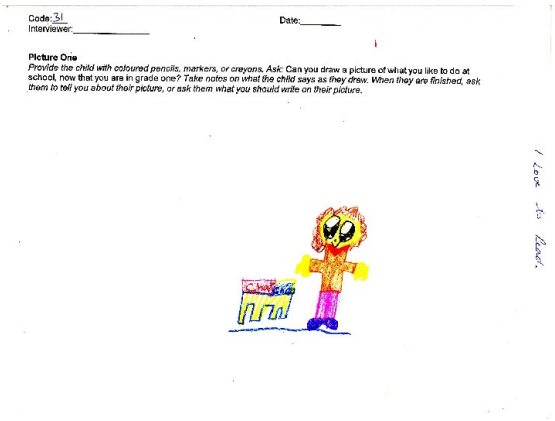

Figure 1. Marisa: "I love to read."

In addition to describing activities and subjects they enjoyed, a number of children mentioned their teacher in the list of their "likes". When asked, "What you like about school?" twenty-two children reported that they liked their teacher; they described their teacher as warm, "nice", and nurturing. Some reported that they enjoyed talking to their teachers, and listening to them read stories to the class.

What children liked about grade one. Although some children reported some challenges with being in grade one, many children expressed many aspects they liked about being in grade one. Similar to their kindergarten interviews, they listed school subjects and activities they particularly enjoyed, such as playing outdoors (n = 11), creative arts (n = 18), and reading (n = 18; see Table 1). In

addition to those descriptions, other emergent themes surfaced, including: a sense of feeling bigger, pleasure in the development of new friendships, and a sense of competency in learning how to read, write and do mathematics.

For some children, entry to grade one was an empowering experience. Some children expressed how they felt "bigger" and more "responsible" and enjoyed more freedoms (e.g., more time outside) in grade one:

> Michael: You feel much older because you're an older kid. It gets a little bit harder in grade one because there's different things.
>
> Joey: You get to be stronger and more better and you can play outside for more minutes and at snack time.
>
> Kristina: Grade ones are big.

Although these children were undergoing many changes, they perceived them in a positive light; therefore, they appeared to be welcoming the challenges of being in grade one. Perhaps this type of attitude helped facilitate their transition to school. Interestingly, one child who also had a positive experience at school also reported grade one as a first step towards attaining his future ambition:

> Carl: I want to go all the way to Cegep, to learn how to be a police…

These children reported that they felt competent in meeting the challenges of school, as they expressed they were good at various academic school subjects.

While children mentioned "feeling bigger" in grade one, they also placed importance on forming new friendships. Similar to kindergarten, developing and maintaining friendships was an important aspect of school, as described by one

child who articulated pleasure in forming new friendships in his drawing (see Figure 2). In addition to his narrative, throughout this interview, this child reported:

> Alex: I like it (school), not that I don't have many friends, but the fact that I'm getting more.

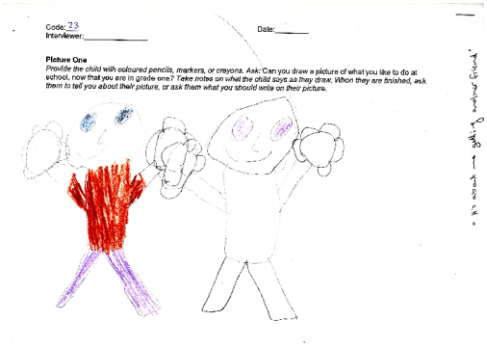

Figure 2. Alex: “It's about me getting another friend.”

Specifically, many children mentioned recess as a time for them to enjoy with their friends.

> Samantha: I like recess and when it’s recess time I like to play with my friends.
>
> Samuel: I like being with my friends. I like playing in the snow with my friends. I like to talk with my friends at lunchtime.

Table 1

Frequency of emerging themes of children's likes in Kindergarten and Grade one.

Likes	Kindergarten		Grade one	
	n	%	*n*	%
Play Activities				
Dramatic Play	5	5.8	0	0
Outdoor Play	38	44.2	11	12.8
Physical activities	15	17.4	10	11.6
Playing with Friends	35	40.7	7	8.1
Playing with toys	13	15.1	0	0
Playing games	11	12.8	3	3.5
Building activities	4	4.7	0	0
Academic Activities				
Technology	4	4.7	2	2.3
Creative arts	28	32.6	18	20.9
Reading and/or Writing	8	9.3	18	20.9
Working and Learning	14	16.1	8	9.3
Science	1	1.1	2	2.3
Math	5	5.7	12	14.0
Interaction with Teacher	14	16.1	1	1.2

Note. *n* = number of children reported each theme. *N* = 87.

Challenges children encountered in kindergarten and Grade one.

Emergent coding across interviews also revealed that the children experienced some challenges as they made their transition to school that included: a persistent awareness that their role as students was to behave appropriately and follow

directions, an awareness that they were being evaluated by their parents and teachers, and a displeasure in encountering conflicts or other issues with their peers. These themes were similar in both kindergarten and Grade one and reflected children's perceptions of transition challenges that were based on actual experiences and feelings about these experiences.

Behavior regulation. Adapting to a new environment, learning how to regulate their behaviour and teachers reinforcing the rules seemed to be intertwined in some children's views on school. When they were in kindergarten, ten children described their concern for their behavior and when they were in grade one, thirty children expressed similar concerns. Perhaps this difference between kindergarten and grade one was due to the increased structure and academic focus of grade one as compared to kindergarten. Nevertheless, the issue of behaving well, sitting still, following rules, and abiding by the teachers' directives seemed to be an emergent theme across the interviews. Many children expressed their concern for being able to regulate their behavior; it appeared this was challenging for them and may have caused displeasure to some, as described by these children:

> Carmen: Sometimes I have trouble sitting still, and I'm always hungry at school when it's not snack time.
>
> Anne: J'aime pas ça quand elle (teacher) dit "va à ton bureau" juste moi et les autres restent. Et j'aime pas ça quand il faut l'écouter et s'asseoir par terre.

A kindergarten child also reported that she did not like when her classmates "got in trouble" by the teacher because of the negative implications it would have on her:

Jessica: I don't like it when my teacher stops doing what we're doing, because of other kids who are talking.

Some children also viewed their participation in certain fun activities at school as contingent on good behavior:

Sarah: We only play sometimes, if we are quiet or if there is enough time.

Another kindergarten child described how she "did boring stuff" in kindergarten and further stated:

Cindy: Every minute we had to put our head on the table.

For Cindy, behavior issues influenced her views about school. This theme of concern for behavior regulation emerged throughout the interview questions and across many children, suggesting they perceived their behavior to be an important aspect of school. Similarly, when asked, "What would you like to improve?" one child responded:

Diana: J'aimerais aussi ameliorer ma politesse parce que je ne suis pas trop polit.

This emergent theme of heightened awareness for discipline and concern for behavior regulation may be linked to how children's perceive their teachers and the school environment. To follow up on their view of teachers, children's perception of the role of the teacher was also explored further in a later section (i.e., section on teacher support)

Peer conflict. Twenty-three children expressed concern for resolving and responding to conflicts with their classmates in kindergarten and nine reported similar concerns in grade one. Classmates were collapsed to include both friends

and peers since during the first few years of school, children spend the whole day with the same classmates making it inevitable that they develop a relationship. Many children described their relationships with their peers and friends as inconsistent and unstable. They also seemed to have experienced stress towards certain interactions with them. These children expressed their tremulous relationships with their classmates:

> Valerie: Sometimes they're bad with me (classmates), and push me and sometimes people come and say "what's wrong?". Sometimes I love to play by myself and sometimes I don't. Then sometimes they come and play with me.
>
> Alex: Some insult me. I think they don't like me. Others like me and encourage me.
>
> Jerry: I don't like it when everyone's not nice to me, except little Ann.
>
> Matthew: Don't like when they tease me, hurts my feelings.

Alternatively, children's relationships with their classmates may provide many opportunities for socialization and support as depicted by this child:

> Samuel: I like being with my friends. I like playing in the snow with my friends. I like to talk with my friends at lunchtime. I like playing Monopoly.

However, conflict and negative interactions among peers may be perceived as an additional stressful experience to children as they are already adapting to the changes that occur during their transition to school. Perhaps these young children encountered conflict with their classmates and were still learning to deal with conflict while developing these new relationships. Transition to school may be a

sensitive period for children who are developing new friendships, perhaps because at that point, children have not yet formed close bonds with their classmates and they are still learning to negotiate everyday conflict situations.

Sense of being compared and evaluated. Some children expressed awareness that their behavior and academic performance were being evaluated and compared by their teachers and parents (n = 4 in kindergarten; n = 20 in grade one). In their interviews, some of these children emphasized the importance of getting "right answers", for example:

> *Interviewer*: Are [your parents] happy with your school work?
>
> *Jamie:* Yes, because I always get them right. I'm smart. I'm really smart since I was small, cuz of my father, he's as smart as me.

Jamie seemed satisfied with her feedback as she was a student who received "right answers". Another child perceived her academic performance and homework completion as reflecting that she had been successful. She mentioned how her teacher did not mark any mistakes:

> Nina: I always listen in school. The homework I did at home yesterday. I didn't have a circle in anything. I did all good. I know how to do my homework.

Another child reported that she was rewarded for her performance:

> Mary: I am happy with how I write. If I could get a lot of good marks, I might get a toy.

Attaining positive evaluations and rewards may help develop some children's perceptions of their performance as successful; however, this was not the case for some children, who did not receive positive evaluations:

> Thomas: J'aime pas faire des "Journals." Je sais pas quoi écrire, puis j'écris quelque chose que je pense est très bon, pis là, Mme B. me dit d'écrire mieux. Et je suis déçu.
>
> Emma: Sometimes my teacher says "that's not right" and I don't like it.

These children seemed to perceive their teacher's feedback as harsh. Similarly, when asked about her progress in school, Veronica, a grade one student, responded:

> [I'm doing] a little bit bad because sometimes I make mistakes in my work.

The following child also mentioned getting "wrong answers":

> Sandy: Math, that is the hardest, and I always have the wrong answer.

This focus on getting answers "right" or "wrong" could be problematic for some children. For Sandy, she then reported that she "[did not] like doing math so often". Therefore, it seemed that Sandy did not receive the feedback positively; thus potentially influencing her perception of mathematics. In elementary school, children may become accustomed to receiving feedback, but it may be surprising to some children when they first start school. Children may interpret making mistakes on homework and tests as reflecting negatively on them, despite the fact that making mistakes is a natural part of learning. Perhaps, this finding could serve a cautionary message to some adults about how children perceive this sudden introduction of feedback, evaluation and comparisons.

Also, many of these children reportedly compared their behavior to others and made reference to being evaluated. For example, these children reported:

> Samuel: Yeah. I'm always good, but Sarah is bad.
>
> Karina: Do you know J. B. (child in same class)? He was in kindergarten and now he's in my Grade one class and he's getting really good at listening. He used to be the worst in my class. In the winter, he was better and better and now he's way better than he was in Kindergarten.

Perhaps these young children looked to their peers for social cues on which behaviors were deemed acceptable by their teacher's feedback and which behaviours were considered inappropriate. This way, by comparing their behaviors with their peers, they may have been able to avoid undesirable consequences without enacting the behavior themselves. They often referred to their peers' behaviour, especially when it was inappropriate, to show that they were well-behaved.

Therefore, these children reported heightened awareness that their behavior and academic performance were being evaluated in grade one.

Differences between Kindergarten and Grade one. Children expressed how grade one was different from kindergarten and described the changes they experienced in grade one. One child summarized the different ways in which grade one differed from kindergarten:

> Jeff: We don't play, there are no toys. We do harder things and we have different teachers. Our classroom is different, there are more books, there's a different desk for the teacher, and we have desks instead of tables.

These descriptions of the changes in the physical structure of the classroom and the role of the teachers were also apparent in children's descriptions of both the similarities and differences between kindergarten and grade one. Overall, eleven children reported that there were no similarities at all between kindergarten and grade; one child reported that "there [was] nothing the same". Thirteen children reported that while there were differences between kindergarten and grade one, there were also some similarities. They reported that although they had less time for play and creative arts, the little time they did get to play outdoors at recess and the opportunities they had to draw were points of similarity and familiarity for them between kindergarten and grade one.

When children perceived differences between kindergarten and grade one, these included changes in their daily routines and schedule, as well as their perception that they played less, learned more, worked harder and did homework in grade one.

Change in daily routine. Some children described how their daily routine and schedule changed from kindergarten to grade one. These children spoke about how the structure of their days changed:

> Carl: Lunch is not at the same time, the kindergarteners play while the grade ones eat.
>
> Billy: In kindergarten the art teacher came to our class, now we go to the art teacher's class.

The structure of day in grade one was unfamiliar to them; therefore, they experienced a different daily schedule and they had to learn to navigate through the

day with the new schedule and the expectations of others. One child reported that in grade one, he had to get used to not having nap time; he expressed that it was hard because he missed nap time.

Less time for play in Grade one. Twenty-eight children reported that they "do not get to play a lot" in grade one. In kindergarten, play was perceived to be a major aspect of their daily routine.

> Sarah: We only play sometimes, if we are quiet or if there is enough time.
>
> Karen: We had free time to play (in kindergarten) and now there's not much free time.

Another child reported the difference in play time and in classroom materials:

> Julie: I missed playing and stuff, and toys. In grade one, there's not much toys.

One child expressed that he liked kindergarten more due to the greater emphasis on play:

> Brian: I liked kindergarten more than grade one because we played a lot.

Reporting that grade one is characterized by less time for play was offset by some children's descriptions that there was an increased focus on academics, as suggested by this child:

> Jenny: In grade one, we do work instead of playing.

Other themes emerged regarding the aspects of kindergarten that the children missed in grade one. Ten children expressed that they missed art in grade one. One child reported:

> Patrick: They let you do whatever you want in colouring (in kindergarten). Now we have to follow instructions like on the computer, now we have to do what the computer says.

This child used computers as an analogy to describe how his creative expression was being constrained and structured. It seemed as though this child expressed how he lost his autonomy to choose what to draw. Another child reported:

> Julian: I miss doing some arts and crafts 'cause we don't usually do them.

Learn more in Grade one. In line with their views that they worked more in grade one, some children expressed that they learned more in grade one. Ten children reported that they learned more in grade one than in kindergarten. One child reported:

> Justin: In kindergarten we don't learn as much. I didn't learn anything how to write it.

This child described the academic shift that occurred in grade one resulting in the decreased emphasis on play and a devaluation of the role of play in learning:

> Megan: [Grade one is] really different because we write a lot and we play sometimes.

In line with their view that they learned more in grade one, they also perceived grade one as "harder". Children's perception that grade one was more challenging could be perceived positively by some children who already began to view tests in a positive light:

> Melanie: What I like about Grade one is that I don't have to do easy stuff like in kindergarten. When I was in Kindergarten everything was too easy for me.

> Grade one is like a challenge - I don't have tests like I used to, in Grade one they are harder.

In a way, some children felt positively about the hard work they were introduced to in grade one, but at the same time perhaps, they no longer valued the play experiences in kindergarten and did not place any importance in what they had learned in kindergarten because it was easier and did not involve writing and evaluation.

Introduction of homework. Many children reported that grade one was marked by the introduction of homework. In response to the question, "what do you like and dislike about school?", eighteen children reported that they disliked homework whereas nine reported that they liked homework. One child who reported liking homework, specified that he disliked "doing too much homework [but] liked a little homework." Subsequently, the children who expressed dislike were clear and vocal in stating that they did not like homework, as expressed by this child:

> Aidan: I don't want to do homework; I didn't have it in Kindergarten. I HATE HOMEWORK!

These children expressed their dislike for homework by explaining that it took away from their time to play after school, as expressed by this child:

> Samantha: Because the only thing I don't like that I can just play a little bit and I have to do a lot of work at home and my mom says I can only watch a little bit in the TV and then I have to do my work.

The issue of play emerged as an important theme across children and interviews in kindergarten and grade one. For example, children expressed that they enjoyed playing (e.g., with friends, outdoors), that they did not have time much time for play during the day (especially in grade one) and similarly, that homework prevented them from playing afterschool. These children perceived play as a special time to unwind and enjoy time with friends and being outdoors.

The aspects of kindergarten that children missed in grade one. Twenty-six children reported that they missed their kindergarten teachers (see Table 2). One child was particularly open about missing her kindergarten teacher:

> Cheryl: I miss my [kindergarten] teacher a lot. I cried a lot.
>
> Jamie: My teacher, I liked my teacher a lot. It was only at the beginning of the year, and I miss being in kindergarten and that I missed my teacher.

Most children developed a warm, caring and nurturing relationship with their teachers in kindergarten. Furthermore, some kindergarten children described how they liked one-on-one time with their teachers in kindergarten. In their grade one interviews, they mentioned how they missed their kindergarten teachers, specifically, how they missed that one-on-one time with their kindergarten teachers. Therefore, along with the many changes that occurred with the start of grade one, children were required to develop new relationships with their grade one teachers. This relationship was different from the student-teacher relationship in kindergarten, constrained perhaps by the classroom environment requiring more structure, evaluative feedback, and discipline, as described in previous excerpts by some children in the study.

In addition, sixteen children reported that although they enjoyed meeting new friends in grade one, they missed their kindergarten friends. These children explained how their kindergarten friends had moved, were in different classes or sometimes, different schools.

Overall, most children reported that they enjoyed school and twenty reported that they did not miss kindergarten at all. Therefore, although the children were experiencing many changes and they missed certain aspects of kindergarten, it seemed as though they were nevertheless moving forward and meeting the challenges of grade one.

Table 2

Number of grade one children who reported missing aspects of kindergarten

Code/Category	Frequency (*n*)
Free time or time for play	13
Kindergarten friends	16
Kindergarten teacher	26
Having no homework	3
Time for creative expression	11
Does not miss kindergarten	20

Note. $N = 86$; n = number of children by code. These themes are not mutually exclusive.

Understanding Why Some Children Disliked School.

While most of the children in the study reported that they liked school, it was important to understand the reasons behind why some children did not enjoy their first few years of school. The following themes emerged from those children who either disliked kindergarten or grade one.

Dislike of teacher. In total, eight children spontaneously reported that they did not like their teachers; seven of which also reported that their dissatisfaction with school stemmed from their negative relationship with their teacher. Six of the seven children reported this when they were in kindergarten, and one child reported this when he was in grade one. They described their teacher as cold, low in warmth, and severe, such as these kindergarten children describe:

> Christopher: Non, je n'aime pas l'école parce que Miss Aurora est méchante avec moi. J'aime ça travailler pas, j'aime pas l'école, parce que mon prof est méchante avec moi.
>
> Johnny: I don't know. I don't like it when she screams at me.
>
> Kiara: J'aime pas me faire chicanée … j'aime pas Madame Caroline.

In grade one, Kiara (who stated she disliked her kindergarten teacher) reported that she was satisfied with school and described her grade one teacher (in contrast to her perceptions of her kindergarten teacher) in the following manner:

> Kiara: She's super nice. She's very nice, she tells us funny stories, and she tells us she loves us all the time. She loves us a lot.

Contrary to her perceptions of school in kindergarten, this child seemed satisfied with her teacher and subsequently, with school in general in grade one. She was also one of the very few children who described their grade one teachers as nurturing and warm. Another child stated that he preferred school without his teacher present.

> Patrick: The times that I like school are the times that my math teacher doesn't come. That's the time when I have more fun.

These children point to the teacher as the reason why they did not like school, a finding that highlights the importance of children's strong perceptions of teachers and their roles in engaging children and making school an enjoyable experience. In the first few years of elementary school, children spend most of their day with one teacher; therefore, it is understandable why their perceptions of and attitudes towards school might be shaped by how they view their relationship with their teacher.

Work is too hard. Some children mentioned that "work was too hard" when they held negative views about school. Similarly, some children clearly expressed their dislike for work. Entry to school seemed to be accompanied by increased responsibility to "work" and engage in academically challenging activities. While

some children perceived these new academic challenges and tasks as empowering, some also perceived them as stressful, especially children who did not feel competent in completing these increasingly difficult tasks and work. One grade one child expressed the reason she disliked school by stating:

> Melanie: I want to get out of grade one, I'm not so good at grade one. Grade 2 is harder. I hope I don't have to do grade one again.

This child seemed to be experiencing difficulty adapting to the grade one workload. When the responsibility of having to perform well on tests, classwork and homework was too stressful to cope with, these children may have already developed an aversion to school. In other words, it seemed as though school became the context where they experienced stress because they perceived school as "too hard", thus preventing them from enjoying school as a stimulating learning experience.

Similarly, when children perceived their schoolwork as too hard, they developed distaste for it and also referred to it as boring as explained by these children:

> Mary: Grade one is a little bit boring because I have to do homework and stuff and sometimes it's hard. They're hard on us. By the time you get to grade one it is hard.
>
> Simon: All you have to do is work, work, work. It's boring.

When prompted further by the researcher, "What are you not so good at?" Simon responded, "everything". It appeared as though these children were not feeling competent in school and were beginning to show signs that they were disengaged

and perhaps even annoyed with school. When these children were followed up in grade one, they seemed to continue to show that they were discouraged by school and their ability to perform as learners was compromised. For example, when asked, "how do you feel about being in grade one?", Simon (who reportedly disliked kindergarten) described his perceptions of grade one:

> Simon: Bored, nothing to do, just boring.
>
> *Researcher:* What do you like about grade one?
>
> Simon: Everything, except for the school parts. When we have to go and do boring work. I like to talk to my friends.

Although he described a somewhat more positive attitude towards school (i.e., in regards to his friends) in grade one, he nevertheless mentioned how he disliked homework and other school work. It appeared that there was some continuity between kindergarten and grade one in this child's perceptions of school, suggesting that children's early experiences in school could have a long-lasting influence on their views of school work and education in general.

Would rather be home. Another theme that emerged from the transcripts of those children who did not like school was the mention of wanting to stay home rather than attending school. Five of the 16 children who disliked school expressed their desire to stay home as opposed to going to school. Being away from their families may have caused these children stress. One kindergarten child described how she preferred to stay home.

> Anne: Non. J'aime pas en aller à l'école. Je veut rester avec maman puis ma petite soeur et toute ma famille. Demain on a pas d'école.

It seems as though this child missed her family when she was away at school. Throughout her kindergarten interview, she also expressed negative emotions towards her teacher, her behavior, and her relationship with her classmates, suggesting perhaps her separation issues from her family may have impacted her adaptation to school.

It is also evident, that when other children also spoke about not wanting to go to school, their insecurities towards school were implicit in their responses. Once child responded by stating:

Carole: I never want to go … I wish I could have 105 days off.

Behavior Issues. As children begin school, regulating and controlling their behavior seemed to be an increasingly emerging theme to adapting to school. Although discussed in a previous section, this issue also pertained to why some children specifically reported that they disliked school. Therefore, this issue, in the light of disliking school will be reviewed once more. Some children (3 of the 16 kindergarten children who do not like school) perceived their behavior as "bad" and used this perception to assess their feelings towards school, as revealed by this child who reported that he dislike school both in kindergarten and in grade one:

Interviewer: Do you like school?

Noah: No.

Interviewer: How do you think you are doing in school?

Noah: Not good. I ain't good. Today I have a suspension.

In addition, a kindergarten child described her displeasure in regulating her behavior and stated she did not like “sitting down and listening.” Another grade one child described what would happen when he misbehaved:

> Tony: My behavior is out of control; my behavior is on the wall. When I get into trouble I have to stand on the wall, it's my 100th time.

***Peer issues*.** Five of the 16 kindergarten children who reported disliking school also spoke about their conflicts with their classmates. As was discussed in previous paragraphs, new relations with peers begin to develop and take off during their transition to school. Encountering conflicts with classmates could lead some children to feel excluded or not accepted and this makes school less pleasant for them:

> Sophie: Most girls are not my friends! I don't like that most kids in my class aren't my friends, when they tease me.
>
> Joanne: I don't like my friends not playing with me.

Furthermore, when asked about what her parents think about school, Joanne responded:

> They think it's um... I ... they think I like it, but I don't really like it, school, sometimes.

This response suggests that this child did not disclose her dislike for school with her parents. Since young children are not adept to keeping secrets from their parents, this child may have experienced stress by keeping from her parents her dislike of school and perhaps, she felt that she needed to hide these challenges from adults in her life.

Research Question 2: What are children's perceptions of the social support they receive (or do not receive) from the different people in their lives (parents, siblings, teachers, and friends)?

(*This research question includes the following sub-question*: What types of social support do these various people provide?)

Social Support

During the second interview in grade one, the children were asked to draw a picture of who helps them with school and to explain their picture (by providing a narrative which includes a drawing and description). The researcher then asked follow up interview questions regarding the children's various relationships (i.e, parents, teachers, siblings, and friends). Together, their drawings and narratives as well as their responses to the interview question helped us understand how children perceived their support systems.

Children drew and described their teachers most often as providers of support (n = 31) followed by their friends (n = 19), and thirdly, they drew their parents (n = 15). It is surprising that the children drew their friends as often as they did because most children described their relationships with their friends as tremulous and inconsistently supportive. However, it seemed that even though their relationships with their friends were described as challenging, these relationships were clearly important to them as demonstrated through their drawings.

Parental Support. Parents played an important supportive role by helping their children with homework as well as providing emotional and informational support when they needed it. In addition, children reported that their parents

supported their learning in ways beyond homework assistance, essentially by taking care of their needs, by helping them get ready for school, and by getting them to school. These were all ways in which children appreciated their parents' support in helping them transition to school. Some children also reported that their parents volunteered in their classrooms. The following section summarizes the pattern of emergent themes from children' s responses on their parents' support.

Homework. Forty children reported that their parents helped them with their homework. It seemed that in grade one, most children were introduced to homework and many described that they experienced difficulty adapting to this daily responsibility. One child explained how her parents helped with homework because it was a novel task. Another child expressed that his parent took on the role of correcting his homework:

> Joshua: When I have homework, they help me (parents), because I don't really know how to do my homework.
>
> Name: If I'm doing it wrong or right, if it's bad work and doesn't like it, mom helps me with homework all the time.

In this sense, parents helped their children with their homework by monitoring and verifying that it was done correctly. Despite this type of support, one child described the challenges with homework:

> Nathan: I always have lots of homework, every day when I get at home I cannot even start playing, every day I have to do my homework. My parents say like my teacher will be mad or something and I have to do it that day.

This child explained that his parents implemented and reinforced a strict homework routine and that his parents viewed that this homework was important to his teacher. According to this child's report, his parents made reference to his teacher in a negative way to ensure that he did his homework.

Interestingly, while most children spoke of both their parents as providers of homework support, ten children spoke only of one parent (5 spoke of their fathers whereas 5 spoke of their mothers). Figure 3 demonstrates a picture of a boy sitting with his father and doing homework. One child described how his father would help him when his mother did not have time.

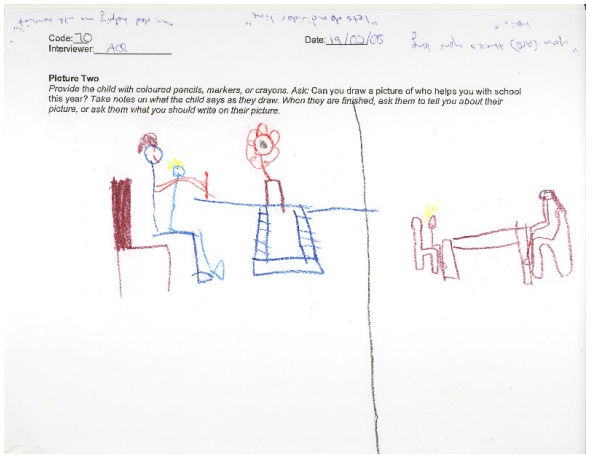

Figure 3. Patrick: "My dad helping me with homework."

Other academic or information support. Some children mentioned that their parents also supported them by engaging in educational activities beyond homework. These children reported that their parents read with them and spent time teaching them about specific subjects they were interested in:

> Domenic: They (his parents) teach me how to learn, they teach me about bats, about animals, clocks, and what time it is.

In many ways, parents took on the responsibility of teaching their children. It seemed as though some parents took on this role in a natural and stimulating way that met their children's needs (e.g., learning about dinosaurs as a way to follow their children's interests). These children who described their parents as providing additional educational and academic support also expressed enjoyment in learning.

Emotional Support and Acceptance. Five children perceived their parents as providers of emotional support and acceptance. As indicated in the previous paragraphs, children undergo many changes during their transition to school. In these cases, emotional support from parents may have alleviated some of the stress children experienced as they started school and adjusted to these changes. One child explained:

> Selena: Once I told my parents to tell my teacher that Jimmy pushed me and was being mean to me and they told her (the teacher), but she never did anything about it.

This child sought support from her parents as a way to deal with peer conflicts. Beyond that, these children sought their parents for protection against aspects of school that were threatening to them.

In addition to requiring protection, some children sought acceptance from their parents. The children who sought and received acceptance from their parents reported that they wanted their parents to be "proud" of them. One child reported:

> Christopher: We had a test and I did well. I knew all of the words. My mom is going to be proud of me.

With the start of school, many children were introduced to the reality that their performance and work would be evaluated. It seemed as though during this time, some children sought approval and acceptance from their parents.

Infrequent support. Twenty-three children reported that their parents did not help them with school. These children were mostly referring to homework assistance. While at first, this may have been surprising given their age; however, most of these children reportedly liked and enjoyed school and felt they could complete their school work without the help of their parents. One child reported that he "just [knew] what to do" when completing his homework. Some children described a sense of ownership towards their work, and they knew that their parents were available if needed, as described by this child:

Robert: My parents help me sometimes if I did a mistake in my reading. Sometimes I do mistakes but very very not often.

Additionally, two children viewed their parents as separate entities from school. When asked, "How do your parents help you with school?" these children responded, "they don't go to school." However, there were some children who reported a lack of support from parents in a negative and disappointing way to a certain extent. One child explained:

Tony: Sometimes when I say 'mom' she doesn't come, so ...

This child chose not to complete his sentence. In his picture, he drew himself helping someone else (see Figure 4).

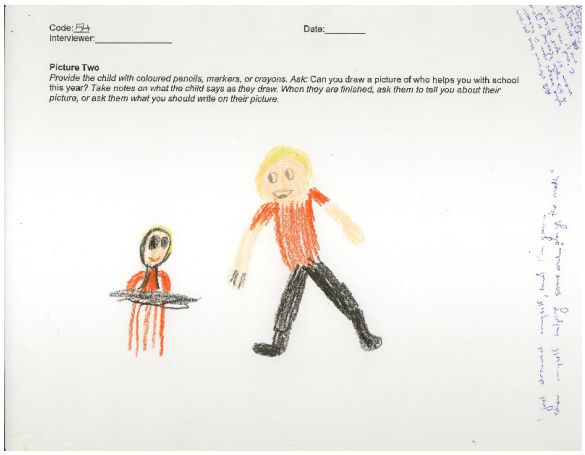

Figure 4. Tony: "I drawed myself, but I'm gonna show myself helping someone doing math."

How children view the role of their parent(s). These findings suggest that the children perceived that parents took on an important role in providing them support as they began school. In essence, some children felt that their parents supported them both academically and emotionally. At times, some parents took a step back, allowing their children to complete their homework on their own; however, they were still available if the children felt they needed support. At other times, it seemed as though parents were pivotal in helping their children address any challenges they were encountering with the start of school.

Teacher Support. In grade one, the children reported that they formed a relationship with a different teacher who often had different expectations. As grade one was marked by various changes in daily routine, structure and course content, children reported that their teachers took on less of a nurturing role and more of a disciplinary and directive role. Nevertheless, many children drew and spoke about how their teachers supported them. This section will review how children viewed

the role of their grade one teachers and how they perceived the support they either received or did not receive from their teachers.

Telling them "what to do". In grade one, teachers were perceived as providing directives, setting limits and essentially, as stated by many children, telling them "what to do" (*n* = 16). Interestingly, this type of support was specific to teachers as children did not report that they received this type of support from their parents or other adults. When asked, "how does your teacher help you?", the following children responded by stating:

Kathlene: They tell me what to do

Alessandra: She tells us what we're allowed and what we're not allowed to do.

Some children did not perceive this type of behavior as supportive.

Joseph: They don't help us, but she says things that you have to do.

Most children who reported that their teachers "told them what to do" seemed to have accepted this type of support as typical, suggesting they viewed the role of the teacher as one who provided boundaries, enacted disciplinary measures to help regulate behavior, and as one who was the head of the classroom. In comparison, many children described their kindergarten teachers as warm, "nice", and nurturing, however, most children did not view their grade one teachers as such.

Emotional support. Only two children perceived that their teachers provided emotional support and help when they got hurt:

Jenny: They help me when I'm hurt, they help me every time.

Kiara: Yes, she's super nice. She's very nice, she tells us funny stories, and she tells us she loves us all the time. She loves us a lot.

It seemed as though the children were not turning to their teachers for this type of support and perhaps, they did not view the role of their teacher as providing emotional support.

Support for learning. Teachers were perceived as providers of informational and academic support. In essence, children viewed their teachers as supporters for learning. In this way, children viewed their teachers similarly to their parents, in that they expressed that both their parents and teacher were essential in facilitating their learning experiences. These children reported:

Karen: They help me with my work

Aidan: They teach me, I learn new stuff

Marco: They help us with a lot, a lot of things, like everything that we do I don't really know. We always say "Madame Cathy, Madame Cathy!"

Most children held similar views on the role of their teacher in supporting their transition to school and in supporting their learning. Therefore, teachers were mostly viewed as providers of support for learning (i.e., by providing informational and academic support), and as setting limits and boundaries (i.e., by providing directives and telling them what to do).

Sibling Support. Thirty-two children reported that their siblings supported them in school and 36 reported that they did not receive support from their siblings. Eighteen children in the study did not have siblings. Of those children who did

report sibling support, they mostly reported companionship and homework assistance. Few children described their siblings as providers of emotional support.

Homework. Seven *c*hildren reported that their older siblings helped them with homework often and many others stated that they were occasionally supported. They also described how their siblings helped them when their parents could not.

Companionship. Five children described their siblings as a companion in that they played together. These children explained how they enjoyed playing with their siblings:

Tommy: …Et aussi au daycare je joue avec mon frère.

Kristina: We are having a snowball fight and there is my sister sledding down the mountain. Here are some snow mountains and my sister is on the top.

Emotional Support. Only two children reported that their siblings provided them with emotional support. They referred to specific events that occurred during which they turned to their siblings for emotional support.

Selena: He helped me once. He helped me get over having my feelings hurt.

This type of support amongst siblings may not occur frequently; however, perhaps some children were aware that their siblings could provide emotional support when needed.

No sibling support: Those children, who reported that they received no support from their siblings (n = 36), described that their siblings were too young. Other children stated that their siblings distracted or "bugged" them rather than help them, as exemplified by these children:

Nathan: He (brother) helps me by doing noise or he keeps talking (while she is doing her homework) and he always wants to play with my mom but my mom says no ‘cause she' helping me.

Ryan: [I have] two brothers who bug me and a sister who bugs me too.

There were children who described their relationships with siblings positively and did not seem to be bothered by their lack of sibling support. Other children described how the wide age gap between them and their siblings prevented companionship.

Peer support. Support from peers and friends were collapsed together because the children referred to their classmates and their friends interchangeably. In kindergarten and in grade one, children spend the whole day with their classmates therefore, peer and friend support often came up when children described supportive people in their lives.

Friends and Peers represented in the children’s drawings. Nineteen children drew their peers and friends as their support providers. This finding is surprising because throughout their interviews, many children also described their relationships with their peers and friends as unstable and tremulous. Five of the 19 children who drew their friends as their support providers also mentioned dealing with conflicts with their friends. This finding highlights that part of making friends may require learning to deal with and resolve conflicts in order to maintain their friendships.

Inconsistent peer support. Thirty children reported that their classmates (peers and friends) were inconsistent support providers. Many of these children

responded that their friends helped them “sometimes”. They expressed that it was their teachers’ role to help them with school. Many of these children described their relationships with their peers and friends as unstable in that their friends were “sometimes nice and sometimes mean” to them. Furthermore, they described how they were sometimes accepted and other times rejected by their peers:

> Nick: Some people say I'm a loser, some say I'm good.

Similarly, one child described his unstable relationship with his peers.

> Alex: Some insult me. I think they don't like me. Others like me and encourage me.

Some children reported that they received support from their peers under certain circumstances; one child reported he received support from his peers “when [his] teacher [said] it was ok”. Other children explained that they were not “allowed” to receive support from peers. They expressed contextual constraints (i.e., they were not allowed to talk in class) on their ability to help and be helped by their peers in the classroom.

> Marco: No, they do what they're supposed to do (peers) and we're supposed to "work all alone".

It seemed as though the classroom context expectations (e.g., they may not be allowed to talk or to help others) may not have supported these children’s developing interest in friendships and close networking

Other Academic or Informational support. When children reported that their friends helped them, they referred to correcting and helping with schoolwork. This

type of support was depicted most often in the drawings of those children who drew their friends as providers of support:

Monica: They help me by correcting my work

Karen: They help me with my stuff that we work on

Companionship. During their interviews, seventeen children described that their friends provided them with companionship. However, of the nineteen pictures that included "friends" as the children's subject matter, only two children drew themselves playing with their friends (see Figure 5). They described their drawing:

Monica: This is me on the swings with my friend on the playground at school.

Joanne: That's me, and my friend colouring.

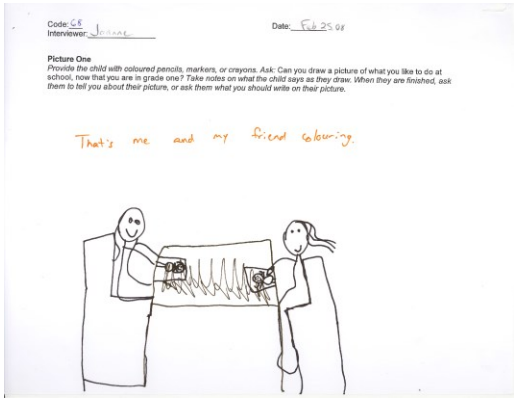

Figure 5. Joanne: "That's me and my friend coloring."

Classroom Aid Support. Interestingly, when asked, "Who helps you at school?" four children drew a picture of a classroom aid. Essentially, these children reported spending one-on-one time with their classroom aids. One child described this relationship:

Jerry: Ms M., she's the person who helps people. Sometimes she comes to pick me up. Sometimes she helps in the class. Sometimes when she comes we're

writing in our agenda. She's bringing me down the hall to the class (referring to his picture).

It seemed that at times, by providing support for learning, the classroom aid took on the role of educator to those children who had developed relationships with them.

Perceptions of home-school collaboration. While children described how individual people (i.e., parents, teachers, siblings, peers, classroom aids) helped them with school, it was interesting to examine whether children perceived home-school collaboration (i.e., how parents and teachers helped together). In other words, did children perceive that their parents and teachers helped them together? Thirty-three children did perceive that home-school collaboration existed. Some of these children provided examples of how their parents and teachers helped them together, while others who also reported that there was collaboration could not explain how and in what ways this was the case. It may be that the children agreed with the interviewer, but could not understand this concept.

Some children reported formal methods of communication their parents and teachers used. These children mentioned how their parents and teachers communicated through the agenda. They perceived frequent home-school communication. Some children mentioned parent-teacher meetings as a time during which parents and teachers communicated together; however, these meetings occurred infrequently. One child explained:

Billy: My mom just did once, interview, that's all, with my teacher, she was showing my portfolio and that's where I learn that I'm going to Disney World because of it.

Billy described a specific time when his parents and teachers helped him together. Once again, (as mentioned previously) the theme of evaluation arose in Billy's response as he described how his trip to Walt Disney was contingent upon the outcome of his evaluated work.

Furthermore, many children mentioned that their parents and teachers communicated informally through casual conversations and phone calls, as described by these children:

Selena: She (teacher) talks to them (parents) a lot whenever she sees them.

Jacob: They talk, sometimes they call each other.

These children who perceived their parents and teachers as working together to provide them support, also viewed the role of their parents and teachers as similar. This way, these children viewed both their home and school as contexts for learning, as described by this child:

Phillip: They help me how to study and do stuff. They talk with each other.

Phillip described how both his teachers and parents supported his learning and how they communicated with each other through informal conversations.

Overview of Results

Overall, there were many aspects of kindergarten and grade one children enjoyed (e.g., playing, spending time with friends) and certain aspects that they found challenging (e.g., behavior regulation, peer conflicts) or that they missed (e.g., their kindergarten friends and teachers). The ways in which children received support from the various important people in their lives was also considered. These

results provided insight into the roles that parents, teachers, siblings, and peers played while these children experienced these changes.

CHAPTER 5 – DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The purpose of this thesis was to engage children in the research process and to elicit their perceptions of starting school and their views on the supportive roles taken on by key individuals in their lives (i.e., parents, teachers, siblings and peers). The current study offers rich and detailed accounts of children's perspectives regarding their school experiences, an area that has received attention in Europe (e.g., Corsaro, Molinari, Hadley, & Sugioka, 2003; Einarsdottir, 2011; Loizou, 2011) and Australia (e.g., Dockett & Perry, 2004a, 2004b, 2005) but less so in North America. The qualitative interviews with children on their perceptions of school were collected as part of a mixed-method longitudinal study on children's transition to school. The children were followed from kindergarten to grade one to examine their perceptions of the transition to school as a *process* that occurred over an extended period of time as exemplified in Kraft-Sayre and Pianta's (2000) ecological and dynamic model of transition. This thesis was premised on the philosophy that children's voices have a deserving and purposeful place in research provided that researchers extend child-centered methodology to obtain their involvement (Einsardottir, 2011). Children's perceptions and their input on the issues of starting school continue to inform and shed new light on the transition to school practices that in North America have mostly been based on research done with parents and teachers.

We were interested in understanding how children viewed school, whether they felt supported and by whom, and essentially, how they made sense of their

school experience in kindergarten and grade one. The following were the goals of this study: (a) to understand children's perceptions of school in kindergarten and grade one and, (b) to explore their perceptions of the social support they received (or did not receive) from the different people in their lives.

Research Question 1

What are children's perceptions of school in kindergarten and grade one? *Do they like school? What do they like and dislike about kindergarten and grade one? What challenges do they face as they make the transition to school?*

In this study, most of the children reported that they liked school both in kindergarten and grade one. They reported that they liked creative arts (e.g., drawing) and playing, mostly outdoors (i.e., recess and lunch time) and with their friends. In grade one, many children reported that they missed art and playing in that they had no time to rest throughout the day. They described how they had less time to draw, paint and color and further, that they were not free to draw "whatever they want[ed]". This finding offers insight into the potential messages schools may be transmitting to their students in regards to the importance and value (or lack thereof) of art within the curriculum and choices when they are engaging in such activities. Alternatively, as children proudly described their sense of enjoyment and competency in their academic abilities (i.e., to read, write and to do math), it was clear that unlike the creative arts, they perceived these academic-oriented school subjects as highly valued within the classroom and equated learning to academic pursuits (Einarsdottir, 2011). Reflecting upon Einarsdottir's (2011) claim, perhaps this finding "indicates how children are by their participation in society restricted

by the existing social structures and by social reproduction" (p.752). Therefore, if a number of children enjoyed the creative arts, and since parents and teachers were perceived as "supporters of learning" in this study, perhaps they have a role in incorporating creative art activities as part of the curriculum, particularly since children's motivation to be engaged in this area is high. This will be further discussed in the recommendations section.

In this study, the children described changes that occurred from kindergarten to grade one. In face of these changes, the children had to absorb become accustomed to a new daily routine, new teachers and friends, and a different educational focus of their school day (Einarsdottir, 2011) from play-oriented to academically-driven. As well, they had to adapt to changes in the dynamic of their relationships with teachers (Daniels et al., 2001; Einarsdottir et al., 2008) from nurturing to evaluative, and with their peers, from familiar to new. Furthermore, many grade one children expressed their views on homework. Recently, Di Santo and Berman (2012) found that pre-kindergarten children view homework as inevitably part of school; therefore, it seems they know before they begin school, that they will encounter homework. While some children reported that they liked homework, many children conveyed their dislike for it as they described that it further took away from their free time. They reported that in addition to having less play time during the school day, homework further prevented them from enjoying play time after school (Di Santo & Berman, 2012).

Although the children reported that they enjoyed the amount of play and art time allotted to them in kindergarten and that they missed it when they reached

grade one (Einarsdottir, 2011), most of the children also felt positively towards many aspects of grade one (Dockett & Perry, 2004a; Einardottir, 2008). For example, they were pleased that they were "learning more", and that they felt "bigger" (Di Santo & Berman, 2012). Actually, similar to the current findings, Einarsdottir (2008) posit that although it is known that children learn a great deal through play, the children in her study reported that they did not learn (i.e., how to read, write or do mathematics) in kindergarten. This thesis yielded similar findings in that very few children reported that they learned academics in kindergarten and when they spoke about play they did not equate it with learning. Di Santo and Berman (2012) reported that prior to children's entry to kindergarten, children had expected to play and not learn; Dockett and Perry (2007) found that once children were in kindergarten, they too perceived that they did not "learn" in kindergarten. The shift of focus from play (in kindergarten) to academic work (in grade one) was clear in the current study. This finding highlights that perhaps the children viewed such a sharp contrast between kindergarten and grade one, suggesting that the start of grade one is met with many changes children must adapt to. Similarly, Di Santo and Berman (2012) found that "discontinuity can be a basis for children's learning provided that there is appropriate support." While the focus of the quality of children's relationships was not the focus of their study, the importance of relationships is inevitable and implicit in their findings. Perhaps future policies could implement strategies to obtain a more seamless and less contrasting transition from kindergarten to grade one.

Although the children perceived a drastic change in focus from kindergarten to grade one, many children accepted the drastic change. Actually, consistent with previous research, many children felt pleasure in learning and a growing sense of autonomy when they reached grade one (Dockett & Perry, 1999, 2004; Einarsdottir, 2011). Most felt that the onus was on them to follow their teacher's directives, to complete their work and to behave accordingly (Einarsdottir, 2011). It seemed as though the children displayed a natural inclination to learn; and adults (teachers and parents) had an important role in supporting their interests that may have been easily swayed with their entry to school. To elaborate, for some children, their entry to grade one involved their first experiences with receiving feedback, having to do tests and being told that their answers were "wrong". This focus on evaluation was perceived as challenging to some children. Some reported concern for being evaluated and compared, a finding that to my knowledge, has not been addressed in other studies. It might be beneficial for teachers and parents to provide such initial feedback cautiously when first introducing the concept of feedback and evaluation to children. As suggested in this study, children who perceived work as "too hard" also reported that they disliked school; therefore, feedback for these children may be exceptionally sensitive.

Not mentioned in Dockett and Perry's work but found in this study, is that a majority of those children who disliked school also disliked their teachers, some of which clearly stated that the reason they disliked school was because they disliked their teachers. Many of these children did not describe a single aspect of school they enjoyed. Perhaps this finding underlines the important influence teachers may have

on their students' perceptions of school, further highlighting the important role of the teacher during the period of transition (Hamre & Pianta, 2001). Similarly, previous research from the leading transition to school researcher, Pianta, has found that the relationships children form with their teachers in early school can have long-lasting implications on children's academic and behavioral development (Pianta, 1997). To elaborate, children who experience cold and conflictual relationships with their teachers were more likely to experience behavior and academic difficulties throughout their schooling (Pianta, 1997). In line with findings by Dockett and Perry (1999), some children who held negative dispositions towards school also expressed their preference to stay at home. Interestingly, in this sample, we did not find any evidence for the opposite; that is, children who described that they disliked their teachers because they disliked school; however, this relationship (between attitudes towards schools and attitudes towards teacher) could be examined in future research.

Similarly to Dockett and Perry's (2004a) findings, the children in this study were concerned about their behaviour and the ability to regulate it according to teacher expectations. Dockett and Perry (2004) discuss the issue of behaviour disposition as *rules* and *adjustment*. In line with previous research, during entry to school, children learned about their boundaries within the context of their schools in terms of acceptable and unacceptable behaviour. This finding is related to children's perceptions that their teacher's role was to "tell them what to do". In this regard, the teachers may have provided these limits for the children initially in an overt way and with time these limits became internalized as rules or standards of

behaviour. Not only did the children view their teachers as classroom leaders who emphasized the importance and value of behaviour regulation (Dockett & Perry, 1999), but also as agents and supporters of learning. Most of the children in this study reported in their narratives that their teachers helped them with school; therefore, it seems as though these children may have developed a reliance on their teacher to provide direction and to teach them. Therefore, it appears that although many children began to feel independent in grade one, some nevertheless perceived their ability to learn as contingent on their teacher's ability to teach.

Research Question 2

What are children's perceptions of the social support they receive (or do not receive) from the different people in their lives (parents, siblings, teachers, and friends)? *What types of social support do these various people (parents, siblings, teachers, and friends) provide (as perceived by the child)?*

The current study also found that children perceived teachers and parents as their primary support providers with school. Not addressed in previous studies, this study found that parents' and teachers' roles were similar in that both these adults were perceived as providing children support for learning. However, it was also found that aside from providing support for learning, parents were also perceived as providers of emotional support, whereas teachers were found to be providers of directives (i.e., "telling them what to do"). Perhaps this notion of the teacher filling the role of "telling [children] what to do" shares some parallel with the finding that children perceive a distinct shift from play to academics during their transition from kindergarten to grade one. As suggested by Di Santo and Berman (2012), "young

children perceive play as the opportunity to self-direct their activity, whereas work is characterised as teacher-directed and mandatory" (p. 474). Franco and Levitt (1997) also reported that parents are preschool children's "primary support provider, but they did not investigate whether teachers were support providers. The current study may suggest that children spend a great deal of time in school at this age and they may perceive the role of the teacher as providing a different type of support from their parents.

Interestingly, this study revealed that the children who welcomed opportunities to develop autonomy (e.g., they wanted to do their work on their own) also reported how they appreciated their teachers' and parents' support when their work was too hard. Therefore, perhaps these children were skilled at signalling when they did or did not need support; thus, they used their support networks as resources depending on their needs. By contrast, children who did not perceive that they received support from parents and teachers appeared disengaged with school (i.e., did not describe any aspects of school they liked). Therefore, it appeared that while most children were satisfied with feeling "big" and capable of working independently (as mentioned previously), support from adults was still paramount in helping them overcome academic challenges and school work deemed too hard. Many children acknowledged the many ways their parents provided practical support during their transition to school. Actually, they described that their parents helped facilitate their transition in many ways; they helped their children get school supplies at the beginning of the school year, got their children to and from school, packed their lunches and some also volunteered in the classroom or during

fieldtrips. While previous research on children perspectives (i.e., Franco & Levitt, 1997) has found that parents provide emotional support, they did not examine the role parents take on throughout their child's education. Moreover, research with adults has found that parents help in many ways; however, children offer insight into how parents provide support that may seem as behind the scenes in certain regards. For example, before children even begin school in the morning, their parents have already provided support in ways that are not always exposed to teachers or other educational professionals.

Adding support to the few previous studies that examined young children's social support networks, children viewed their siblings and peers as their companions in that they played together (Franco & Levitt, 1997), However, other types of support (i.e., emotional, academic) from peers and friends during this period in children's lives was to a certain extent unstable in that the children perceived their friends as inconsistent providers of support; their relationships were described as hot and cold and changing depending on the events of the day. Many children also expressed concern for conflicts they had or would have with their peers although they did not discuss the ways they would resolve such conflicts. It was surprising that many children drew their friends in their pictures and described them as providing "help"; yet they described the support as either not occurring often or as unstable. As a number of grade one children reported missing their kindergarten friends, perhaps they were slow to establish strong friendships at the start of grade one because they were in some ways, starting fresh with new relationships which ultimately would take time. A study conducted by Dockett and

Perry (2011) yielded similar results in that they found that kindergarten children reportedly missed their pre-kindergarten friends at the start of kindergarten and suggested that the teacher should organize a celebration for starting school, during which, the teachers could "introduce them to new friends" (p.378). Perhaps, as suggested by the children in Dockett and Perry's (2011) study, adults could have a role in facilitating the development of new healthy peer relationships especially at the start of each new year as children move into a new class or new group in school.

Children also reported the importance of siblings in their lives. For those children who did report companionship with their siblings close to their age, their descriptions of their sibling relationships sounded similar to their peer relationships. However, since the study focused on children's perceptions of their support networks in school, the children described the support received from both relationships (peer and sibling) vaguely (e.g., by making statements such as "they help me with work sometimes"); whereas, they provided concrete examples of how their parents and teachers helped them with school (e.g., "they read with me"). Therefore, it was insightful to examine how children differed in their descriptions of their various support providers.

Recommendations

Ultimately, the starting and ending point of research is to address the needs in education. In other words, to ask ourselves, "how could these findings apply to or help inform practice?" Referring back to Kraft-Sayre and Pianta's (2000) ecological and dynamic model of transition (which stemmed from Bronfenbrenner's ecological model), the transition to school is embedded in the relationships children establish

with others. Furthermore, children are involved in various relationships and systems that are interconnected (home, school, community, peer groups... etc). Perhaps a transition to school practice could be to implement activities in which children and their families could make links between these systems; for example, perhaps they could visit grade one classrooms as they finish kindergarten to prepare for the change in classroom setting and layout. In addition, as many children reported that they had many interests both in kindergarten and grade one, they could bring in their favorite books, toys or activities to their classroom at the start of the school year. This could be a great opportunity for teachers to learn about their students and may also be an opportunity for children to potentially realise they have similar interests as their classmates. Perhaps adults could prepare children for issues they may encounter with their peers (by having conversations with them) or for how their classmates and teachers may change, such as the idea of "having a celebration" as expressed by the children in Dockett and Perry's (2011) study. In addition, as children expressed concern for their behavior regulations, perhaps teachers could encourage their students in the process of identifying and establishing rules that could then be re-visited as children are adjusting to the changes of grade one. Perhaps teachers could implement creative and innovative ways to incorporate play and art activities into the curriculum to engage the children in school as many of the children in this study reportedly missed these aspects when they transitioned to grade 1. These suggestions are rooted from the children's perceptions expressed during this study. By taking into account children's

perceptions of their transition to school, perhaps transition to school practices could be tailored to meet their needs.

Limitations

The current study contributes to research on children's perspectives about their transition to school and their perceptions of the social support they receive. We gained a unique understanding of what children thought was important to them. However, as with any study, certain limitations apply and will be discussed for the purpose of improving future research.

Firstly, this study involved children from middle- to lower- income families in suburban areas around Montreal. Therefore, while these results provide possible implications for children with similar demographic information, the intention of this exploratory study was not to generalize across all children "in a statistical sense" (Merriam, 2009, p. 270). To elaborate, Merriam (2009) explains that qualitative studies extrapolate "modest speculations on the likely applicability of findings to other situations under similar, but not identical, conditions" (p. 225) and do not necessarily generalize across all settings. In this regard, the ethical goal of this study was to ensure that the analyses conducted throughout were consistent with the data collected (Merriam, 2009). Merriam (2009) claims that "human behavior is never static"; therefore, it is not possible to imply that there is a single reality because human behavior is ever-changing (p.220). For this reason, this study provides valuable information pertaining specifically to how these children perceived school and their social support during their transition at the times of these interviews.

These findings represent the perceptions, feelings and attitudes of the participating children.

Throughout data analysis, I have been conscious to avoid bias and to truly represent the children's voices (through dependability, discussions, memo-ing and an audit trail); however, it is important to note that their perceptions are subject to change along with their experiences. With this in mind, these results do show some consistencies with research findings from Australia (Dockett & Perry, 2004) and Iceland (Einarsdottir). At the same time, new issues emerged in the current study.

As another potential limitation, the data were collected prior to analyses; however, Merriam (2007) suggests that these two processes (collection and analyses) should occur simultaneously in order to continually refine and develop analytical questions, write memos and comments "as you go" (p.172) throughout the process, among other reasons. Perhaps collecting and analysing the data simultaneously would have provided additional focus to the current study. Nevertheless, it was useful to analyse the children's narratives in response to the same interview process across all the children as it allowed them to speak about the issues that were meaningful to them without the researcher continually mending and refining the research questions to attain a desired, or more narrow response.

The use of closed-ended questions asked during the interview (e.g., Do you like grade one?) may have served as a limitation to the current study in that the children may respond arbitrarily to the questions. Perhaps the children's interviews were influenced by the fact that they were conducted by unfamiliar researchers; however, had the teachers conducted the interviews, perhaps the children would

have answered with the goal of pleasing the teacher, or telling the teacher what he or she wanted to hear. The drawing activity was a non-intrusive and non-threatening way for the children to engage in a familiar activity; perhaps this may have counterbalanced with the children's unfamiliarity with the researcher.

Directions for Future Research

This thesis has explored interesting and important research questions; however, as with all research studies, new research questions and directions emerge. It may be interesting for future research conducted in Canada to explore children's perspectives in relation to those of their parent and teachers, possibly through triangulation, as done by Dockett & Perry (2004a, 2004b). This way, we could explore whether consistencies and discrepancies arise between children and adults and for what reasons. Moreover, research could be conducted wherein teachers, parents, and children take on a participatory role in the research process to develop and discuss transition to school practices and activities. By developing such a research project, perhaps teachers and parents could gain insight into the types of activities children would welcome, once again, appreciating the value of children's contribution to research. As another possible direction, it would be interesting to use different methods to involve Canadian children in research, such as participatory photography, storybooks, journals, or focus group conversations. Regarding research on social support, it would be interesting to investigate how children's perceptions of the social support received from peers change at different points during the school year in grade one (i.e., beginning, middle, and end of the year) and perhaps into years that follow and as they make the transition to high

school. In this study, it seemed as though the children were still early in their development of relationships with school peers and friends. In this current study, children presented some of their views regarding their school experiences and this has stimulated new interest for future research.

Conclusion

Overall, the children's narratives and their responses to the interview questions provide evidence that transition to school involves many changes that occur within the context of relationships (with their parents, teachers, siblings and peers). Subsequently, these relationships may play a role in shaping children's perceptions and attitudes towards school. By engaging children in the research process, children's views were taken into account in understanding how they perceived their relationships and the transition to school. Despite the challenges with interviewing children and the various methodologies that could be employed, the children in this study were good informants on their own experiences and the changes they faced. The goal of the study was to be attentive listeners to children's views and perspectives because children may differ from adults in how they experience and perceive the transition to school.

In regards to possible limitations at the level of data analysis, caution was emphasized to present children's voices and to avoid bias and misrepresentations of the children's perspectives. Continual feedback and discussions regarding discrepancies or uncertainties were discussed with the research team and consensus was reached in the interpretation of these qualitative findings. Future

research triangulating these results with the findings from parents and teachers could add another layer of understanding from an ecological point of view.

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APPENDICES

A. Parent Consent Form

B. List of Measures

C. Interview Questions

D. Dockett and Perry's (2004a) Coding Scheme

Appendix A

Concordia
UNIVERSITY

Parent's Consent Form
CONSENT FORM TO PARTICIPATE IN RESEARCH

This is to state that I agree to participate in a program of research being conducted by Dr. Hariclia Petrakos of the Department of Education of Concordia University (telephone: 848-2424, ext. 2013; email: hpetrakos@education.concordia.ca).

A. PURPOSE

I have been informed that the purpose of the research is to provide information about how teachers and parents perceive the transition children make to kindergarten and grade one with respect to their academic achievement, social skills and behaviour over the course of two school years. I am interested in understanding the types of parent and school collaborative practices (such as communication in the beginning of the year, daily communication, parent meetings, phone calls, homework assistance, school volunteering) and how they contribute to children's progress academically, socially and behaviourally. The study will also be comparing different models of transition to kindergarten and their impact on children's learning.

B. PROCEDURE

I have been informed that the procedure is the following:

The researcher will meet with my child's school and explain the purpose of the study. The researcher will ask teachers to allow her to send letters home with the children. Once I give my consent to allow my child to be part of the study, the researcher will receive a copy of my child's report card. The data collection will take place at two time periods: in kindergarten and again in grade one. During these two time periods my child will be taken out of class for three sessions of approx. 30 minutes each. He/she will meet individually with a research assistant to complete some standardized assessments and interviews. These assessments will include a brief assessment of the child's cognitive (thinking), visual-motor (e.g., using blocks, puzzles) and verbal skills (e.g., asking them the meaning of words, comprehension questions, math problem solving). My child will also be assessed in areas of early reading, writing, language and mathematical skills that pertain to classroom tasks. My child will be asked to answer questions about his/her support from friends, teachers and family and his/her self-esteem in different areas, including sports, school work, friendships and family relationships.

I will be asked to complete some questionnaires that ask me my opinion about the child's school performance, his/her behaviour and his/her social interactions. I will also answer questions about my parenting (stress and ways of coping). This will take 1 hour of my time in February 2007 and again in February 2008. Finally, I will be invited to take part in a small interview and a 2-hour group discussion that will involve answering questions about parent-school collaboration and my views about education.

My child's teacher will also be asked to give her opinion on the same topics when my child is in kindergarten and again in grade one.

I will receive $40/child package ($20/2007 and $20/2008), as a token of appreciation for my time as a participant.

C. CONDITIONS OF PARTICIPATION

- I understand that I am free to withdraw my consent and discontinue my participation at anytime without negative consequences.
- I understand that my participation in this study is CONFIDENTIAL (i.e., the researcher will know, but will not disclose my identity). We will only share information with the parent if we suspect the child is unsafe and needs attention or if there is a recommendation for further assessment.
- I understand that the data from this study may be published.

☐ I HAVE CAREFULLY STUDIED THE ABOVE AND UNDERSTAND THIS AGREEMENT. I FREELY CONSENT AND VOLUNTARILY AGREE TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY.

NAME (please print) _____

SIGNATURE _____

CHILD'S NAME _____

HOME TELEPHONE NUMBER _____

OTHER TELEPHONE NUMBER _____

SCHOOL _____

TEACHER'S NAME _____

☐ I DO NOT consent for my child to participate in this study.

If at any time you have questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Adela Reid, Research Ethics and Compliance Officer, Concordia University, at (514) 848-2424 ext. 7481 or by email at AdelaReid@Concordia.ca.

Appendix B
List of Procedures

Child Session 1

Date completed:

- ○ Student consent _____
- ○ TCAM act. 1 _____
- ○ Pictorial Scale of Perceived Competence _____
- ○ WIAT-2 subtests: _____
  - Word Reading
  - Numerical Operations
  - Reading Comprehension
- ○ Child interview _____

Child Session 2

- ○ Student consent _____
- ○ TCAM act. 2 _____
- ○ WIAT-2 subtests: _____
  - Spelling
  - Pseudoword Decoding
  - Math Reasoning
- ○ Child interview picture 2 _____

Child Session 3

- ○ Student consent _____
- ○ TCAM act. 3 & 4 _____
- ○ WIAT-2 subtests: _____
  - Written Expression
  - Listening Comprehension
  - Oral Expression
- ○ Child Interview picture 3 _____

Date Received:

Report card _____

Parent Package

- ○ BASC- Parent _____
- ○ PTI (Parent Teacher Involvement) _____
- ○ Parent Questionnaire (Walker, 2005) _____
- ○ PSOC (Perceived Scale of Competence) _____
- ○ PSI (Parent Stress Index) _____
- ○ Play Questionnaire _____
- ○ Demographic info _____
- ○ PPSP Pictorial -- Harter _____
- ○ Payment Received Amount:_____ Date: _____
- ○ Receipt _____

Teacher Package

Date Received:

- BASC- Teacher _____
- PTI (Parent Teacher Involvement - -fast track _____
- STRS- Student-Teacher Relationship Scale (Pianta) _____
- Teacher Questionnaire (Walker) _____
- Teacher Rating Scale (PSPC) (Pictorial - Harter _____
- Payment Received Amount: _____ Date: _____
- Receipt _____

Appendix C

Interview Questions

KINDERGARTEN

Interview 1

Do you like school?

What do you like about school?

What do you not like or hate about school?

GRADE 1

Interview 2

Can you draw a picture of what you like to do at school, now that you are in grade one?

(Instructions: Take notes on that the child says as he/she draws. When they are finished, ask them to tell you about their picture, or ask them what you should write on their picture)

Prompts:

How do you feel about being in grade one?

How is grade one different than kindergarten?

How is grade one the same as kindergarten?

Is there anything you miss about being in kindergarten?

What do you like about grade one?

What do you not like about it?

Interview 3

I am going to ask you to draw a picture about who has helped you with school this year

(Instructions: Take notes on that the child says as he/she draws. When they are finished, ask them to tell you about their picture, or ask them what you should write on their picture)

Prompts:

How do you think you are doing in school?

How do your parents help you with school?

Do you have any brothers or sisters?

Do they help you with school?

How do your teachers help you with school?

Do your parents and teachers help you together? How?

How do the children in your class think you are doing in school?

Are they nice to you?

Do they help you at school?

Is there anything else you want to tell me about grade one?

Appendix D

A goal of the interview was to allow children to speak about issues that they find important. For this reason, open-coding will be used to capture the themes that emerge and to represent the issues that important to the children. Below is a coding scheme used by Dockett & Perry (2004a, 2004b).

Emerging Themes Related to the Transition to School:

Category	**Description**	**Example(s)**
Knowledge	Ideas, facts or concepts that needed to be known.	Knowing the alphabet, numbers and shapes
Adjustment	Aspects of adjusting to the school environment, either socially or organizationally	"Fitting in" at school, with friends and in peer groups.
Skill	Observable actions	Tying shoes
Disposition	Children's attitudes towards or feelings about, school or learning	Liking school Hating school Preferring to stay home
Rules	Understanding and following rules, abiding by the expectations of the school.	Following routines (lining up in a straight line) Following teacher's directions Verbal actions Being good
Physical	Physical attributes of the school and the children, their needs (nutrition, sleep), and their physical characteristics.	Whether they are sleeping enough The size of the school yard
Family Issues	Issues related to family functioning or involvement with the school.	Parents helping with homework Parents attending field trips
Educational Environment	What happens at school, including curriculum and the nature of the school environment	Group work

Dockett and Perry (1999, 2004)