IS EVERYBODY READY? RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN
SCHOOL READINESS AND CONCURRENT

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DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN

Uday Singh * & Preeti Mishra**

[ABSTRACT: School readiness is a multi-dimensional construct. Cohesive understanding of the concept of school readiness and its applications are necessary to improve learning and development of children at different stages in school. School readiness includes three major components viz. children readiness for schools, schools readiness for children and readiness of parents or families for schools and children. It is necessary that each one of these components provide necessary opportunities, conditions and support to optimize children development and learning. Supportive parenting, stimulating school environment and child’s own preparedness are strongest predictors of school performance during early years. School readiness is currently defined by following three interlinked dimensions (a) ready children, (b) ready schools, (c) ready parents or families. Children, schools and families are considered ready when they have gained the competencies and skills required to interface with other dimensions and support smooth transition of the children. All three dimensions of school readiness are important and must work together to ensure that the time of transition for child, family and school system is smooth. Piaget (1956) spoke on the effects of the environment on the growth of mental structures of the child which facilitates learning and the development of cognitive domain that the early years hold the key to learning. Aligned with these components are several dimensions which have been discussed in this paper.]


INTRODUCTION: The role of care and education in childhood is of immense importance for wholesome development of children. After home, the child comes in contact with the new world of the school. Here the child gets new opportunities to interact, explore and develop. School provides a conducive environment in which the child is forced to learn and to live his or her life according to the requirements of law of development under supervision of an expert. Most of the students enter formal
schooling in the primary stage. A child at this stage must be prepared to take normal schooling enthusiastically and there must be smooth transition from home to formal schooling.

Supportive parenting, stimulating school environment and child’s own preparedness are strongest predictors of school performance during early years. School readiness is currently defined by following three interlinked dimensions (a) ready children, (b) ready schools, (c) ready parents or families. Children, schools and families are considered ready when they have gained the competencies and skills required to interface with other dimensions and support smooth transition of the children. All three dimensions of school readiness are important and must work together to ensure that the time of transition for child, family and school system is smooth. Piaget (1956) spoke on the effects of the environment on the growth of mental structures of the child which facilitates learning and the development of cognitive domain that the early years hold the key to learning. There is, therefore the need for special attention to be given to the sensitive nature of early learning by affording the child the right environment where he will develop the potential and skills for later life experience and education.

Children who enter school possess a unique set of gifts and challenges. A child’s chronological age is often used as an indicator of whether or not he or she is ready to start schooling. However, there are many other factors that are essential for children’s preparedness for school and their ability to participate in different learning environments. In many schools young children and their parents are subjected to entrance tests at primary stage. Researches have also thrown light on the increasing load of curriculum on children at primary stages (Vashitha et. al, 2001). In this background it is very important and essential, as well, that children entering formal school system must be equipped with basic skills and competencies to achieve success in schools. Holistic development of children at the time of school entry is strongly associated with their readiness to school, e.g. child’s health is strongly associated with learning. Unnourished and stunted children often underperform at school likewise children lacking fundamental skills are known to show poor readiness to school (Doherty, 1997). Cognitive skills with which young children enter primary stage make a difference in their achievement at primary stage (Boethal, 2004). Researches on
school readiness have shown to produce positive effects on children’s learning and development. Quality preprimary experience helps to prepare children for school and can have long lasting benefits. There is linkage between ‘Early Childhood Care and Education’ and primary education (Upadhyaya, 2003). School readiness is foundation of equity and quality education. It is linked to improved academic outcomes in higher stages of education. The children who lack school readiness lack confidence and exhibit excitement and sometimes become reluctant to learn. Gap in the readiness of the child is more likely to bring achievement gaps as the child progresses through school (Applied Survey Research, 2007). The nature of home learning environment has a major impact on children school entry skills (Melhuish et al. 2008) and is a strong predictor of educational and behavioural outcomes for children into the primary years.

Apart from children readiness, role of parents and schools are equally important in developing school readiness. Parents and families must be ready to help their children in smooth transition to schools. Schools must be equipped and ready to provide optimal learning environment for children. School readiness is a product of interaction in terms of settings in which a child participates (Pianta & Cox, 2002). Parents positive experiences with early childhood programmes could help in children’s preparedness and can keep them engaged in elementary schools (Krieder, 2002). In an epoch when education is forward looking, dynamic and under rapid transformation the development of school readiness must be given attention so that the children are flexible to absorb the changes in education process.

**COMPONENTS OF SCHOOL READINESS:** Following are the components of school readiness;

1. **SCHOOL READINESS:** It has been defined as the stage of early development that enables an individual child to engage in and benefit from first grade learning experiences. School readiness denotes the capabilities of children, their families and schools that will best promote students’ success in primary and beyond. It is defined under following sub-components;
(a) **Ready children** - The ready children dimension focuses on children learning and development. It refers to what children should know and be able to do in order to enter school ready and eager to learn, thereby enabling a successful transition of children from home to school learning environment. Success in schools is determined by a range of behavior and abilities such as literacy, numeracy, physical well-being, motor development, social and emotional development, language development and cognitive development etc.

(b) **Ready Families or Parents** – This dimension focuses on parental involvement and parental attitudes positive and supporting to children’s learning, development and transition to school. Parents’ educational goods, beliefs, attitude and commitment are considered crucial for school success of the children.

(c) **Ready School** – The ready school dimension focuses on the school environment. It includes practices those foster and support a smooth transition for children to school and those promote learning for all children.

All the above mentioned three components of school readiness are important and must work together to ensure that the time of transition for child, parent and school system is smooth. These sub components interact and support each other in building competencies among children and preparing them for transition from home to school.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>TRANSITION</th>
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<td>How are schools making provisions for admitting new children into the system and creating environment, representing individual needs?</td>
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<th>READY CHILDREN</th>
<th>READY SCHOOL PARENT</th>
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<td>READINESS</td>
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How are children able to adjust to learning environment?
How are families able to work with school system?

2. CHILDREN READINESS FOR SCHOOL: A child who is ready for school has the minimum skills and knowledge in a variety of domains that will enable the child to be successful in school (L., Cinisomo, et. al. 2004). These minimum standards set the bar for what children should be able to know and be able to doso that they enter school ready and eager to learn, thereby enabling a successful transition to school. Success in school is determined by a range of basic behaviours and abilities including literacy, numeracy, and ability to follow directions, working well with other children and engaging in learning activities (Rouse, Brooks-Gunn & Mclanahan 2005). The ready children component can be covered under following six dimensions viz.

(a) Cognitive Skills. Cognitive skills are those skills which provide children knowledge of the objects, people, concepts and conventions of their world (D-Angelo et al., 2007). With academic demands getting more and more rigorous development of cognitive skills is necessary for children so that they are ready to face intellectual demands of primary stage. Northwestern University researcher Greg Duncan says,” The single most important factor in predicting later academic achievement is that children begin school with a mastery of cognitive skills.” Mastery of cognitive skills predicts not only future maths achievement, but also future reading achievement (Duncan, 2007). Attention skills though more modest can also predict achievement.

(b) Social and Emotional Skills. Children readiness also includes the development of self control, self regulatory abilities and social skills to interact positively and work cooperatively in a class room (D-Angelo et al, 2007). In addition child must exhibit various self help skills such as the ability to use
the bathroom (including knowing when they need to use the bathroom) and wash his or her hands independently, eat and drink independently, and handle some fasteners on clothes to dress themselves with minimal assistance (Applied Survey research, 2007). To be socially and emotionally ready for classroom participation and learning, the child must be able to learn classroom routines and follow oral directions. The child must maintain appropriate focus on the groups activity, and demonstrate the ability to make choices.

(c) Physical well-being and Motor skills. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs research states that each lower level need must be met before moving to higher level (Williams, 2008). In other words, he argued a child’s most basic/physical needs must be satisfied so that further development can occur. Children must be physically healthy, immunized, growing well, and have developmentally appropriate gross and fine motor skills upon entering school. Development of motor skills, both fine and gross, can affect a child’s school experience. Gross motor skills refer to movement in larger muscles like arms or legs. A Child who is struggling with gross motor development might have trouble walking, jumping etc. Fine motor skills refer to movements in smaller muscles, like in hands or fingers. A child who is lacking fine motor skills might have difficulty in grasping and using a pencil, crayon or scissors.

(d) Language and Vocabulary Skills. These skills help children to follow basic rules of conversation, meaning the child will be able to listen and understand others, and express themselves appropriately (D-Angelo, 2007). A child must be skilled in both receptive and expressive language. Receptive language consist of learning to listen, and to understand language. Receptive language development is significant in early stages when children enjoy listening and comprehending stories and instructions that are read/said to them. A child’s transition to school is facilitated by already being familiar with the words and concepts used by the teacher. Expressive language development refers to children learning to speak, and to use language. This is especially important when children are required to communicate their wants, needs, thoughts and feelings to their teacher and their peer.
(e) **Arithmetic and Numeracy Skills.** These skills help children to develop ability to work and understand numbers, spatial concepts etc. Activities such as counting objects, understanding shapes, distinguishing bigger and smaller are associated with development of arithmetic and numeracy skills. A great deal of learning that takes place in a classroom occurs through sheer exploration. It is important that children are curious and enthusiastic in classroom. They must demonstrate flexibility and problem solving abilities appropriately in order to interact productively within a kindergarten environment.

A second aspect of the newer concept of children readiness is the understanding of the developmental trajectory of the foundation skills described above. Children readiness skills are considered cumulative in the sense that achieving simpler skills allow acquisition of higher and more complex skills *(Bowman, Donovan & Burns, 2001)*.

**Difference between ready for school and ready to learn;**

Difference between ready to school and ready to learn is important to discuss. While readiness for school implies being prepared to succeed in a structured learning setting, readiness to learn is a characteristic from birth *(Kagan, 1999)*.

3. **SCHOOL READINESS FOR CHILDREN:** School readiness for children is defined in terms of aspects of the school environment that support a smooth transition for children *(Pianta, 2003)*. The component of school readiness can be discussed under following five dimensions;

(a) **Transaction:** The transition from home to school is significant milestone in lives of children, their families and their teachers. When transitions are well planned, children have fewer adjustment problems and more continuous is the process of developmental.

(b) **Teacher Support:** Children progress is increased with the level of qualification of staff. High quality teaching and supporting staff is key feature of ready schools.
(c) **Engaging Environment:** The resources of school are one of the important dimensions of readiness of school for children. These resources include materials and infrastructure necessary for creating engaging environment for children and building hands on learning.

(d) **Respecting Diversity:** Schools must recognize that children are capable learners with their own experiences and expectations. Children are likely to have quite distinct expectation from school and so, they must be acknowledged and respected. A ready school respects individual differences among children and makes provisions for children with special needs.

(e) **Family and Community Partnership:** Schools need to develop positive, reciprocal relations and communication among and between children families and community. Ready school ensures family and community partnership and welcomes suggestions and feedback.

<table>
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<th>Ten Keys to Ready Schools</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Ready schools smooth the transition between home and school.</td>
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<td>2. Ready schools strive for continuity between early care and education programs and elementary schools.</td>
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<td>3. Ready schools help children learn and make sense of their complex and exciting world.</td>
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<td>4. Ready schools are committed to the success of every child.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5. Ready schools are committed to the success of every teacher and every adult who interacts with children during the school day.</td>
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<td>6. Ready schools introduce or expand approaches that have been shown to raise achievement.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. Ready schools are learning organizations that alter practices and programs if they do not benefit children.</td>
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<tr>
<td>9. Ready schools take responsibility for results.</td>
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<td>10. Ready schools have strong leadership.</td>
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A school’s recognition and response to a student in need of extra guidance and support effects child’s school experience. A teacher and school must welcome and understand all children needs in order to ensure a positive transition to school. It is a school’s responsibility to recognize gaps in a child’s readiness skills that may hinder his or her later school success. It is important that early actions are taken to help at-risk students before they experience school failure.

4. READINESS OF PARENT: Children early development and learning is promoted when they experience secure attachments with stable dependable care givers within consistent and predictable environments (Chazan-Cohen et. al. 2009). What happens at home and within community makes a difference to children’s readiness and their educational outcomes (Forget-Dubois et al. 2009). The nature of parent-child relationship and quality of parenting exerts strong influences on children learning and development, including school readiness (Weiss & Stephen, 2009). Readiness of parent can be covered under broad two dimensions;

(a) Readiness of Parents at Home Level - Children need stability, permanency and safety in order to flourish. All children, but especially young children in the process of establishing trust with adults, require a safe and stable home and caring, permanent relationships. Long-term stays in temporary out-of-home placement can negatively affect children, causing emotional, behavioral and educational problems. The level of education attained by parents strongly affects their children’s development. Higher levels of maternal education are associated with better school readiness among young children, better health throughout childhood and adolescence, and an increased likelihood of finishing high school and going to college. Higher education levels of parents contribute to a more supportive home learning environment and more involvement in the child’s school (Krieder, 2002). Children who have been neglected or physically or sexually abused are more likely to have cognitive and emotional problems. Abuse and neglect are strongly linked with many negative outcomes for children including poor school performance, frequent grade retention, juvenile delinquency and teenage pregnancy. Children are most at risk of maltreatment if their families are overwhelmed by
multiple problems such as inadequate income, lack of a job, inadequate housing, emotional stress, drug or alcohol abuse, mental illness or domestic violence (Boenthal, 2004). Young children who are taught regularly by their parents develop better early literacy skills, are better readers when they reach elementary school and are more likely to succeed in school. Reading to young children helps to develop imagination, creativity, vocabulary and early literacy skills. Children who are taught on a regular basis and who have books in the home are more likely to enjoy books and to read on their own. Young children with depressed mothers are more likely than other children to demonstrate social-emotional and behavior problems, difficulties in school, trouble with self-control, poor peer relationships and aggression (Chazan-Cohen, 2009).

(b) Readiness of Parents at School-A parents ability to support child’s entry into classroom is an important component to school readiness. Parents that expose their children to school activities and other meaningful learning experiences assist their children with their success in schools. School readiness is built through experiences prior to entry into school and a child’s family is important to shaping those experiences. Parents involvement and participation in programmes, activities organized by school directly contributes in their child’s progress. It is often seen that parents who keep in touch with the teachers and attend school meetings are able to monitor their child in various aspects. Children whose parents do not give proper time in school feel themselves neglected. Parents educational goals, beliefs, attitudes and commitment are considered crucial for school success. Parental commitment to ensuring timely enrolment for young children is an important aspect of successful school transition.

CONCLUSION—There has been significant shift in the conceptualization of school readiness in recent years. It is no longer seen as applying only to child, but as a shared responsibility. As stated by the United Nations’ National School Indicators which advocate that ‘children will not enter schools ready to learn unless families, schools, and communities provide the environment and experiences that support the physical, social, emotional, language, literacy and cognitive development of children’. The
benefits of school readiness can be understood at two levels: intrinsic and instrumental. Intrinsic benefits address to children, families and schools. Instrumental benefits refer to gains towards the broader development goals of social equity and economic development.

**Intrinsic benefits of school readiness**: At individual level school readiness is an important factor in educational achievement, child’s development, school completion and ultimate success in adulthood. School readiness is linked to learning, school completion, later skill development and the acquisition of academic competencies and lifelong success. The benefits of school readiness are most profound at three development points:

a) In primary school, reducing dropout rates and increasing academic engagement.
b) In secondary and higher secondary bettering academic performance and rates of graduation
c) In adulthood, improving employment outcomes

**Instrumental benefits of school readiness** - School readiness is a proven strategy to improve the economic and social development of a society. School readiness increases the returns on investment in education, reduces education costs as fewer children repeat grades and thus the same children do not have to be taught twice, increases human productivity and income and benefits to society. School readiness is a powerful framework for improving equity in access to education and in learning outcomes. The importance of such improvement in equity is evident at both individual and global level.

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