

Qualitative Study of Kindergarten School Readiness and Personal and Social Development

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Dissertation submitted to the faculty  
of Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in  
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

In

Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

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September 5, 2008

Richmond, Virginia

Keywords: school readiness, personal and emotional development, kindergarten

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(Abstract)

Kindergarten school readiness and the phenomenon of students entering kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills they need to be successful in kindergarten was explored in this qualitative study. How this phenomenon impacts the school setting, including administrative support systems and classroom instructional practices implemented by kindergarten teachers, was explored. Elementary principals and kindergarten teachers who experienced this phenomenon were interviewed using semi-structured interviews. Official documents relating to the phenomenon being studied were collected and analyzed to provide for triangulation of the data.

Findings of this study provide insights into current classroom practices that are currently being implemented to solve the problem of students' personal and social skill deficits. Findings will assist division level leaders, elementary principals and kindergarten teachers to guide and shape classroom practices designed for enhancing and improving students' personal and social skills. Findings report the current resources being used by kindergarten teachers to provide personal and social skill instruction and how teachers' instructional practices in this domain are being guided and directed by administrators. Division level leaders and school level leaders are provided with information about instructional practices for improving kindergarten students' personal and social skills. Findings of the study show how elementary principals' and kindergarten teachers' beliefs about kindergarten students' personal and social skill development are aligned to the Virginia Department of Education's Foundation Blocks for Early Learning for certain skills and how they are not aligned for other skills.

## Acknowledgements

Reaching the goal of completing my terminal degree could not have been met without the support, encouragement, patience, selflessness, and steadfastness of my wife and friend, Cindy. It is to her that I dedicate this work, as she has been my strongest supporter and encourager throughout my career and throughout the adventure of writing this dissertation. If only I could award her an honorary degree! My dear children, Katilynn and Isaac, have been an inspiration and motivation to me as they have continued to take on new challenges and goals in their own lives with a spirit of focused determination. Thank you for your sacrifices so that your father could reach his goal.

My chair, Dr. Travis Twiford, has walked me graciously and patiently through each step of the dissertation process. For this I am very thankful! My committee members, Dr. Magliaro, Dr. Tate, and Dr. Cash have also guided and supported me through the process. Thank you for giving of your time and talents to help me succeed.

God has placed people in my life who have been a source of strength to me as they have prayed for me and helped to build on the talents and abilities He has given me. I am grateful for my parents, Jack and Barb Allan, who are always praying for me and who have always taken a genuine interest in my educational pursuits. I am grateful for my mother-in-law, Lois Keener, for her unwavering interest in my journey and for her prayers. I am also grateful for my fellow cohort members from Virginia Tech, my coworkers in each of the school divisions that I have been employed, and for my current colleagues at the Virginia Department of Education who have cheered me on and provided support along the way. I have been truly blessed!

***\*The work conducted by the researcher for this study, including the findings, implications for practice, and the future research recommendations, reflect solely the work and thoughts of the researcher and not that of his current employer, the Virginia Department of Education.***

## Table of Contents

<b>CHAPTER I THE PROBLEM.....</b>	<b>1</b>
PURPOSE OF STUDY .....	2
<i>Virginia's Foundation Blocks for Early Learning.....</i>	3
RESEARCH QUESTIONS .....	4
LIMITATIONS.....	6
Definitions.....	6
SIGNIFICANCE OF STUDY .....	7
OVERVIEW .....	8
<b>CHAPTER II REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE.....</b>	<b>9</b>
<i>Historical Perspectives .....</i>	9
History of Kindergarten .....	9
History of School Readiness .....	10
Domains of School Readiness .....	12
Virginia Definitions of School Readiness.....	15
Readiness as Defined by the Nations' Teachers and Parents .....	16
<i>Related Research .....</i>	23
Elementary Principals and Kindergarten School Readiness .....	25
<i>Personal and Social Skills Research.....</i>	27
Self-Concept .....	27
Self-Control.....	29
Approaches to Learning.....	31
Interactions with Others.....	33
Social Problem-Solving Skills .....	34
SUMMARY .....	35
<b>CHAPTER III METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>38</b>
RESEARCH QUESTIONS .....	38
RESEARCH DESIGN .....	39
<i>Role of Researcher.....</i>	40
<i>Setting Selection.....</i>	41
<i>Participants Selection .....</i>	42
<i>Informed Consent and Permission Procedures .....</i>	42
<i>Gaining Access and Entry.....</i>	44
DATA COLLECTION .....	44
<i>Interviewing .....</i>	44
<i>Field Notes.....</i>	46
<i>Documents.....</i>	47
DATA ANALYSIS .....	48
SUMMARY .....	50
<b>CHAPTER IV RESEARCH FINDINGS.....</b>	<b>52</b>
CODING OF THE DATA.....	52
PARTICIPANTS.....	53
<i>Ms. Magenta .....</i>	53

<i>Ms. Violet</i> .....	58
<i>Ms. Pink</i> .....	62
<i>Ms. Lavender</i> .....	66
<i>Ms. Red</i> .....	70
<i>Ms. Orange</i> .....	75
<i>Ms. Blue</i> .....	79
<i>Ms. Green</i> .....	83
DOCUMENT REVIEW .....	87
<i>Division Level Documents</i> .....	88
<i>School Level Documents</i> .....	89
<i>Classroom Level Documents</i> .....	89
CONCEPTS REPORTED BY RESEARCH QUESTION.....	90
<i>Research Question #1: What are elementary principals' and kindergarten teachers' school readiness beliefs and expectations for students in the domain of personal and social skills?</i> .....	91
<i>Research Question #2: How well aligned are principals' and kindergarten teachers' school readiness beliefs and expectations for personal and social skills with Virginia's Foundation Blocks for Early Learning?</i> .....	91
Self-Concept .....	91
Self-Control.....	95
Approaches to Learning.....	95
Interaction with Others .....	96
Social Problem-Solving .....	97
Skills Not Identified by Foundation Blocks.....	98
<i>Research Question #3: What do kindergarten teachers report they are doing to guide and instruct students who enter kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills to be successful?</i> .....	101
Being Sensitive to the Child's Needs.....	102
Engaging the Students in Learning .....	103
Providing Consistency in Classroom Routines and Classroom Management.....	104
Individualizing Instruction.....	105
Seeking Assistance from Parents .....	105
<i>Research Question #4: What administrative support systems are available to teachers for assisting them as they guide and instruct students who enter kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills?</i> .....	106
Available and Accessible Administrators .....	106
Principal Provides Guidance and Direction.....	107
Principal Serves as a Bridge Between the Home and the School .....	108
Guidance Counselor Provides Support and Assistance .....	108
Principal Provides School wide Behavior Expectations .....	109
UNANTICIPATED FINDINGS .....	109
Professional Development for Teaching Personal and Social Skills .....	110
Disruption of Learning Environment by Certain Students without Personal and Social Skills .....	112
Foundation Blocks and Kindergarten Standards of Learning are Not Used as Benchmarks .....	112

Preschool Experiences Impact Students' Personal and Social Skill Development .....	113
Focus of Kindergarten has Changed from Social to Academic .....	113
Disadvantaged Students are More At-Risk .....	114
Communication with Parents Regarding Personal and Social Skills .....	114
SUMMARY OF RESEARCH FINDINGS .....	114
SUMMARY .....	120
<b>CHAPTER V DISCUSSION, FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH.....</b>	<b>121</b>
DISCUSSION AND FINDINGS.....	121
<i>Research Question #1: What are elementary principals' and kindergarten teachers' school readiness beliefs and expectations for students in the domain of personal and social skills?</i> .....	122
<i>Research Question #2: How well aligned are principals' and kindergarten teachers' school readiness beliefs and expectations for personal and social skills with Virginia's Foundation Blocks for Early Learning?</i> .....	122
Findings: Self-Concept .....	122
Finding #1. ....	122
Finding #2. ....	122
Findings: Self-Control .....	123
Finding #3 .....	123
Finding #4 .....	123
Findings: Approaches to Learning.....	124
Finding #5. ....	124
Finding #6. ....	124
Finding #7 .....	125
Findings: Interaction with Others .....	125
Finding #8 .....	125
Finding #9 .....	126
Finding # 10 .....	126
Findings: Social Problem-Solving .....	126
Finding #11 .....	126
Finding #12. ....	127
Finding #13 .....	128
Findings: Additions to Personal and Social Development Foundation Blocks .....	128
Finding #14 .....	128
Finding #15 .....	129
Finding #16. ....	129
<i>Research Question #3: What do kindergarten teachers report they are doing to guide and instruct students who enter kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills to be successful?</i> .....	130
Findings: Teacher Support Systems .....	130
Finding #17 .....	130
Finding #18 .....	131
Finding #19 .....	132
Finding #20 .....	132
Finding #21 .....	133

<i>Research Question #4: What administrative support systems are available to teachers for assisting them as they guide and instruct students who enter kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills?</i> .....	134
Findings: Administrative Supports .....	134
Finding #22 .....	134
Finding #23 .....	134
Finding #24 .....	135
Finding #25 .....	136
Finding #26 .....	136
UNANTICIPATED FINDINGS .....	137
Finding # 27 .....	137
Finding #28 .....	138
Finding #29 .....	138
Finding #30 .....	139
Finding #31 .....	139
Finding #32 .....	140
Finding #33 .....	140
SUMMARY OF FINDINGS .....	141
IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE .....	142
Implications for Practice: Self-Concept.....	142
Implications for Practice: Self-Control .....	143
Implications for Practice: Approaches to Learning .....	143
Implications for Practice: Interaction with Others.....	144
Implications for Practice: Social Problem-Solving.....	145
Implications for Practice: Additions to Personal and Social Development Foundation Blocks .....	146
Implications for Practice: Teacher Supports.....	148
Implications for Practice: Administrative Supports.....	149
Implications for Practice: Unanticipated Findings .....	150
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH .....	151
CONCLUDING STATEMENTS .....	153
EPILOGUE.....	153
<b>REFERENCES .....</b>	<b>155</b>
<b>APPENDIX A PROPOSED INFORMED CONSENT FORM.....</b>	<b>160</b>
<b>APPENDIX B INTERVIEW QUESTIONS .....</b>	<b>163</b>
<b>APPENDIX C INTERVIEW QUESTIONS CORRESPONDING WITH RESEARCH QUESTIONS .....</b>	<b>166</b>
<b>APPENDIX D INTERVIEW PROTOCOL .....</b>	<b>169</b>
<b>APPENDIX E OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS COLLECTED AND ANALYZED.....</b>	<b>170</b>
<b>APPENDIX F IRB APPROVAL LETTER.....</b>	<b>171</b>

## List of Tables

<b>Table</b>	<b>Page</b>
Table 1 National Goals Panel: Goal 1 and Objectives.....	12
Table 2 School Readiness Indicators .....	15
Table 3 Results and Findings of ECLS-K for Social and Personal Skills of Kindergarten Students .....	21
Table 4 Virginia’s Foundation Blocks for Early Learning: Self-Concept.....	28
Table 5 Virginia’s Foundation Blocks for Early Learning: Self-Control .....	29
Table 6 Virginia’s Foundation Blocks for Early Learning: Approaches to Learning .....	32
Table 7 Virginia’s Foundation Blocks for Early Learning: Interaction with Others.....	33
Table 8 Virginia’s Foundation Blocks for Early Learning: Social Problem-Solving.....	35



## List of Figures

<b>Figures</b>	<b>Page</b>
<i>Figure 1.</i> Domains of school readiness (Kagan, Moore, & Bredekamp, 1995). .....	14
<i>Figure 2.</i> Comparison of kindergarten teacher school readiness surveys. ....	23
<i>Figure 3.</i> Experience levels of participants. ....	43
<i>Figure 4.</i> Five components of a qualitative interview (Lichtman, 2006). ....	46
<i>Figure 5.</i> Three C's of analysis: Codes to categories to concepts (Lichtman, 2006). ....	49
<i>Figure 6.</i> Types of documents reviewed by the researcher. ....	88
<i>Figure 7.</i> Participants' beliefs and expectations for personal and social skills aligned to foundation blocks. ....	92
<i>Figure 8.</i> Participants' beliefs and expectations for student anger management skills. ....	99
<i>Figure 9.</i> Participants' beliefs and expectations for literacy/oral language. ....	100
<i>Figure 10.</i> Strategies participants reported using to develop personal and social skills. ....	102
<i>Figure 11.</i> Administrative supports available for teachers as reported by participants. ....	107
<i>Figure 12.</i> Participants' responses for concepts that emerged as unanticipated findings. ....	111
<i>Figure 13.</i> Concepts for participants' beliefs and expectations for student's personal/social skills. .....	116
<i>Figure 14.</i> Concepts for teacher practices and administrative supports. ....	118
<i>Figure 15.</i> Concepts that emerged and are unanticipated findings. ....	119
<i>Figure 16.</i> Revised foundation blocks originally based on Virginia Department of Education (2007b). ....	147

## CHAPTER I

### THE PROBLEM

The National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) reports that an achievement gap among various subgroups of students continues to exist in the United States as indicated by test results from the NAEP 2002 reading assessment (Grigg, Daane, Ying, & Campbell, 2002). According to a *Phi Delta Kappa Gallup Poll* on the *Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools*, 90 percent of Americans believe it is important to close the achievement gap (Rose & Gallup, 2006). This may cause educators to examine the K-12 public school system to identify and correct weaknesses in instructional practices. Teachers look to their colleagues who taught the preceding grade level and ask why their students were not better prepared for the rigorous curriculum of the present grade level. Eventually, the indictment of poor student preparation reaches down to the kindergarten level. Could it be that kindergarten teachers did not provide students with a strong foundation in the necessary skills needed to succeed in the K-12 public school system? The conclusion may be drawn by some that the achievement gap began in kindergarten and that it has never narrowed over the students' school careers. Kindergarten teachers could respond in their defense that most of the students falling behind did not come to school with the skills necessary to be successful in kindergarten. In fact, kindergarten teachers from across the country were surveyed regarding the school readiness skills of their students and teachers responded that only 52 percent of their students experienced a successful entry into kindergarten, with 32 percent of their students having a moderately successful entry into kindergarten, and 16 percent having significant problems with kindergarten (Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, & Cox, 2000). It is possible that the achievement gap has its roots in the first days of a student's entrance into the public school system?

Students entering kindergarten without adequate personal and social skills may be at risk for adjusting to the classroom environment and therefore, may fall behind in the foundational skills taught in kindergarten. A review of the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study, Kindergarten Class of 1998-1999 (ECLS-K) data, indicates that about 31 percent of all kindergartners come to school without the necessary personal and social skills needed for kindergarten (Wertheimer, Croan, Moore, & Hair, 2003). Recently researchers have begun to study the importance of personal and social skills and the impact that students' social behaviors, relationships with peers, and relationships with teachers have on their school adjustment (Ladd, Herald, & Kochel, 2006).

The individuals who play a major role in the lives of students entering kindergarten (i.e., parents, pre-K teachers, kindergarten teachers, elementary principals) agree that a focus on readiness skills in the domains of literacy and numeracy distracts from the importance of the students' personal and social skill development. Kindergarten students' well-being and adjustment to kindergarten is just as important as academic readiness (Zill & West, 2001). Laparo and Pianta (2000) report that personal and social skills are important indicators of school adjustment for kindergartners and in some discussions are equal to those indicators in the cognitive domain. Kindergarten students, who begin kindergarten successfully, tend to maintain this success as they progress through school (Boethel, 2004). It is imperative that kindergarten students have the necessary social and personal skills to be successful as they enter kindergarten and progress through schooling in the K-12 school system.

### Purpose of Study

In order to prevent school failure at an early age, and to narrow the achievement gap, more needs to be learned regarding school readiness and kindergarten students' social and personal skills. This qualitative study has four primary purposes 1) to gain an understanding of the value and importance elementary principals and kindergarten teachers place on kindergarten students' personal and social school readiness skills; 2) to gain an understanding of how the principals' and teachers' values regarding personal and social skills align to the Foundation Blocks for Early Learning; 3) to explore how kindergarten teachers guide and instruct students who enter kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills needed for success; and 4) to explore what administrative support systems are available to teachers for assisting them as they guide and instruct students who enter kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills. The Foundation Blocks for Early Learning are Virginia's comprehensive standards for what four-year-olds should know and be able to do by the time they enter kindergarten. Although the Foundation Blocks include cognitive domains and personal and social domains for school readiness, this study will focus on the personal and social domain. The five "Blocks" that are the sub-headings under the personal and social domains include (a) self-concept; (b) self-control; (c) approaches to learning; (d) interaction with others; and (e) social problem-solving. This study will use the Blocks as the framework for defining the personal and social skills that are needed for students entering kindergarten classrooms in Virginia (Virginia Department of Education, 2007b).

*Virginia's Foundation Blocks for Early Learning*

In 2001, the Virginia Department of Education developed a guidance document for use by early childhood educators. This document provided early childhood educators with guidelines for literacy and mathematics that included indicators for success for entering kindergarten. The guidelines were developed by a committee of Department of Education specialists, literacy and mathematics professors, and public and private school teachers and administrators. The guidelines were written using scientifically-based research (Virginia Department of Education, 2007a). Scientifically-based research must employ systematic methods taken from observation or experiment, must involve rigorous data analyses, must rely on measurements that provide valid data, and must be accepted and reviewed by experts in the field of study (National Institute for Literacy, 2005).

During the 2004 session of the Virginia General Assembly, language was added to the Appropriation Act for the At-Risk Four-Year-Old Program (The Virginia Preschool Initiative) requiring the Department of Education, in cooperation with the Council on Child Day Care and Early Childhood Programs to establish academic standards that are in accordance with the appropriate preparation for students to be ready to successfully enter kindergarten. The Department of Education convened a committee of Department of Education specialists, preschool teachers, and administrators to review and revise Virginia's Foundation Blocks for Early Learning: Guidelines for Literacy and Mathematics. The result of their work was the document Virginia's Foundation Blocks for Early Learning: Standards for Literacy and Mathematics (Virginia Department of Education, 2007a).

During the spring and summer of 2005, the Department of Education convened a committee of department specialists, preschool teachers, and administrators to develop preschool standards for four-year-olds in the areas of science, and history and social science. The result of their work was the document Virginia's Foundation Blocks for Early Learning: Standards for Science, and History and Social Science.

During the summer and fall of 2006, the Department of Education developed preschool standards for four-year-olds in the areas of physical and motor and personal and social development. They were reviewed by preschool teachers, administrators, and the team members for the state's Early Childhood Grant from the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE). The result of their work is the addition of the Virginia's Foundation Blocks for Early

Learning: Standards for Physical and Motor and Personal and Social Development (Virginia Department of Education, 2007a).

The Foundation Blocks for Early Learning provide early childhood educators throughout the state of Virginia with a common vocabulary and a set of common standards for preschool teachers as they assist students in gaining the necessary skills for entering kindergarten (Virginia Department of Education, 2007a). All of the cognitive Foundation Blocks for Early Learning are aligned to Virginia's Kindergarten Standards of Learning (SOL). The kindergarten SOL does not include specific standards for social and personal skills. However, one of the kindergartens History and Social Science SOL does address several of the personal and social skills from the Foundation Blocks for Early Learning. SOL K.8 which is titled "Civics" states that students will demonstrate being a good citizen involves (a) taking turns and sharing; (b) taking responsibility for certain classroom chores; (c) taking care of personal belongings and respecting what belongs to others; (d) following rules and understanding the consequences of breaking the rules; and (e) practicing honesty, self-control and kindness to others. Standards encompassing all of the personal and social skills have not been written beyond the standards established for four-year-olds in the Foundation Blocks for Early Learning.

For the purpose of this research study, and in order to answer the research questions of the study, the researcher will use the "Blocks" and indicators outlined in Virginia's Foundation Blocks for Early Learning: Personal and Social Development. The "Blocks" include the five areas of personal and social development: (a) self-concept; (b) self-control; (c) approaches to learning; (d) interactions with others; and (e) social problem-solving. The indicators are the specific skills listed under each of the "Blocks" and include skills such as following rules and routines and seeking and accepting help when needed. It is important to note that the term "Social and Emotional" is used throughout the research literature, however; the Foundation Blocks for Early Learning uses the term "personal" rather than "emotional" and the name of the entire domain becomes "Personal and Social" rather than "Social and Emotional". The two titles can be used for the same domain of development. For consistency and clarity "Personal and Social" will be used throughout the rest of this study.

### Research Questions

Specifically, this study explores the following primary questions:

1. What are elementary principals' and kindergarten teachers' school readiness beliefs and expectations for students in the domain of personal and social skills?
2. How well aligned are principals' and kindergarten teachers' school readiness beliefs and expectations for personal and social skills with Virginia's Foundation Blocks for Early Learning?
3. What do kindergarten teachers report they are doing to guide and instruct students who enter kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills to be successful?
4. What administrative support systems are available to teachers for assisting them as they guide and instruct students who enter kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills?

A phenomenological approach is used to explore the phenomenon of students entering kindergarten without the necessary social and personal skills that they need to be successful in kindergarten and how this phenomenon impacts the school setting including the administrative support systems and classroom instructional practices. This phenomenon can best be explored through the researcher's interactions with elementary principals and kindergarten teachers who experience this phenomenon on an ongoing basis. Official documents relating to the phenomenon being studied were collected and analyzed. Official documents provided for triangulation of the data which improved confidence in the reported findings of the study (Hatch, 2002).

The setting for this study is two school divisions located in Virginia. Three kindergarten teachers and their principal in each of the divisions served as participants in the study. Teacher participants volunteered for the study and taught kindergarten in Virginia for at least three years. Teachers in Virginia are eligible for tenure after three successful years of teaching experience. Teacher participants needed to have had the opportunity to experience the phenomenon being studied. Principal participants served as principals of their respective schools for at least two years. This gave the principal time to establish his or her leadership style and practices within the school and to develop professional relationships with the teacher participants.

Data was gathered through in-depth interviews conducted with the eight participants through the detailed field notes provided by the researcher, and through the official documents collected. Data was analyzed using the "coding to categorizing to concepts" approach

recommended by Lichtman (2006). Once this process was completed the data was used to report the meaning of the lived experiences of the kindergarten teachers and elementary principals who served as study participants.

### Limitations

Limitations of this study include the bias of the researcher and the lack of the ability to generalize the findings of the study to a population. It is the researcher's responsibility to make known that his professional responsibilities have the potential to bias the researcher's role in the study. The researcher is aware of possible bias due to his current professional role and responsibilities. The researcher is committed to putting his preconceived ideas about school readiness, social and personal skills, and kindergarten teacher's classroom practices aside. The researcher is committed to using terminology and language during interviews with participants that is familiar to school-level educators and will not contain jargon from state-level policies or practices. This is important so that the participants' responses are not negatively impacted by the complexity of the language used in the question. The researcher is also committed to analyzing the data gathered from the study to illuminate the specific experiences of the kindergarten teachers studied. Even though findings from this study may not be generalized to another population, the rich description of the kindergarten teachers' experiences will add to the body of literature on school readiness, particularly in the personal and social domain of readiness.

### *Definitions*

Kindergarten – The traditional year of school primarily for five-year-olds prior to first grade (Heaviside & Farris, 1993)

Pre-K – Primarily a program for four-year-olds prior to kindergarten.

School Readiness – The skills and qualities that a student possesses when entering kindergarten. This includes a combination of skills and qualities from the five domains of school readiness as defined by the National Educational Goals Panel (Coppie, 1997): (a) health and physical development; (b) personal and social development; (c) approaches to learning; (d) language development; and (e) cognitive and general knowledge.

Personal and Social Domain of School Readiness – The personal, social, and behavioral competencies of young children (Virginia Department of Education, 2007b).

Self-Concept – A combination of a child’s self-confidence and self-reflection (Virginia Department of Education, 2007b).

Self-Control – A combination of a child’s self-direction and responsibility (Virginia Department of Education, 2007b).

Approaches to Learning – A child’s eagerness and persistence as a learner (Virginia Department of Education, 2007b).

Interaction with Others – The manner in which a child interacts with other children and familiar adults (Virginia Department of Education, 2007b).

Social Problem-Solving – The manner in which a child resolves conflicts (Virginia Department of Education, 2007b).

### Significance of Study

Studies have found that kindergarten teachers place a substantial emphasis on the need for students to enter kindergarten with the adequate personal and social skills needed to be successful in kindergarten (Barnidege, Carlson, Cooke, Kuklinski, Larson, Latchaw, O’Sullivan, Sweson-Klatt, & Wallace, 2005; Heaviside & Farris, 1993; Pitrkowski, Botsko, & Matthews, 2000; Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, & Cox, 2000; Wesley & Buysee, 2003). The results of the ECLS-K study indicate that approximately 31 percent of all kindergartners come to school without the necessary personal and social skills needed for kindergarten (Wertheimer, et al., 2003). The research clearly shows that the lack of appropriate personal and social skills presents an additional challenge for kindergarten students and their teachers. Surprisingly, there is little data available reporting what current practices are being implemented by kindergarten teachers to remediate for students’ lack of the necessary personal and social skills. The results of this study contribute to the body of research on school readiness in the personal and social domain. Results provide data on current classroom practices that are, or are not, being implemented to solve the problem of students’ social and personal skill deficits. Results of this study will assist division level leaders, elementary principals and kindergarten teachers in guiding and shaping classroom practices designed to enhance and improve students’ personal and social skills. Results from the study provide insight into the current resources being used by kindergarten teachers to provide personal and social skill instruction and how teachers’ instructional practices in this domain are being guided and directed by administrators. Division level leaders and school level leaders are provided with information about instructional practices for improving



kindergarten students' personal and social skills. Results of the study will provide insights and information for Virginia Department of Education officials if the Foundation Blocks for Early Learning are revised in the future.

In Virginia, the established Foundation Blocks for Early Learning are the state standards which set the expectations for the personal and social skills that should be possessed by students as they enter kindergarten (Virginia Department of Education, 2007b). Results of this study explore how well aligned kindergarten teachers' school readiness expectations for personal and social skills are to the Virginia's Foundation Blocks for Early Learning. Data gathered from this portion of the study will assist division leaders and elementary principals in determining how well kindergarten teachers have been informed about the Foundation Blocks for Early Learning. Results may assist Virginia Department of Education officials as they provide technical assistance to pre-k and kindergarten teachers in Virginia.

### Overview

This qualitative study has four primary purposes 1) to gain an understanding of the value and importance elementary principals and kindergarten teachers place on kindergarten students' personal and social school readiness skills, 2) to gain an understanding of how the principals' and teachers' values regarding personal and social skills align to the Foundation Blocks for Early Learning, 3) to explore how kindergarten teachers guide and instruct students who enter kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills needed for success, and 4) to explore what administrative support systems are available to teachers for assisting them as they guide and instruct students who enter kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills.

The study is organized into five chapters. Chapter one provides an explanation of the problem, the purpose for the study, the research questions, the limitations, definitions, and the significance of the study. Chapter two provides a historical overview of kindergarten and school readiness followed by a review of the literature pertaining to the personal and social domain of school readiness. Chapter three provides an outline of the phenomenological research design that was used for the study including data collection procedures and data analysis procedures. Chapter four presents the results of the data collected by the researcher. Chapter five provides a summary and discussion of the research findings, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this literature review is to provide an analysis of the research on school readiness as it pertains to the specific areas of personal and social development needed by children entering kindergarten. The review begins by providing a brief historical perspective on the establishment of kindergarten programs in the United States, followed by an overview of the rise of the concept of school readiness in the United States. The review brings clarity to what defines kindergarten school readiness in general terms and specifically in the domain of personal and social development for students. An in-depth review of two landmark studies on school readiness are included in addition to examining the results of smaller studies related to school readiness.

Specific personal and social skills that are attributed to school readiness are discussed along with the perceptions of those who interact most frequently with kindergarten students: kindergarten teachers. The importance of personal and social school readiness skills are related to the needs of not only the kindergarten students, but also to the needs of kindergarten teachers.

Personal and social skills as outlined in the Foundation Blocks of Early Learning (a) self-concept; (b) self-control; (c) approaches to learning; (d) interactions with others; and (e) social problem-solving will be used as a framework for additional review of the literature.

#### *Historical Perspectives*

##### *History of Kindergarten*

In 1840, Friedrich Froebel coined the new word kindergarten or child garden to describe the institution in Germany established for the purpose of educating and caring for the little children (Shapiro, 1983). Often referred to as the “Father of Kindergarten”, Froebel believed that children begin to learn as soon as they began to interact with the world around them (Richie-Sharp, 2002). He viewed child’s play as a form of learning and advocated that a highly trained kindergarten teacher or “kindergartner” could assist young children in drawing analogies between objects found in the world and abstract concepts such as self or color.

Kindergarten was introduced in the United States by Froebel’s followers between 1848 and 1872 (Shapiro, 1983). Training institutes for kindergarten teachers were established,

however; kindergarten programs remained mostly in philanthropic organizations such as missions and churches (Braun & Edwards, 1972). Between 1890 and 1910, kindergarten was gaining the interest of public-school systems (Shapiro, 1983). Kindergarten was viewed as a possible solution for the difficulties that faced many public school systems, including educating children from poverty. Public-school kindergarten classrooms were first adopted in urban locations such as Chicago, Philadelphia, and Boston. By 1913, thirty-three states provided statutory or constitutional amendments that allowed for the adoption of public-school kindergartens. By 1915, twelve percent of the kindergarten-age population received a free kindergarten education through the public-school system (Shapiro, 1983).

Kindergarten was thrust into the spotlight again in the late 1950s when sputnik was launched by the Russians. Critics of kindergarten used this opportunity to lament that kindergarten instruction was too permissive and no longer intellectually stimulating for students (Shapiro, 1983). During the 1960s, school reform efforts brought about several educational experiments such as the free school and open school movements and ushered in the revival of Montessorisum in many kindergarten programs (Shapiro, 1983). Montessori programs emphasize that education is not something the teacher does, but it is a natural process that occurs when children act on their environment and are involved in activities that inspire learning (Seldon, 2007).

### *History of School Readiness*

During the 1920s, the term readiness began to surface in educational discussions and writings. As a result of the high failure rate of first graders, educators began to look for methods to improve children's success during the early years of schooling. At this point in time, readiness referred to a child's readiness for reading, although; research was also beginning on the concept of arithmetic readiness (May & Campbell, 1981). Readiness discussions centered on experiences that prepared children for reading such as an increased vocabulary, correct pronunciation of words, and a desire to read.

By the 1980s, criticism of the nation's public schools was on the rise. The National Governor's Association responded to this criticism by establishing seven task forces to examine the status of public education and to make recommendations for improvements (Ravitch & Vinovskis, 1995). One of these task force committees was charged with the task of creating recommendations for school readiness.

The Task Force on Readiness recommended that (a) states must develop initiatives to help at-risk preschool children come ready for school, (b) provide all parents of preschool children with information on successful parenting practices, (c) stress continued improvement of developmental and educational programs in existing day care centers for preschooler children through accreditation, teacher credentialing, and staff development; and (d) develop state and local structures through which various public and private agencies can work together to provide appropriate programs for young children and new parents (Ravitch & Vinovskis, 1995, p. 251-252).

The Task Force also developed various indicators for school readiness that connected the health and cognitive concerns of young children. Indicators in the cognitive area included providing Head Start programs to all eligible children, providing quality preschool programs to every at-risk three- and four-year old, and screening three- and four-year olds for possible learning disabilities. The final indicator under the cognitive domain stated that the number of kindergartners who are ready to do school work when they enter school will increase. This indicator would be assessed once a national assessment tool on school readiness was developed (Ravitch & Vinovskis, 1995).

George H. W. Bush was elected President in 1988 and promised to be a President interested in educational issues. He convened a meeting of the nation's governors in September of 1989 for the purpose of finding ways to enhance America's educational system. The topic of Early Childhood education was on the agenda under the heading "The Learning Environment" (Ravitch & Vinovskis, 1995). As a result of this meeting of the nation's governors, President Bush announced the six national goals in his State of the Union address on January 31, 1990. As displayed in Table I, the first of these national goals stated that by the year 2000 all children in America will start school ready to learn (Ravitch & Vinovskis, 1995).

The challenge of measuring school readiness and progress towards meeting the first national goal was reported in the National Education Goals Panel first annual report. Goal number one was the only goal, of the six goals, that had no results reported. There was no direct way to measure the goal of having all children come to school ready to learn (Ravitch & Vinovskis, 1995). The field of school readiness was emerging as a challenging field for researchers, policy makers, and educators. Coming to an agreement on a specific definition for

school readiness and finding a means for measuring school readiness would continue to present a challenge.

Table 1

*National Goals Panel: Goal 1 and Objectives*

Goal	Objectives
By the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn.	<p>1) All children will have access to high-quality and developmentally appropriate preschool programs that help prepare children for school.</p> <p>2) Every parent in the United States will be a child's first teacher and devote time each day to helping such parent's preschool child learn, and parents will have access to the training and support parents need.</p> <p>3) Children will receive the nutrition, physical activity experiences, and health care needed to arrive at school with healthy minds and bodies, and to maintain the mental alertness necessary to be prepared to learn, and the number of low-birth weight babies will be significantly reduced through enhanced prenatal health systems.</p>

*Note.* From Getting a Good Start, The National Goals Panel (1997) p. 4.

*Domains of School Readiness*

If students are to enter kindergarten ready to learn it is important for parents, early childhood providers, educators, and policy makers to have a common understanding of school readiness. There are few states that have a formal, statewide definition of school readiness (Saluja et al., 2000). The most common indicator of school readiness across all states is the

child's age. Most states determine that a child is ready for kindergarten when the child turns 5 by the fall of their kindergarten year (Saluja et al., p.2).

The need to define school readiness is gaining attention and interest by the educational and research community. Improving the school readiness of students entering kindergarten is often viewed as one of the solutions for closing the achievement gap between sub groups of students. Scientific research conducted in the field of early childhood education, supports the fact that the early years of a child's life are a time of rapid growth and development (Ramey & Ramey, 2004). Despite the increased interest and attention on the topic of school readiness, there are still many different viewpoints as to what being ready for the kindergarten year of schooling really entails. Considering that kindergarten students who begin kindergarten successfully tend to maintain this success as they progress through school, it is imperative that the definition of school readiness be more specifically defined (Boethel, 2004). The topic of school readiness has been debated over the past few decades resulting in a framework for school readiness that has been built around five domains of development.

The National Education Goals panel gathered an interdisciplinary group of experts in the field of early childhood education for the purpose of creating a broad definition of school readiness (Kagan et al., 1995). These experts developed a definition of school readiness that is supported by five domains or pillars of readiness that together form the basis of children's readiness for school. These five domains of school readiness have become widely accepted in the educational community and have been endorsed by the National Institute for Early Education Research (Bodrova et al., 2004), the National Association for the Education of Young Children (2004), and the National School Readiness Indicators Initiative (Rhode Island Kids Count, 2005). The five domains are outlined in Figure 1.

In order to gain a complete understanding of children's school readiness skills, all five domains of readiness need to be considered. A rubric for determining if a child is ready for school, based on the five domains, has not been established (Coppie, 1997). Research has shown that many kindergartners are falling behind in one or more of the domains of school readiness (Wertheimer et al., 2003).

<b>Health and Physical Development</b>	<b>Social and Emotional Development</b>	<b>Approaches Toward Learning</b>	<b>Language Development</b>	<b>Cognitive and General Knowledge</b>
<b>Physical Development</b> Overall rate of growth Level of physical fitness Body physiology  <b>Physical Abilities</b> Gross motor skills Fine motor skills Oral motor skills Sensimotor skills Functional performance  <b>Background/Contextual Factors</b> Perinatal context Care giving environment Health care utilization	<b>Social Development</b> Respecting the rights of others Relating to peer Willingness to give and receive support  <b>Emotional Development</b> Positive self-concept Express feelings appropriately Sensitivity to feelings of others Self-efficacy	<b>Predispositions</b> Gender Temperament Cultural patterns and values  <b>Learning Styles</b> Openness to and curiosity about new tasks Initiative, task persistence, and attentiveness Reflection and interpretation Imagination and invention Cognitive styles	<b>Verbal Language</b> Listening Speaking Social uses of language Vocabulary and meaning Questioning Creative use of language  <b>Emerging Literacy</b> Literature awareness Print awareness Story sense Writing process	<b>Physical Knowledge</b> Knowledge of objectives in external reality  <b>Logico-mathematical knowledge</b> Relationships between objects, events, or people  <b>Socio-conventional knowledge</b> Agreed-upon conventions of society and the school- learned knowledge

*Figure 1.* Domains of school readiness (Kagan, Moore, & Bredekamp, 1995).

To better measure and track school readiness at the state level, the National School Readiness Indicators Initiative (Rhode Island Kids Count, 2005) developed emerging indicators for school readiness. The indicators under the category “Ready Children” reflect the work of the National Educational Goals Panel. The emerging indicators will be useful for policy makers and

state leaders in early childhood education to check the status of school readiness in the 17 states, including Virginia, that are a part of the National School Readiness Indicators Initiative. The “Ready Children” indicators are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

*School Readiness Indicators*

Domain of School Readiness	State Indicator
Physical Well-Being and Motor Development	Percent of children with age-appropriate fine motor skills
Social and Emotional Development	Percent of children who often or very often exhibit positive social behaviors when interacting with their peers
Approaches to Learning	Percent of kindergarten students with moderate to serious difficulties following directions
Language Development	Percent of children almost always recognizing the relationships between letters and sounds at kindergarten entry
Cognition and General Knowledge	Percent of children recognizing basic shapes at kindergarten entry

*Note.* From Rhode Island Kids Count: The National School Readiness Indicators Initiative, p. 9

*Virginia’s Definition of School Readiness*

On April 24, 2008, the Virginia Board of Education adopted Virginia’s definition of school readiness (Virginia Department of Education, 2008). The definition was developed by a School Readiness Task force convened by the Secretary of Education. Task force members had a vested interest in preschool education and represented a wide variety of stakeholders from across the state (Virginia Department of Education, 2008). Virginia’s definition of school readiness describes the capabilities of children who are ready for kindergarten, families and communities who support ready children, and schools that are ready to receive and welcome all children to kindergarten. Components of the definition that pertain directly to kindergarten students’



personal and social development include the obtainment of the following skills (a) communicate effectively with adults and children by effectively conveying information, desires, and needs, (b) use simple language and grammar to solve problems and to negotiate social interactions with adults and peers, (c) exhibit personal and social skills and a sense of self-worth by feeling secure and valued in their relationships, (d) express their emotions and take pride in their accomplishments, (e) recognize the consequences of their actions, (e) show self-control; and (f) cooperate with others using nonphysical ways to resolve conflicts (Virginia Department of Education, 2008).

### *Readiness as Defined by the Nations' Teachers and Parents*

Two paramount studies that are relevant and useful for the purposes of this study have been conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics on behalf of the United States Department of Education. The first study done by Heaviside and Farris (1993), *Public School Kindergarten Teachers' Views on Children's Readiness*, focuses on the views of school readiness from the perspective of the nation's kindergarten teachers. The second study was conducted by Denton et al. (2000), *America's Kindergartners*, and provides an overview of students' skills as they enter kindergarten along with demographic data for these students.

In the spring of 1993, the National Education Goals Panel requested that a survey of public school kindergarten teachers be completed to gain insights into teachers' professional judgments regarding school readiness. Heaviside and Farris (1993) conducted the survey within the study, *Public School Kindergarten Teachers' Views on Children's Readiness for School*. The panel planned to use the survey results to assist in creating a definition of school readiness.

A two-stage sampling process was used to select teachers for the survey. The first stage resulted in a list of 47,000 eligible public schools after special education schools, alternative schools, and schools without kindergarten programs were excluded. The sample was then stratified by school size, region, metropolitan status, economically disadvantaged status, and percentage of minority students in attendance. Eight-hundred-sixty schools were contacted to participate in the study. Within the selected schools, 1,416 teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire and follow-up telephone interviews were conducted with teachers who did not return a questionnaire. The questionnaire response rate was 92 percent (Heaviside & Farris, 1993).

The majority of public school kindergarten teachers (88 percent) related school readiness to children's growth and maturation and felt that school readiness skills should not be rushed. Heaviside and Farris (1993) also reported that only 27 percent of public school kindergarten teachers felt that all of their students would accomplish the goals and objectives of kindergarten and be ready to be promoted to first grade.

Teachers were presented with a list of 15 qualities that may be important for a child to have when entering kindergarten. Qualities on the list included cognitive skills such as knowing the letters of the alphabet and social and personal skills such as sitting still and paying attention along with general qualities such as being healthy and well-nourished. First, teachers ranked the list in order of importance and then they selected the three most important skills for school readiness. The three most important skills selected were for kindergarten students to (a) be healthy, rested, and well nourished; (b) be able communicate needs, wants, and thoughts verbally; and (c) be enthusiastic and curious in approaching new activities (Heaviside and Farris, 1993). None of the top three skills selected were in the cognitive domain of school readiness. The other skills that more than half of the teachers agreed were significantly important for school readiness fell within the personal and social domain: (a) the ability to follow directions; (b) not being disruptive in class, (c) being sensitive to other children's feelings; and (c) the ability to take turns and share. Heaviside and Farris (1993) emphasize that America's kindergarten teachers place a greater importance on the personal and social domains of learning than on the cognitive domains of learning as they relate to school readiness.

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) study *Early Childhood Longitudinal Study - Kindergarten Class of 1998-99* (ECLS-K) took place from September to December 1998. Denton et al. (2000) used the data from this study to compile the report, *America's Kindergartners*. Twenty-two thousand kindergartners along with their parents and their teachers were included in the study. Kindergarten students included in the study attended 1,000 different kindergarten programs in both public and private settings. Participants were selected using a dual-frame, multistage sampling design. One hundred primary sampling units were selected from a national sample of primary sampling units. Public and private schools were selected from these units and then approximately 23 kindergartners were selected from each of the sample schools. Only students who were attending kindergarten for the first time were included in the study.

Data for the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study Kindergarten Class of 1998-99 (ECLS-K) were collected using child assessments, parent interviews, and teacher questionnaires. Kindergarten children were assessed on general knowledge, literacy, mathematics, and non-cognitive skills such as fine and gross motor skills. This assessment was conducted one-on-one using a computer-assisted interview. The majority of parent interviews were done using computer-assisted telephone interviewing although a small portion of the interviews were conducted in person when parents did not have phones or did not desire to be interviewed over the phone. Teachers of participating kindergarten students were asked to complete a questionnaire that collected data on the child's social skills and approaches to learning. Of the participants sampled, there was a 64.4 percent response rate for the children participating in assessments, a 63 percent response rate for parents being interviewed, and a 91 percent response rate of teachers submitting child-specific questionnaires (Denton et al., 2000).

Survey and interview results were analyzed using a non-response bias analysis using weighted and un-weighted response rates. Only preliminary results from this analysis were available and there was no evidence of bias found in the results. Results of kindergarten student assessment scores were converted to t-scores. T-Scores were divided into quartiles for ease of analysis.

Findings from the ECLS-K study are reported in five key areas (a) cognitive skills and knowledge, (b) social skills, (c) physical and well-being, (d) approaches to learning, and (e) the child and family. The cognitive skills assessment given to kindergartners included reading, mathematics, and general knowledge. The reading section included basic reading skill questions in the areas of print familiarity, letter recognition, beginning and ending sounds, rhyming sounds, word recognition, picture vocabulary identification, and comprehension. The mathematics assessment included questions in number sense, number properties, number operations, measurement, geometry, and patterns. General knowledge was assessed with questions relating to the children's experiences with their environment in the area of science and social studies (e.g., observing, collecting, classification, culture, government).

Parents and teachers were asked questions regarding the kindergartners' social skills, physical and well-being, and approaches to learning. Examples of assessment items include (a) frequency with which children make friends and comfort others, (b) frequency with which children fight with others and get angry easily, and (c) frequency with which children persist at

tasks and seem eager to learn. Health questions included general over-all health, ability to pay attention, activity level, coordination, and articulation.

Specific data on the child and family were constructed from questions during the interview process and from a household roster. Information was gathered on the highest grade the mother had completed in her formal schooling. Data were gathered on the composition of the household such as whether the mother and father were present in the household, whether the parent was the birth parent or step-parent, and whether there was a father present in the home income level.

Results of the study indicate that children entering kindergarten for the first time come to school with a wide range of differing cognitive skills and knowledge. In reading 66 percent of children entering kindergarten can recognize their letters, 29 percent know beginning sounds, 17 percent know ending sounds, two percent have knowledge of sight words, and one percent pass a word in context assessment. Only 37 percent of entering kindergartners understand that print reads from left to right, knows to move to the next line of print when one line ends, and understands where the story ends. In the area of mathematics, 94 percent of entering kindergartners can read and recognize numbers up to ten and 54 percent of them can read and recognize numbers beyond 10. Twenty percent of entering kindergartners can read two digit numbers, identify the ordinal position of an object, and solve a word problem. Four percent can calculate sums up to 10 and less than one percent can use multiplication and division to solve a problem (Denton et al., 2000)

Results demonstrate that older kindergarten students (born in 1992) score better in reading, mathematics and general knowledge than do younger kindergarten students (born in September through December 1993). Students who have mothers with more education are more likely to score in the highest quartile in reading, mathematics, and general knowledge than all other children. Kindergartners from two-parent families are also more likely to score in the highest quartile for reading, mathematics and general knowledge than children from single-mother families. More kindergartners from families where the primary language is English score in the highest quartile in reading, mathematics, and general knowledge than those in homes where the primary language is not English. In addition, students who are White are more likely to score in the highest quartile on reading, mathematics, and general knowledge than Black or Hispanic students (Denton et al., 2000). Indicators for children's personal and social development were explored by examining children's social and personal skills as reported by their parents and teachers. Results indicate that there is a difference between parents' perceptions

of their children's personal and social skills and the kindergarten teacher's perceptions regarding students' personal and social skills. In half of the skills listed there was a difference of ten percentage points or more between the parents' rating and teachers' rating. The large discrepancies in ratings existed with the following skills (a) argues with others ( 22 percentage point difference); (b) joins with others (11 percentage point difference); (c) makes friends (12 percentage point difference); (d) comfort others (31 percentage points difference); and (e) eager to learn (17 percentage point difference). The difference in parent's and teacher's perceptions may reflect the difference in how the student displays skills in the home environment versus the school environment.

Kindergarten teachers' perceptions of students' personal and social skills vary according to the demographics of the students. Denton et al. (2000), state that teachers perceive children, whose mothers have a lower education, whose mothers are single, or whose families have received public assistance, as being less likely to have the social skills of accepting peer ideas and forming friendships with their peers. Teachers are less likely to rate children from families with two parents living in the home as having behavior problems as they are to rate children from single-mother families as having behavior problems. In addition, parents and teachers both report that children from families where English is not the primary language spoken in the home are less likely to join other children, make friends, and comfort others.

The skill of being able to pay attention can be challenging for many kindergartners. As noted in Table 3, more than half (66 percent) of kindergarten teachers state that kindergartners are able to pay attention most of the time. Teachers report that there are differences in a student's ability to pay attention based on a students' gender, age, at-risk characteristics (mothers with lower education, mothers are single, low socio-economic factors), and race. According to Denton et al. (2000), teachers report that girls are more likely able to pay attention than boys and that older students are more likely able to pay attention than younger students. Children with some at-risk behaviors are also reported to be less likely to have this skill compared to children without at-risk characteristics. Black children are viewed by teachers as less likely to be able to pay attention than White, Asian, or Hispanic children.

Table 3

*Results and Findings of ECLS-K for Social and Personal Skills of Kindergarten Students*

Personal/Social Skills	Percent of Parents Responding That Child Often or Very Often	Percent of Teachers Responding That Students Often or Very Often
Argue with others	33 percent	11 percent
Fights with others	15 percent	10 percent
Easily gets angry	17 percent	11 percent
Joins with others	86 percent	75 percent
Makes friends	89 percent	77 percent
Comfort others	82 percent	51 percent
Persists	73 percent	71 percent
Eager to learn	92 percent	75 percent
Creative	85 percent	* Not asked on teacher survey
Attentive	* Not asked on parent survey	66 percent

*Note.* Information compiled from *America's Kindergartners*, Denton et al., 2000.

Results for behavior problems are different depending on who is rating this indicator. Teachers' reports of behaviors in the classroom indicate that Black children are more likely than White or Asian children to be seen as having higher levels of behavior problems. Parents' ratings on the same behaviors show few differences between White and Black children (Denton et al., 2000). The difference in the teachers' ratings and the parents' ratings raises two important questions: a) Whose perceptions of student behaviors are most accurate? b) Why is there a disparity in the ratings based on a student's race?

Huey-Ling, Lawrence, and Gorrell (2003) conducted a study, *Kindergarten Teachers' Views of Children's Readiness for School*, using the kindergarten survey data from the ECLS-K. Findings from their study and the study by Heaviside and Farris in 1993 are consistent in the domain of personal and social skills.

Figure 2 demonstrates how teachers ranked the importance of a list of qualities/skills for kindergarten readiness. A similar list was used for both the kindergarten teacher survey done by Heaviside and Farris in 1993 and the kindergarten teacher survey used in the ECLS-K study in 1998 and then analyzed and reported by Huey-Ling et al. in 2003.

Comparison of the kindergarten teacher survey results for 1993 and 1998 shown in Figure 2 demonstrates that kindergarten teachers consistently place the greatest value on the personal and social skills and qualities needed for students to be successful in kindergarten. Of the top seven skills selected as most important, six were directly related to a student's personal and social qualities or skills. Knowing the alphabet and counting to 20 or more were rated as least important by kindergarten teachers in both surveys. Although, the percent of teachers rating the alphabet as very important or essential did increase by 11 percentage points from 1993 to 1998 and the percent of teachers rating counting to 20 or more as very important or essential increased by eight percentage points. These data indicate that increased numbers of kindergarten teachers are placing more importance on the need for students to enter kindergarten knowing the alphabet and being able to count to 20 or more. Overall, the data reflect kindergarten teachers' continued emphasis on students needing to have essential personal and social skills when entering kindergarten.

Studies completed by Heaviside and Farris (1993), *Public School Kindergarten Teachers' Views on Children's Readiness*, and by Denton et al., (2000), *America's Kindergartners*, make it possible to draw significant conclusions for defining kindergarten readiness across America according to kindergarten teachers. Findings can be generalized beyond the sample. The large sample used in the studies makes the findings especially valuable to policy makers and educators as they develop definitions for school readiness, create state early learning standards, develop curricula for preschool and kindergarten programs, and develop quality preschool programs for the purpose of preparing children for kindergarten and the elementary school years.

<b>Qualities/Skills</b>	<b>Percentage choosing “Very Important” or “Essential”</b>	
	<b>1993 Kindergarten Teacher Survey</b>	<b>1998 Kindergarten Teacher Survey</b>
Physically healthy, rested and well nourished	96 percent	N/A
Communicates needs, thoughts and wants in primary language	84 percent	N/A
Communicates needs and thoughts	N/A	84 percent
Enthusiastic and curious with new activities	76 percent	N/A
Is not disruptive of the class	60 percent	79 percent
Can follow directions	60 percent	76 percent
Is sensitive to other children’s feelings	58 percent	62 percent
Takes turns and shares	56 percent	74 percent
Sits still and pays attention	42 percent	61 percent
Finishes tasks	40 percent	54 percent
Knows English	N/A	48 percent
Names primary colors and basic shapes	24 percent	32 percent
Has good problem solving skills	24 percent	35 percent
Is able to use pencil or paint brush	21 percent	36 percent
Knows the alphabet	10 percent	21 percent
Counts to 20 or more	7 percent	15 percent

*Figure 2. Comparison of kindergarten teacher school readiness surveys.*

### *Related Research*

A disconnect exists between how parents view school readiness and how teachers view school readiness. LaParo and Pianta (2000) emphasized in their meta-analytic study of 70 published reports on the cognitive and personal and social domains of school readiness that



parents define readiness in terms of academic skills while teachers define readiness in terms of the students' personal and social skills. Piotrkowski et al. (2001), also discovered in focus group interviews with kindergarten teachers and parents of kindergarten students that parents valued basic knowledge skills (knowing colors and alphabet) as being most important while kindergarten teachers deemphasized the importance of these skills. Piotrkowski et al. (2001), also reported that preschool teachers and kindergarten teachers placed different values on the importance of basic knowledge skills. Preschool teachers rated basic knowledge as being significantly more important than kindergarten teachers. However, in a study conducted by Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, and Cox (2000), 36.6 percent of the 3,595 kindergarten teachers surveyed reported that about half of their class or more lacked necessary academic skills.

A study conducted by the Minnesota Department of Education (Barnidge et al., 2005) also indicates that kindergarten teachers reported a deficit in the academic skills of entering kindergartners. Kindergarten teachers in this study reported that only 47 percent of students entering kindergarten were proficient in language and literacy skills and only 46 percent were proficient in mathematical thinking. They reported that 51 percent of entering students had proficient personal and social skills.

Kindergarten teachers are clearly placing a greater importance and value on students entering kindergarten with the necessary social and personal skills versus coming to kindergarten with the necessary academic/cognitive skills (Denton et al., 2000; Heaviside & Farris, 1993; Huey-Ling et al, 2003; Piotrkowski et al., 2001; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2000; Wesley & Buyssee, 2003). However, this does not mean that kindergarten students are entering kindergarten with the necessary academic skills for success in kindergarten (Denton et al, 2000; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2000). Wesley and Buyssee (2003) may have discovered the answer to this apparent disconnect between kindergarten teachers' views of the importance of personal and social skills even though students are lacking cognitive skills as they enter kindergarten. In their study involving 118 participants including parents of children enrolled in kindergarten, preschool teachers, kindergarten teachers, and elementary principals in 20 different focus groups they summarized participants' beliefs with the following:

Participants stressed the critical importance of social and emotional development, as well as language development and communication, while de-emphasizing academic skills.

The belief was that if children could interact meaningfully with each other and adults,

follow simple rules and directions, and demonstrate some degree of independence in the classroom, including expressing their wants and needs, then kindergarten teachers could teach them the other academic skills and knowledge they would need to be successful in school. (p. 357)

This viewpoint was also reported by West, Germino-Hausken, and Collins (1993) when they stated that kindergarten teachers felt that it was not important for students entering kindergarten to know their letters and numbers because they could impart these skills to their students during the kindergarten year. Kindergarten teachers consistently consider it one of their major responsibilities to prepare students for the personal and social demands of the K-12 school environment. Kindergarten teachers view themselves as providing students with the appropriate school behaviors that will assist them in being successful as they begin their school careers (Huey-Ling et al., 2003).

#### *Elementary Principals and Kindergarten School Readiness*

As reported by Wesley and Buyssee (2003), elementary principals share similar school readiness viewpoints with kindergarten teachers. During focus group discussions held with twenty-five elementary principals Wesley and Buyssee (2003) discovered that elementary principals believe that kindergarten school readiness involves much more than literacy and numeracy skills. Principals stated that importance of kindergartners' ability to separate from their parents without becoming upset, to actively participate in groups, to ask questions and draw conclusions, and to follow simple rules and directions. Principals felt that kindergarten teachers had too much pressure being placed on them to focus on academics, as a result of accountability standards. Both principals and kindergarten teachers agree that kindergarten students should be provided with learning experiences that are focus on active participation and play in a stimulating environment with attentive adults (Wesley & Buyssee, 2003).

A study involving Virginia elementary principals who had one or more Virginia Preschool Initiative (Virginia's preschool program for at-risk four-year-olds) classrooms housed in their school building was conducted by the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) in November 2007 (Rotz, Bearse, Rest, & Sarte, 2007). One-hundred sixty elementary principals returned surveys regarding how well the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) program prepared students for success in kindergarten. Eighty-eight percent of the principals reported that VPI programs substantially increased students' social ability to be successful in school and

eighty-two percent said that the program substantially increased the student's academic ability. When principals were asked to note the strengths of the VPI programs, two of the most frequent responses focused on personal and social skills: 1) social skill development, and 2) exposure of the students to a school setting, routines, peers, and expectations (Rotz et al., 2007).

Elementary principals play an important role in the success of kindergarten students during their first year of schooling. In order for students to be successful, kindergarten teachers need the support and guidance of their principal as they deal with the challenges of instructing students who enter kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills needed for success. The National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP) has published a guide for elementary principals entitled *Leading Early Childhood Learning Communities: What Principals Should Know and be Able to Do* (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2005). A purpose of this guide is to assist principals in understanding and supporting high-quality early childhood educational experiences for young children including preschool and kindergarten experiences. Specifically in the area of supporting teachers with students personal and social development the guide advocates that principals must assist teachers in two key areas: 1) organizing the learning environment in order to promote specific personal and social skill development, and 2) responding to children's challenging behaviors (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2005).

Principals should provide guidance to teachers as they organize and plan for learning so that the environment provides many opportunities for children to learn to share, to positively interact with one another, to ask and answer questions, and to participate in group experiences (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2005). Participation in experiences that are well planned and organized may assist students in gaining needed personal and social skills. Teachers may need training and guidance by the principal in the development of these experiences.

Young students without the necessary personal and social skills may exhibit challenging behaviors. Inappropriate behaviors may keep these students from learning and may inhibit the learning of others in the classroom. Principals must be ready and willing to assist kindergarten teachers as they respond to these students' behaviors. Principals should provide this assistance by doing the following: 1) encourage teachers to adopt research-based strategies that are effective for young children; 2) help teachers develop classroom management skills that reduce these

behaviors; and 3) serve as a bridge between the school and home so parents and teachers are working as a team to improve the child's behavior (National Association of Elementary School Principals, 2005).

Working with young students can require a great deal of energy for any seasoned teacher; however, working with young students who are having significant difficulties adjusting to the kindergarten environment or who are displaying challenging behavior problems can be exhausting for any teacher. The support and guidance of the elementary principal is especially important to the kindergarten teacher in this situation. Richards (2003) reports the findings from a study conducted to discover the most valued principal behaviors and attitudes as reported by kindergarten through eighth-grade teachers. The top five most valued principals behaviors as reported by teachers were 1) respects and values teachers as professionals; 2) has an open door policy – accessible; 3) is fair, honest, trustworthy; 4) supports teachers with parents; and 5) is supportive of teachers in matters of discipline.

### *Personal and Social Skills Research*

The review of the literature reflects the importance kindergarten teachers and elementary principals' place on students' personal and social skills. This emphasis by kindergarten teachers and elementary principals, the experts in the field, warrants additional review of the literature pertaining to the specific student indicators that point to a student's personal and social development. For the purpose of this study and for consistency with the research questions of this study, the review will be organized by the framework of Virginia's Foundation Blocks for Early Learning: Personal and Social Development: (1) self-concept; (2) self-control; (3) approaches to learning; (4) interaction with others; and (5) social problem-solving.

#### *Self-Concept*

A child with self-confidence and self-reflection will be more likely to participate in most classroom activities, explore the learning environment, and positively interact with others in the classroom (Virginia Department of Education, 2007b). As shown in Table 4, The Foundation Blocks for Early Learning list several indicators that children will begin to display as they develop a strong self-concept.

A term found in the research literature that ties closely with indicators for a student's self-concept is "executive function." Executive function includes the child's ability to set goals,

plan and organize how they will participate in an activity, and monitor their own progress toward a goal (Bronson, 2000). This requires an increased level of independence and self-direction on the part of the child. For students to develop executive function skills they need many

Table 4

*Virginia's Foundation Blocks for Early Learning: Self-Concept*

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Self-Concept: The child will demonstrate self-confidence and self-reflection

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Demonstrate knowledge of personal information including first and last name, gender, age, and birthday.

Begin to recognize and express own emotions using words rather than actions.

Recognize self as a unique individual and respect difference of others.

Develop personal preferences regarding activities and materials.

Demonstrate self-direction in use of materials.

Develop increased independence in school activities throughout the day.

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*Note.* From Virginia's Foundation Blocks for Early Learning (2007b) p. 51

opportunities during their day to experience and attempt challenging tasks that are self-selected and self-directed. Classrooms that do not provide engagement in challenging activities may frustrate children who need learning experiences that are matched to their skill level. This may hinder their development of executive function skills and their self-concept. When students use newly learned skills and engage in challenging activities they tend to generalize these process skills and begin to view themselves as competent (Bronson, 2000).

Teachers can support and encourage the development of students' self-concept and executive function skills by providing students with (a) a range of choices of learning activities and experiences; (b) open ended activities; (c) problem solving tasks; (d) activities with a final product; and (e) assigned chores that will serve the classroom community (Bronson, 2000). Teachers must individualize instructional activities so that each child has an opportunity to experience the feelings of success that result from completing a task or project successfully.

### *Self-Control*

A child who has developed self-control will show self-direction and responsibility. The child can manage transitions successful and follow classroom routines and rules (Virginia Department of Education, 2007b). As shown in Table 5, The Foundation Blocks for Early Learning list several indicators that children will begin to display as they develop self-control skills. Learning school related behaviors such as walking in a line and raising a hand to seek permission to speak are skills that require self-control for young students to manage successfully. Teachers should develop lessons with specific learning objectives for the development of self-control in the classroom and school environment. Kindergarten students may not be accustomed to using their self-control skills in a classroom and school environment. Learning to self-regulate behaviors at school may require many opportunities for practice of these skills with guided practice provided by the teacher.

Table 5

#### *Virginia's Foundation Blocks for Early Learning: Self-Control*

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Self-Control: The child will show self-direction and responsibility.

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Contribute ideas for classroom rules and routines.

Follow rules and routines within the learning environment.

Use classroom materials purposefully and respectfully.

Manage transitions and adapt changes in routine.

Develop positive responses to challenges.

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*Note.* From Virginia's Foundation Blocks for Early Learning (2007b) p. 52.

Kindergarten students are expected to regulate their emotions. They are required to delay gratification and accept different solutions to their problems without becoming frustrated (Sroufe, 1996). Bronson (2000) states that the development of students' emotional and behavioral control is related to social competence, to acceptance by peers, to school success, and to a student's future life adjustment. In a study conducted by Webster-Stratton, Reid, & Hammond (2004) they discovered that the parent, the child, and the classroom teacher could

contribute negatively or positively to student's development of self-control. They found that the best strategies for improving a student's severe behavior problems were to provide training for parents, teach specific social skills to the child, and provide training for the teacher to ensure a positive classroom environment (Webster-Stratton, Reid, & Hammond, 2004). The treatments provided in the study (parent – received training from a therapist to strengthen positive interactions with the child; child – received social skills instruction from a therapist with follow-up activities provided at home and school; teacher – received training in classroom management skills and in promoting positive relationships with difficult students) led to improved parenting skills, improvement in the child's behavior in the classroom, and improved teacher behavior. Final results of the study revealed that a combination of parent training with child training or teacher training may be the most effective treatment for young children with severe classroom behavior disorders (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2004).

Kindergarten teachers should assist students with gaining better self-control by helping students understand that there are reasons for rules. When children do not understand the reasons for having rules, they may believe that the rules are arbitrary and not meant for them to follow. If children do not understand the rules they may be less likely to follow them (Bronson, 2000). When kindergarten students break the rules or lose control of their emotions, the teacher's reaction should focus on ways to help the student learn from their misbehaviors. The focus should be on problem solving and alternative choices for their behaviors rather than on punishment (Bronson, 2000).

In a study including 250 kindergarten students and their teachers, Rimm-Kaufman, La Paro, Downer, and Pianta (2005) found that classroom quality played an important role in students' self-control. In this study, classroom settings (structure and group size) and classroom quality were observed to determine how students' engagement and compliance varied in the different settings and according to classroom quality.

Classroom quality was rated primarily based on the teacher's interactions with the students and included the teacher's (a) use of proactive approaches to discipline; (b) familiarity with children's academic needs; (c) sensitivity toward individual children; (d) use of individualized instruction; (e) establishment of stable routines; (f) attention to children's needs; and (g) use of questioning and feedback (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2005).

Students were more likely to be observed off-task during unstructured activities as opposed to activities directed by the teacher. Off-task behavior was also more prevalent during times when the teacher was leading whole group lessons than when the teacher was instructing small groups of students. Pearson correlation coefficients were used to examine the relationship between the level of classroom quality and the types of instructional settings (i.e., whole-group, small-group, teacher-directed). It was important to determine if low-quality classrooms or high-quality classrooms had more or less of one of the types of instructional settings. The correlation coefficients ranged from  $-.007$  -  $.02$ , and none were statistically significant indicating that the different instructional settings were used equally across the different quality classrooms (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2005).

Student behavior problems, including noncompliance and off-task behaviors, were observed less in classrooms with a higher quality rating (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2005). Teacher behaviors can help influence students' behaviors. This may assist students in internalizing and developing self-control of their emotions and behaviors. Young children may wish to control their actions and behave appropriately but the ability to control their actions is separate from the desire to behave. When children control their actions and behaviors voluntarily, they have developed self-regulation or self-control that requires motivation that comes from within (Bronson, 2000).

### *Approaches to Learning*

A child who has a developed approach to learning skills will show eagerness and persistence as a learner (Virginia Department of Education, 2007b). As shown in Table 6, The Foundation Blocks for Early Learning list several indicators that children will begin to display as they develop approach to learning skills.

Young children are naturally curious and ask questions about the world around them as they interact with their environment. As they develop these exploratory skills, children ask for additional clarifications and for additional information about the world they live in (Virginia Department of Education, 2007b). Teachers must be sensitive to students as they explore and



Table 6

*Virginia's Foundation Blocks for Early Learning: Approaches to Learning*


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Approaches to Learning: The child will show eagerness and persistence as a learner.
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Show interest and curiosity in learning new concepts and trying new activities and experiences.
Demonstrate the ability to learn from experiences.
Increase attention to task or activity over time.
Seek and accept help when needed.

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*Note.* From Virginia's Foundation Blocks for Early Learning (2007b) p. 53.

discover new concepts. For students to see teachers as a resource to assist them in learning, teachers must provide consistent and responsive interactions with students and provide an environment for students to feel safe to explore and discover (Pianta, Cox, & Snow, 2007).

In a study using data from ECLS-K conducted by Ready, LoGerfo, Burkam, and Lee (2005), kindergarten students who were rated by their teachers as having poor approaches to learning skills scored lower, on average, on their spring literacy tests, than students who were rated to have higher approaches to learning skills. This was after taking into account students fall literacy achievement as measured by literacy test given in the fall. There was also a moderately strong correlation ( $r = .46$ ;  $p < .001$ ) between children's approaches to learning score and their spring literacy score (Ready et al., 2005). Approaches to learning was defined in this study as attentiveness, task persistence, eagerness to learn, learning independence, flexibility, and organization (Ready et al., 2005).

Approaches to learning relates to many other school readiness domains. Students use their skills of persistence and attention to task to achieve in the cognitive areas of literacy, mathematics, science, and history and social science. Students' curiosity may motivate them to explore and engage in new learning activities regardless of the domain (George & Greenfield, 2005). Teachers can encourage students' persistence to time-on-task by providing students with periods of focused attention on independent activities. Extended periods of time for independent activities may help to build a child's self-direction and persistence (Bronson, 2000). If possible,

these times should be absent of interruptions so that children may complete a task and experience the reward that comes from finishing a task or completing a product.

### *Interactions with Others*

A child who interacts with others successfully in the classroom will interact easily with one or more children and with familiar adults (Virginia Department of Education, 2007b). As shown in Table 7, The Foundation Blocks for Early Learning list several indicators that children will begin to display as they learn to interact with others successfully.

For children between the ages of 3 to 5 establishing friendships with peers becomes more and more important to them. Having success in developing relationships with peers is important to children's social development during this time period (Bronson, 2000). Young children are learning how to effectively communicate with each other. In order to be effective communicators for building relationships, children must use skills from a variety of developmental areas: physical, social, linguistic, cognitive, emotional, and personal (Virginia Department of Education, 2007b).

Table 7

#### *Virginia's Foundation Blocks for Early Learning: Interaction with Others*

Interaction with Others: The child will interact easily with one or more children and with familiar adults.
Initiate and sustain interactions with other children.
Demonstrate verbal strategies for making a new friend.
Interact appropriately with other children and familiar adults by cooperating, helping, sharing, and expressing interest.
Participate successfully in group settings.
Demonstrate respectful and polite vocabulary.
Begin to recognize and respond to the needs, rights, and emotions of others.

*Note.* From Virginia's Foundation Blocks for Early Learning (2007b), p. 54.

Students who actively initiate and participate in social interactions with classmates and teachers during the first few months of kindergarten adjust well to the social environment of the

kindergarten classroom (Ladd et al., 2006). There is some consensus in the literature that certain types of classroom environments are more conducive to the development of pro-social behaviors (Bronson, 2000). These include classrooms where there are warm and responsive relationships between children and adults. There is a climate of care, where caring behaviors are modeled and reinforced by the adults (Bronson, 2000).

Ladd, Birch, and Buhs (1999) conducted a study involving 200 kindergartners and their teachers. They found a relationship between the students' level of classroom participation and their achievement in kindergarten. Students with higher levels of classroom participation had higher levels of achievement. In addition, they found that having friends, gaining peer acceptance, and having a positive teacher relationship were the best predictors of the students' classroom participation (Ladd et al., 1999).

Having friends and being able to interact with other students may provide students with greater access to learning activities through their active participation in learning experiences. Students who do not feel as if they belong or feel that they are rejected by their classmates may withdraw from classroom activities. Children from non-minority, higher socioeconomic families, were more likely to be better accepted by their peers and to have fewer conflicts with their teachers (Ladd et al., 1999). This could place minority students and students from lower socioeconomic families at a disadvantage for having access to the same learning activities as non-minority students and students from higher socioeconomic families. The end result could mean lower levels of achievement for minority and socio-economically disadvantaged students.

### *Social Problem-Solving Skills*

As shown in Table 8, The Foundation Blocks for Early Learning list several indicators that children will begin to display as they learn to use social problem-solving skills. Kindergarten students may be faced with an increased number of social situations as they enter the kindergarten setting. Learning to share, taking turns, and sharing the attention of the teacher with numerous other students can be frustrating for young students. Physical aggression can often be the strategy of choice used by students for solving social problems. Teachers should serve as the guide in assisting children to verbalize their feelings and then modeling appropriate ways to resolve the conflict (Virginia Department of Education, 2007b). Kindergarten students are able to understand that feeling angry can be separated from acting on those angry feelings and then reacting with aggression. Teachers should model appropriate ways to express anger by modeling

appropriate words to be used when feeling angry and by setting standards for acceptable behaviors in the classroom. Students need to know the reasoning behind social rules. If a student learns that hitting someone else may hurt him and cause him to cry he might refrain from this aggressive behavior (Bronson, 2000).

Table 8

*Virginia's Foundation Blocks for Early Learning: Social Problem-Solving*

Social Problem-Solving: The child will learn and use non-physical ways to resolve conflicts.
Express feelings through appropriate gestures, actions, and words.
Recognize conflicts and seek possible solutions.
Allow others to take turns.
Increase the ability to share materials and toys with others over time.
Include others in play activities.

*Note.* From Virginia's Foundation Blocks for Early Learning (2007b) p. 55.

Students having difficulty adjusting to kindergarten are more likely to have poor social problem-solving skills and problems with peer and teacher relationships (Ladd et al., 1999). Students must use social problem-solving skills in the classroom setting in order for there to be a sense of order and a feeling of safety and security. Social problem-solving skills are promoted by educators as a way of creating equitable access for all students to the resources available in the classroom. These resources include the teacher, the learning activities, and the instructional materials (Ladd et al., 2006). Students without adequate social problem-solving skills are at a disadvantage in developing positive peer relationships and at a disadvantage for having access to the educational resources being provided for them.

### Summary

Seventeen years ago, President George H. W. Bush announced that the first of six national education goals was that by the year 2000, all children in America would come to school ready to learn (Ravitch & Vinovskis, 1995). A review of the literature includes data that supports the conclusion that this goal has not been met. The national study, Early Childhood Longitudinal Study Kindergarten Class of 1998-99 (ECLS-K) reports that only 66 percent of students entering kindergarten can recognize their letters and 54 percent of entering students

recognize numbers beyond ten (Denton et al., 2000). Nine percent of the students participating in the study came from families where English was not the primary language spoken in the home. Over 30 percent of kindergarten teachers (3,595) surveyed by Rimm-Kaufman et al., (2000) reported that over 50 percent of their students entered kindergarten without some of the necessary personal and social skills needed to be successful in kindergarten. There is clearly more work to be done to ensure that America's kindergarten students enter school with the necessary skills needed to aid them in maximizing their achievement in school. The question now is, "What can administrators and teachers do to ensure that this happens?"

Kindergarten teachers and elementary principals have repeatedly placed a greater emphasis on students needing to enter kindergarten with the necessary personal and social skills rather than skills in the cognitive domains of learning. *The Public School Kindergarten Teachers' View of Children's Readiness* (Heavyside & Farris, 1993) study and the *Kindergarten Teacher's Views of Children's Readiness for School* (Huey-Ling et al., 2003) confirmed that over a period of time America kindergarten teachers continue to see social and personal skills as more important for students entering kindergarten than academic skills. Kindergarten teachers were asked to select the most important qualities or skills that children should possess when entering kindergarten. On a list of 13 qualities or skills, teachers chose seven qualities or skills that were all outside of the cognitive domain and six of them were personal and social skills.

Who are the students that are coming to kindergarten without the social and personal skills needed to be successful in kindergarten? Students whose mothers have a low educational level are at risk for having deficits in social and personal skills along with students who come from homes with a single-mother. Also at risk for deficits are students from lower socio-economic families and students who are English language learners. Boys are more at risk than girls for certain personal and social skills such as paying attention and staying on task (Denton et al., 2000). These kindergarten students are entering school with many more personal and social skill deficits as compared to their peers.

The state of Virginia is working to diminish the deficits that entering kindergarten students may have in personal and social skills through the development of the Foundation Blocks for Early Learning: Personal and Social Skills (Virginia Department of Education, 2007b). These are standards explaining what all four-year-olds should know and be able to do in the domain of personal and social skills when they enter kindergarten. In Virginia, four-year-old

children who experience social or economic risks are eligible to attend the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI), Head Start, or Title I preschool programs (Virginia Department of Education, 2007a). Families from all social and economic backgrounds may choose to send their four-year-olds to private pre-K programs. The Foundation Blocks for Early Learning are mandatory for use by VPI programs and available and encouraged for use by all other pre-K programs in the state.

The literature is limited in providing information and data on the current practices in kindergarten classrooms for teaching personal and social skills. It has been determined that kindergarten teachers value these skills most of all for kindergarten students (Heaviside & Farris, 1993) and it has been determined that many students enter kindergarten without these necessary skills (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2003).

Virginia educators need to effectively and efficiently address the needs of students coming to school with personal and social skill deficits. We need to know what personal and social skills elementary school principals and kindergarten teachers in Virginia expect kindergarten students to possess to be successful in kindergarten. We need to know what educators are currently doing to address the personal and social skill deficits of kindergarten students and how they can be supported as they assist students in gaining new skills. Virginia educators need to ensure that students struggling with a variety of social and personal skills receive the instruction and support that they need. Elementary principals and kindergarten teachers are in a prime position to provide insights into the complexities of school readiness as it relates to students' personal and social skills and this study provides them with an avenue to share their knowledge and insights.

### CHAPTER III

#### METHODOLOGY

This study has four primary purposes 1) to gain an understanding of the value and importance elementary principals and kindergarten teachers place on kindergarten students' personal and social school readiness skills, 2) to gain an understanding of how the principals' and teachers' values regarding personal and social skills align to the Foundation Blocks for Early Learning, 3) to explore how kindergarten teachers guide and instruct students who enter kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills needed for success; and 4) to explore what administrative support systems are available to teachers for assisting them as they guide and instruct students who enter kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills.

This qualitative study uses a phenomenological approach as described by Creswell (1988). A phenomenological approach is used to explore the phenomenon of students entering kindergarten without the necessary social and personal skills that they need to be successful in kindergarten and how this phenomenon impacts the school setting including the administrative support systems and classroom instructional practices. This phenomenon is explored through the researcher's interactions with elementary principals and kindergarten teachers who experience this phenomenon on an ongoing basis.

#### Research Questions

Specifically, this study explores the following primary questions:

1. What are elementary principals' and kindergarten teachers' school readiness beliefs and expectations for students in the domain of personal and social skills?
2. How well aligned are principals' and kindergarten teachers' school readiness beliefs and expectations for personal and social skills with Virginia's Foundation Blocks for Early Learning?
3. What do kindergarten teachers report they are doing to guide and instruct students who enter kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills to be successful?

4. What administrative support systems are available to teachers for assisting them as they guide and instruct students who enter kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills?

### Research Design

A phenomenological approach is used as the framework for the research design of this study. Schwandt (1997) describes a phenomenologist as someone who provides a detailed description of ordinary life experiences. This includes “things” experienced such as perceptions, beliefs, feelings, judgments, and evaluations. The focus of a phenomenology is on the meaning of individual experiences. Creswell (1988) states, “Phenomenology examines the meaning of experiences of individuals, based on the premise that human experiences make sense to those who live it prior to all interpretations and theorizing” (p 86). When reading a report written by a phenomenologist, the reader should come away understanding better what it was like for someone else to experience the phenomenon being studied (Creswell, 1988). A goal of this study is for the reader to understand the phenomenon of students entering kindergarten without the necessary social and personal skills that they need to be successful in kindergarten and how this phenomenon impacts the school setting including the administrative support systems and classroom instructional practices. The reader better understands this phenomenon through the rich descriptions provided by the researcher as he interacted with principals and kindergarten teachers who experienced the phenomenon on a regular basis.

The focus of this study concerns issues that may not be obvious, may not be a part of any formalized curriculum or textbook, or found documented in a teacher’s lesson plan book. Erickson (1986) stated, “Central questions of interpretive research concern issues that are neither obvious nor trivial, they concern issues of human choice and meaning, and in that sense they concern issues of improvement in educational practice” (p. 122). The issues explored through this study are issues of human choice and meaning and issues that can bring about improvement in educational practice.

The review of the literature indicates there is a need to gain a better understanding of what kindergarten teachers are doing to provide personal and social skill instruction. Surveying teachers to answer the question, “What is happening?” would not provide the detailed, in-depth data needed to gain a comprehensive understanding of how kindergarten teachers guide and instruct students who enter kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills to



be successful in kindergarten. A phenomenological approach to this study provides descriptions of how the problem is being addressed and to what extent it is being addressed by kindergarten teachers and how principals provide support and guidance to these kindergarten teachers. Principals are provided with information on how kindergarten teachers are providing personal and social skill instruction to students that may not be successful in school without this targeted instruction. This provides principals with important insight into the personal and social skill development of students who may be at-risk of failure without the teachers' implementation of specific and focused intervention strategies to remediate the deficits. Principals should use results of this study to assist them in providing support and guidance to other kindergarten teachers on how to successfully provide instruction in personal and social skill development. Qualitative researchers can best answer the questions: (a) What was the treatment? (b) What is happening here? (c) What do these happenings mean to the people engaged in them? (Erickson, 1986). This study answers these questions through a phenomenological approach using rich, detailed descriptions obtained from conversations with elementary principals and kindergarten teachers.

### *Role of Researcher*

The role of the qualitative researcher is to find the answers to the research questions proposed in the study through conversations with people. The focus of these conversations is on what is taking place in a real-life setting versus a controlled experiment in a laboratory. The questions are not strictly controlled by the researcher and are often general in nature (Lichtman, 2006). The researcher must build trust and rapport with people since the data for the study comes directly from the minds of those individuals who have experienced the phenomenon being studied. In essence, the researcher's abilities to relate positively with people and to make them feel enough at-ease to share their honest thoughts and beliefs are pivotal to the entire research study.

The researcher has served in many different educational roles over the past 24 years that have required the use of strong people skills, including the ability to build professional relationships based on trust and open communication. These roles have included serving as a (a) school bus driver; (b) first-grade instructional assistant; (c) elementary classroom teacher; (d) elementary assistant principal; (e) elementary principal; and (f) a planning principal for the purpose of opening a new elementary school. The researcher's current professional role is one

that needs to be disclosed as a possible bias in this study. Currently the researcher serves as Director of Elementary Instructional Services for the Virginia Department of Education. In this position, the researcher oversees the Virginia Preschool Initiative (VPI) program and the development of the Foundation Blocks for Early Learning. It is the researcher's responsibility to make known that this professional role has the potential to bias the researcher's role in the study.

The researcher is aware of possible bias due to his current professional role and responsibilities. It is important for the researcher to use the concept of bracketing. "Bracketing means holding a phenomenon up for inspection while suspending presuppositions and avoiding interpretations." (Hatch, 2002, p. 86) Lichtman (2006) says that the researcher must place his own thoughts in brackets so as not to influence his thinking about the phenomenon. When words are put in brackets it means that they are to be set aside and treated as a unit. The researcher is committed to putting his preconceived ideas about school readiness, personal and social skills, and kindergarten teacher's classroom practices aside. The researcher accomplished this task by carefully listening to each participant without making judgments or jumping to conclusions, by recording each interview, by taking field notes, and through careful review of official documents provided by participants. The researcher also found it important to keep his interactions with participants focused on the topic of school readiness pertaining specifically to personal and social skill development. This helped to keep both the participants and the researcher focused on the importance of the data being collected. The researcher let the data speak for itself as it was analyzed and concepts emerged.

### *Setting Selection*

The setting for this study was two school divisions located in Virginia. To protect the anonymity of the school divisions, the schools, the principals, and the teachers participating in this study, general descriptors will be used in describing the setting and participants.

Each of the two school divisions were asked to provide one elementary school based on the following criteria: 1) has at least 40 percent of students considered as disadvantaged; 2) the principal has served in the role of principal at the school for at least two years; and 3) the kindergarten team includes four or more teachers in order to provide a large enough pool of volunteers to serve as participants. These criteria were necessary to ensure involvement of teachers in the study who have experienced teaching students who come to school without the necessary personal and social skills and who are also socio-economically disadvantaged.

### *Participants Selection*

A purposeful sample of two elementary principals and six kindergarten teachers was selected for the study. Lichtman (2006) states that typically in qualitative research a small number of individuals are selected so that information can be covered in-depth. Since the purpose of qualitative research is to describe rather than interpret, there are not specifications regarding the number of individuals that should be interviewed (Lichtman, 2006).

Purposeful sampling was used to obtain the two elementary principals and six teacher participants. Principals served schools that met the following criteria 1) has at least 40 percent of students considered as disadvantaged, 2) the principal has served in the role of principal at the school for at least two years; and 3) the kindergarten team includes four or more teachers in order to provide a large enough pool of volunteers to serve as participants. The teacher participants for this study were purposefully selected from kindergarten teachers at the identified elementary schools who met the following criteria: (a) full-time teacher; and (b) taught kindergarten at their current school in Virginia for the past three years. These criteria were selected in order to ensure that participants had plenty of opportunities to experience the phenomenon being studied. Collectively, participants had in-depth experience in the field of education. Figure 3 displays the experience levels of each participant in their role as principal or teacher.

### *Informed Consent and Permission Procedures*

In a qualitative study, the individuals studied need to be well informed of the purposes for the research study and how the results of the study will be reported (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998). They need to be aware of any burden that may be placed on them, such as the time required for participation with the researcher in interviews. Principals and teachers were asked to sign an informed consent form (see Appendix A). Participants needed to know of any potential risks that were involved while participating in the study (Erickson, 1986). This study was conducted under the guidance of the university's Institutional Review Board (IRB) which ensured that the rights and safety of those being interviewed was protected (see Appendix F). Approval for conducting the study was obtained from each of the two school divisions participating in the study.

Foley		Hedke	
Participant	Experience	Participant	Experience
<b>Magenta</b>	4 years as principal 13 years teaching	<b>Red</b>	5 years as principal 16 years teaching
<b>Violet</b>	24 years teaching kindergarten 31 years teaching	<b>Orange</b>	13 years teaching kindergarten 23 years teaching
<b>Pink</b>	5 years teaching kindergarten 23 years teaching	<b>Blue</b>	4 years teaching kindergarten 24 years teaching
<b>Lavender</b>	3 years teaching kindergarten 12 years teaching	<b>Green</b>	14 years teaching kindergarten 15 years teaching

*Figure 3.* Experience levels of participants.

An application for expedited review was submitted to the university's IRB in December of 2007. Participants received a copy of the informed consent document prior to the interview. In addition, participants were told that they could withdraw from the research study at any time during the process. Permission to tape record the interviews was obtained before each interview. Throughout the research project, open communication with the participants was maintained so that participants understood the processes and procedures of the study, including the proposed use of the data collected.

Participants, including the school division, elementary schools, principals and teachers participating in the study were assured of confidentiality. Pseudonyms were assigned for the schools and school division. Principals and teachers were assigned a pseudonym and they were assured that information shared would not be identifiable. Data, including field notes, documents collected, transcriptions, and audio-tapes, were kept in the researcher's home office in a secure file cabinet. Data will be retained until the completion of the study and the defense of the dissertation, publication of any associated papers, and presentation of materials at conferences.

All data will be shredded and audio tapes will be destroyed after the culmination of these activities.

### *Gaining Access and Entry*

Bogdan and Biklen (1998) recommend following three steps to gain successful access and entry to participants in a qualitative research study (a) be persistent; (b) be flexible; and (c) be creative. The researcher was persistent in setting up interviews even when they were canceled due to unforeseen circumstances. The burden for rescheduling interviews was placed on the researcher. The researcher was flexible and conducted interviews during a time and in a location that was convenient for the participants. Finally, the researcher used his creative skills to build a strong rapport with the participants and to motivate them to cooperate with the interview process. This creativity included sending personalized note cards in advance of the interview to thank participants for their willingness to participate in the research study and bringing a small thank you gift to each interview. The initial contacts with the participants set the foundation for the relationship that was formed between the researcher and the participant.

### *Data Collection*

The researcher in a phenomenological study gathers and collects the information for the study primarily through in-depth interviews with individuals who have been identified to have experienced the phenomenon to be studied (Creswell, 1998). The goal of the researcher is to understand the experience of these individuals through face-to-face interactions. Primary data collection for this study was compiled by the researcher through interactive interviews, field notes, and official documents collected at the school level and classroom level.

### *Interviewing*

Qualitative interviewing is described by Lichtman (2006) as a group of methods that permit the researcher to engage in a dialogue or conversation with the participant. This conversation has a purpose and is guided by the researcher. One goal of the interview is to understand how the participant thinks. This requires skilled listening on behalf of the researcher (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Making the participant feel comfortable enough to share their thoughts freely with the researcher is instrumental in the collection of the data. One way to establish a trusting relationship is to involve the participants directly in the research as

collaborators with the research (Erickson, 1986). Let the participants know that they are the experts in the field. Their insights and thoughts will be the actual data used to provide the results of the study.

A semi-structured interview process was used for gathering the data. This involved creating a general set of questions with a standard format that was used with all participants. The questions were relatively open-ended but focused around particular topics (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The questions used were written for the purpose of gathering data in order to answer the research questions of this study. The outline of the interview is the same for all participants; however, the researcher can vary the questions as each individual interview session unfolds (Lichtman, 2006). Bogdan and Biklen (1998) admonish the researcher to avoid rigidly controlling the interview because if a participant cannot tell his or her story in his or her own words, the interview is no longer considered a qualitative interview.

The researcher used the five main components of qualitative interviews as recommended by Lichtman (2006) and outlined in Figure 4. The interview questions (see Appendix B) were developed based on the research questions (see Appendix C). The interview questions for teachers were reviewed by an expert in the field of early childhood education who serves as the Early Childhood Specialist for the Virginia Department of Education. Interview questions for principals were reviewed by a current elementary school principal. Modifications to the questions were made as recommended by these experts. After the review of the interview questions, the researcher conducted pilot testing of the revised interview questions using the interview protocol (see Appendix D). The pilot interviews were conducted with a former early childhood teacher and a current elementary school principal. These mock interviews were tape recorded, and an analysis of each interview was conducted by the researcher.

All eight of the participants' interviews took place in the school setting and lasted approximately 90 minutes for each interview. The researcher's field notes indicate that on three occasions a participant continued to discuss the topic of kindergarten school readiness even after the interview had concluded and the audio tape had been shut off. One participant was contacted via e-mail several days after the interview in order to gain additional information about her classroom management plan and to obtain a copy of this plan. The participant was willing to answer the researcher's questions and promptly sent a copy of her classroom management plan to the researcher. This information was used to in determining findings for the study.

### *Field Notes*

Field notes consist of descriptive word pictures of the setting, actions, and conversations held in the field. (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). They are written during or immediately following the interview and should include the researcher's intuitions and reactions regarding the interview. Field notes are the written record of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences, and thinks (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998).

<b>Advanced Planning</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify 5-10 topic areas that need to be covered in the interview</li> <li>• Identify demographic information to gather from participants</li> <li>• Develop starter questions</li> </ul>
<b>Opening</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provide preliminary information to participant: why the researcher is there; purpose for interview; permission for interview; permission for recording interview; and how long the interview should take.</li> </ul>
<b>Getting Started</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop rapport with participant: chit-chat; making the person feel comfortable; stay connected as the interviewer rather than aloof</li> </ul>
<b>Body</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Use semi-structured interview guidelines</li> <li>• Take brief notes of questions or comments for follow-up</li> <li>• Take brief notes of participants body language, gestures, and time needed to respond</li> </ul>
<b>End of Interview</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Final question: Do you have anything you want to add that we have not talked about?</li> <li>• Thank participant</li> <li>• Write down reactions to the interview immediately after the interview</li> </ul>

*Figure 4.* Five components of a qualitative interview (Lichtman, 2006).

Field notes were a vital part of the data collection process for this study. As noted by Bogdan and Biklen (1998) they consisted of two parts (a) word pictures of the actions and conversations; and (b) reflection by the researcher on his own frame of mind and thoughts during and after the interview. The researcher's field notes became a part of the data that were analyzed to answer the questions proposed in this study.

### *Documents*

For the purpose of this study a document is a piece of writing that significantly pertains to school readiness skills in the school or classroom setting of the participants (Holliday, 2002). The researcher solicited available documents from participants that assisted the researcher in investigating the four primary purposes of this study 1) to gain an understanding of the value and importance elementary principals and kindergarten teachers place on kindergarten students' personal and social school readiness skills, 2) to gain an understanding of how the principals' and teachers' values regarding personal and social skills align to the Foundation Blocks for Early Learning, 3) to explore how kindergarten teachers guide and instruct students who enter kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills needed for success; and 4) to explore what administrative support systems are available to teachers for assisting them as they guide and instruct students who enter kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills. These data sources provided for triangulation of the data. Hatch (2002) describes triangulation as the verification or extension of information from other sources. The collected documents were used by the researcher to gain another perspective of the phenomenon being studied. Documents were used to better understand the perspective of the participants and how they made sense of kindergarten students' school readiness skills (Bogdan & Bilken, 1998). The researcher coded and categorized data from the documents along with data collected from interviews, and field notes. For a list of the official documents collected and analyzed see Appendix E.

Teachers were asked to provide the researcher with the following official documents that were available and that participants were willing to share with the researcher: a) classroom management plan; b) newsletters to parents that outline behavior expectations for students; c) list of classroom rules; and d) lesson plans or units of study that may include personal and social skill objectives. Principals were asked to provide the researcher with following official documents that were available and that they were willing to share with the researcher: a) current student handbook; b) current blank report card; c) list of school rules; d) agendas from any professional development activities provided for kindergarten teachers over the past year; e) and school newsletter to parents from the past year. By collecting these data the researcher gained additional insights into the participants' values and beliefs about students' personal and social



skills. In addition, the use of these documents provided for triangulation of the data which improved the confidence of the reported findings of the study (Hatch, 2002).

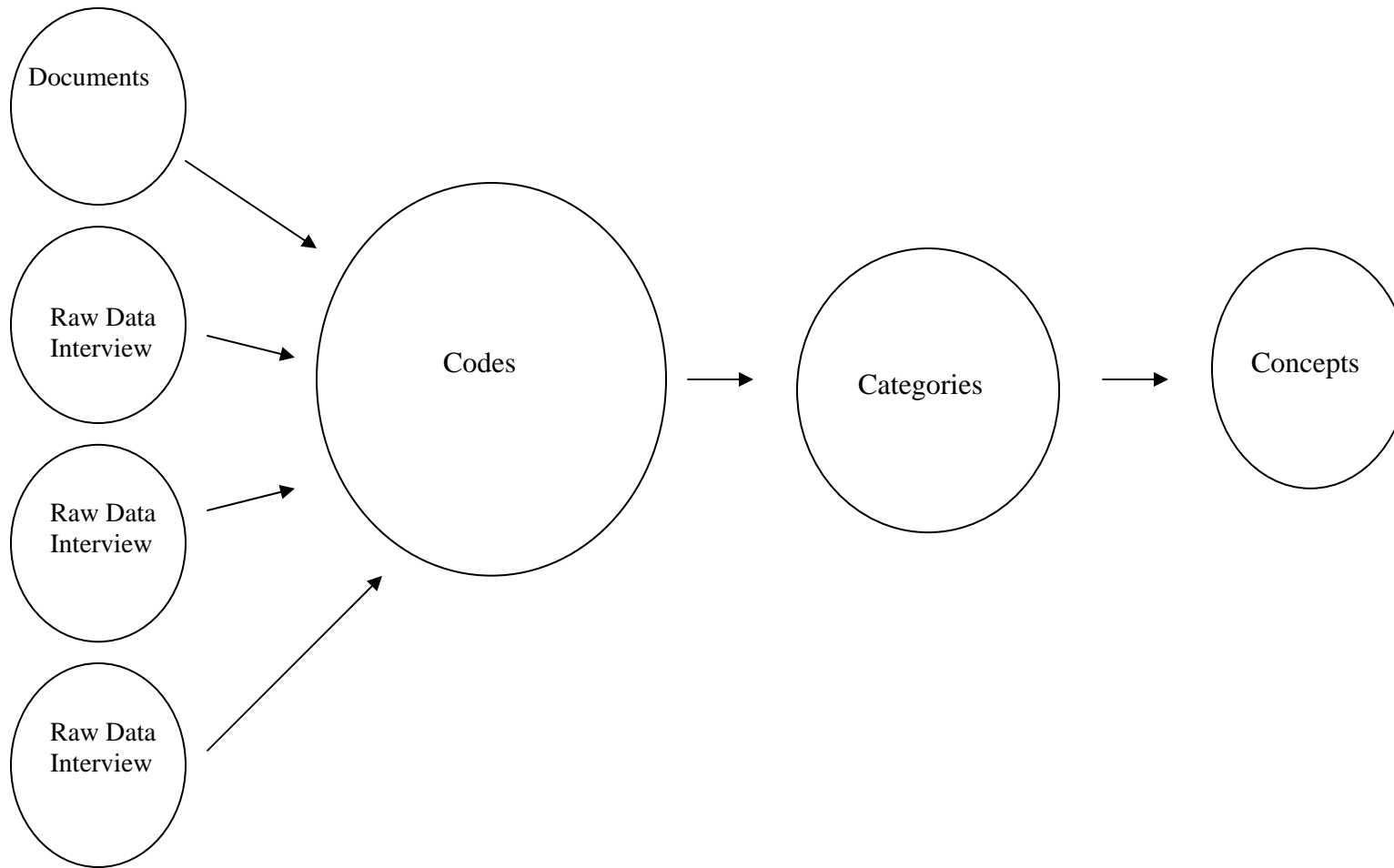
### Data Analysis

Qualitative research involves the management of large quantities of data (Bogdan and Biklen, 1998). A structured system for data management was developed for this study. Interview data from the eight participants was kept on duplicate sets of audio tapes. Each tape was labeled with the pseudonyms for the schools and participants along with the dates the interviews were conducted. Recorded interviews were transcribed and the documents were stored in folders on a computer under the pseudonym for each teacher. Field notes and documents collected were kept in regular file folders labeled with the pseudonyms for the schools and participants with the dates of the interviews noted. The data management system will had an impact on the way the data was conceptualized by the researcher in the process of analyzing the data (Schwandt, 1997).

Data analysis involves systematically arranging data in a manner that permits the researcher to understand the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The researcher's goal was to take the textual data, which may have limited meaning in its current format, and to make sense of what has been transcribed (Lichtman, 2006). This analysis involved breaking data into manageable units, synthesizing the data for patterns, uncovering what is most important to be learned, and deciding how to report the results to others (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). The unit of data analysis was conducted at the individual participant level versus at the group level.

Bogdan and Biklen (1998) state that the researcher needs to examine the data to find words, phrases, and patterns of behavior that repeat and stand out from the rest of the data. Lichtman (2006) describes the process of moving from raw data to meaningful concepts as "The Three C's of Analysis: Coding to Categorizing to Concepts". This data analysis process was used in this study. The "Three C's of Analysis" as defined by Lichtman (2006) are displayed in Figure 5.

The first stage of the data analysis began with reviewing and coding the transcript from the first interview. The coding process required searching through the data to find regularities and patterns that could be found in words and phrases throughout the data. These words and phrases became codes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998). Once coding was completed with the first transcript the process began on the subsequent transcripts and field notes. Assigned codes were revisited after review of each transcript. Redundant codes were combined and renamed



*Figure 5.* Three C's of analysis: Codes to categories to concepts (Lichtman, 2006).

(Lichtman, 2006). The coding process included multiple reviews of the data and modification of the codes until the researcher began to see emerging themes or categories.

Documents and field notes were reviewed to discover regularities and patterns that could be coded in similar manner to the transcripts. Documents and field notes were especially useful in making comparisons between the interviews conducted with principals and teachers. Common themes emerged from the four different sources of data. Themes and categories that were derived from the documents provided an alternative perspective independent of the interpretations of the participants (Hatch, 2002).

The second stage of data analysis is categorizing the codes. Codes were organized into either major category topics or subsets of these topics. (Lichtman, 2006). Bogdan and Biklen (1998) remind the researcher that categories can be mixed. One unit of data may be labeled with more than one code and may be placed in more than one category. Similar to the coding process, the process of categorization entails combining and renaming categories. The goal of this categorization is to move to the recognition of important concepts.

The final stage of data analysis is to organize the categories into the major concepts that reflect the meaning that is obtained from the data (Lichtman, 2006). Through the use of this three-step data analysis process (i.e., codes, categories, concepts) the researcher began to see that certain ideas or concepts were prominent and required the researcher's attention. The analysis of these concepts brought the researcher to an understanding of what was experienced and how it was experienced by the participants (Creswell, 1998). It is now the responsibility of the researcher to convey the meaning of these concepts to the reader so that the reader understands better the experience elementary principals and kindergarten teachers have of meeting the needs of students who come to school without the necessary personal and social skills needed to be successful in kindergarten.

### Summary

A phenomenological approach was used to explore the experience kindergarten teachers have while teaching students who come to kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills needed to be successful in kindergarten. This phenomenon was explored through the researcher's interactions with elementary principals and kindergarten teachers who experienced this phenomenon on a daily basis.

The setting for this study was two school divisions located in Virginia. Each of the two school divisions were asked to provide one elementary school based on the following criteria: 1) had at least 40 percent of students considered as disadvantaged, 2) the principal served in the role of principal at the school for at least two years; and 3) the kindergarten team included four or more teachers in order to provide a large enough pool of volunteers to serve as participants.

Data were gathered through in-depth interviews conducted with the eight participants, through detailed field notes provided by the researcher, and through documents submitted by the participants. Data was analyzed using the coding to categorizing to concepts approach recommended by Lichtman (2006). Once this process was completed the data was used to report the meaning of the lived experiences of the elementary principals and kindergarten teachers who served as study participants.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESEARCH FINDINGS

The purpose of this chapter is to present the results of the data collected by the researcher. Data were coded from interviews conducted with two elementary principals and six kindergarten teachers, from the researchers' field notes, and from review of official documents collected from the participants.

There are four sections in this chapter. The first section provides information on how the data was coded. The second section tells the story of each participant as they experienced the phenomenon of working with students entering school without the necessary personal and social skills they needed to be successful in kindergarten. This section also includes a summary of data from official documents collected from participants. The third section provides findings for each of the four primary research questions of the study. The fourth section provides a summary of the findings.

#### Coding of the Data

A semi-structured interview process was conducted by the researcher with the eight participants. The unit of analysis conducted was at the individual versus group level. Visits with each participant included the interview using 16 interview prompts (see Appendix B), writing of field notes during and directly after the interview, and gathering of documents from participants. Interviews were audio taped and then transcribed resulting in 152 pages containing over 2,600 lines of text. Each line of text was coded by the researcher. A coding system is provided when direct quotes from a participant are used or when summary comments from the eight participants are included. The code for data retrieved from an interview transcript includes a capital F or H identifying the elementary school where the participant is employed. Foley Elementary and Hedke Elementary are the pseudonyms given to the two elementary schools. Next, the code includes the first initial of the participant's pseudonym (M-Magenta, P-Pink, V-Violet, L-Lavender, R-Red, B-Blue, O-Orange, G-Green). These two letters are followed by the capital letter I, indicating that the data was taken from an interview transcript. The code ends with a number indicating the page number of the transcription from which the data was taken. For example, the transcription code FPI14 indicates that the data was cited using the transcription

from Foley Elementary School (F) with participant Pink (P), during an Interview (I), and can be found on page 14 of the transcription from the interview.

### Participants

Two elementary schools, each from different school divisions, served as the setting for the study. One principal was completing her fourth year as a principal and the other principal was completing her fifth year. Both principal participants had only served as a principal within their current school division and school. Principals had a variety of background experiences in education before entering administration, including teaching kindergarten through grade three and special education.

The six kindergarten teachers participating in the study had an average of 21.3 years of overall teaching experience with a range from three to 24 years of experience as kindergarten teachers. Two of the teachers had master's degrees, one in reading and one in technology. One teacher held an endorsement to teach special education. Two of the teachers indicated that they had taken extra classes in reading. One teacher indicated that she had no specific, specialized training beyond the requirements for her teacher licensure.

### *Ms. Magenta*

Ms. Magenta is the principal of Foley Elementary School. The school serves a diverse student population coming from neighborhoods and subsidized housing. Ms. Magenta describes the teaching staff as being relatively young who work well together as they share ideas and collaborate together in their instructional planning.

During the first few months of school Ms. Magenta gets to know her new kindergarten students by interacting with them during arrival time, in the cafeteria, by her daily visits to the classrooms, and at dismissal time. She described the students as being very needy when they first enter kindergarten. Ms. Magenta further explained what she meant by students being needy.

Students entering kindergarten do not know the routines and procedures for school and that many of the students do not have any preschool experience before coming to kindergarten. Some of the separation, the emotional piece, is really tough. Children who come from impoverished families don't know how to act socially. We have students throwing chairs because they don't know how to hold in their anger. This is a lot of stimulus for them. (FPI2)

Ms. Magenta described some of the qualities, characteristics, and abilities that she observed in successful kindergarten students. In her description she focused predominately on students' personal and social skills such as sharing, playing together well with peers, being able to sit and listen, and having the ability to follow directions from an adult.

Students who are lacking in having the necessary personal and social skills to be successful in kindergarten were described by Ms. Magenta as not being able to get along with their peers, having a tendency to strike out, and not able to handle problems. She summarized these students by the following statements.

Children that are not ready require so much of the teacher's attention. Some how they are not getting attention at home - negative or positive attention. They are demanding so much attention that it takes away from them. Other students pick up on these things. The other students know how to behave and what is accepted, so when someone is not following the procedures and rules they get annoyed with them. (FMI4)

The daily life of a kindergarten teacher working with students who do not have the necessary personal and social skills is very draining as reported by Ms. Magenta. The teacher's role has become especially challenging as the demands on kindergarten teachers and students have increased over the years. "Kindergarten is not what it used to be. Teachers have big accountability issues with the reading and writing aspects. Teachers do not have time to concentrate on the social. It has to be on the academic type of thing." (FMI5) Kindergarten teachers have to accept that they must be nurturing and that teaching kindergarten requires a great deal of patience.

Working with these same students impacts the role of the principal, according to Ms. Magenta. She described how dealing with kindergarten students who do not have the appropriate personal and social skills is a big issue for her as a principal. Her descriptions included being called on her two-way radio frequently to assist in kindergarten classrooms with students who are having outbursts. The outburst or meltdown may include the throwing of a chair or being physically aggressive towards other students. Ms. Magenta mentioned how time consuming this can be for her as a principal. "Dealing with these situations involves more than telling the student they will be okay and patting them on the back. There is a period of decompressing that is needed after an outburst and often detailed behavior plans must be developed for the student." (FMI5) She described one particular incident where she spent 90 minutes with a kindergarten

student before he would get on the bus to go home. Ms. Magenta quickly pointed out that classroom teachers do not have time to deal with these lengthy outbursts from students who are not able to manage their emotions.

Ms. Magenta reported that the lack of social and personal skills does impact the achievement of these students. She related the fact that some of their behaviors are so severe, such as hitting the teacher, that kindergarten students have had to be suspended from school. She reflected on a situation where a student's outburst had become so challenging that she had to suspend the student for over ten days. Her next words were shared with angst. "They miss a lot of time. We hate to do this because it's a double edge sword. They need to be here. They need to learn and we're kicking them out. Sometimes it's the only way you are going to get them help." (FMI7)

During the next portion of the interview, Ms. Magenta was asked to describe students who were lacking in one of the five specific personal and social skills "Blocks" described in Virginia's Foundation Blocks for Early Learning. She was asked what teachers and administrators did to support these students in gaining these necessary skills. Ms. Magenta was prompted to think of specific case scenarios in order to better answer each of the questions presented to her.

Ms. Magenta was asked to share about working with students who do not have a good self-concept. She quickly responded how important it was to build in opportunities for students without a good self-concept to be successful at school. She described setting up a behavior plan for these students that would ensure that the student was going to be successful by meeting the goals of the plan. She relayed how important it is to make students feel successful since they may not have experienced success in their short lifetime. Once students begin to meet their goals they feel great about their achievements and teachers can begin to slowly take them off of the behavior plans. Ms. Magenta became very passionate as she spoke about these students and how teacher's can meet their needs.

If you don't have a self-concept, you don't have anything. Some of the professional readings we have done as a staff have been about children from poverty. These children don't love themselves enough. They don't have self-confidence enough to do it for themselves. They will do it for someone who cares about them. It's all about the



relationships with the teacher and the child. They are trying to please the teacher. When I interview, I look for a teacher that's going to want to make relationships. (FMI14)

Ms. Magenta was asked to share her thoughts about working with students who do not have self-control. She reported that these are the students who are frequently taken out of the classroom due to their inability to control their emotions. These students are missing valuable instruction time; however, as pointed out by Ms. Magenta safety is more important. When asked how she and the staff provided support and guidance to these students she responded, "These students are so young it's hard for them to understand when they are going to explode." (FMI13) She explained that she and staff members try to teach these students what to do before they get to the point of exploding such as using counting techniques. With frustration in her voice, Ms. Magenta stated, "When we get them in kindergarten there could be a four-year deficit." (FMI13)

Ms. Magenta was asked to share about working with students who do not have skills in the area of approaches to learning. She quickly pointed out that working with children who lack motivation and persistence is a challenge for the staff at Foley Elementary. "We have tons of children that the motivation piece is missing, they shut down and nothing seems to motivate them." (FMI12) In providing remediation for these students Ms. Magenta reports that they put every child on an action plan, similar to an Individual Education Plan (IEP). This plan is used to map out small goals of achievement for each student to meet. The plan includes monthly goals. When students meet these small goals the staff is encouraged to celebrate the achievement with students. Ms. Magenta reported that this helps with increasing the students' persistence in completing tasks. It becomes obvious that this topic is endearing to her as her eyes swell and become moist. She shares the following when comparing students who have the needed skills of "approaches to learning" to those who do not possess the skills.

Other children are going on and learning due to their persistence. They are completing tasks and getting the instruction. Other students are getting left behind and that's a huge problem. In their home life it's not important, so give up and don't worry about it. How do we instill that persistence to get a better life for these kids? I struggle with that. This is your ticket out. It starts now." (FMI12)

Ms. Magenta was asked to share her thoughts about working with students who do not have appropriate skills to effectively interact with others. She stated that students who are lacking in skills to interact with others appropriately may often be students who lack

communication skills due to speech issues. Students who cannot communicate their needs may get easily frustrated with others and may act out in ways that they would not normally behave. She stated the importance of teachers not enabling the students by helping them out too much. There is a danger of having others do too much for them. Ms. Magenta stated that she provides support when teachers come to her and ask for assistance. She brainstorms solutions with them or assists by getting involved with the families.

When asked to discuss working with students who do not or cannot implement social-problem solving skills, Ms. Magenta used a case scenario to describe the challenges of working with these students.

I have a student right now and for whatever reason when you call him over to reading group he doesn't want to do it. It's as if he is trying to make it difficult for you. He throws things, throws chairs, and hits the teacher. He has been suspended more times than I want to admit. He has affected other students through the process. We have tried everything. A behavior plan is the first step. We decide what the worst behavior is that we want to distinguish and work with the child on distinguishing this behavior.

Consistency is the rule for this type of plan. These students know all about consistency and they are going to keep it up because they are going to wear you down! They have the skills and know to keep it up. (FMI10)

The question of how kindergarten teachers know what forms of remediation to provide for students lacking in personal and social skills was presented to Ms. Magenta. She explained that the school's guidance counselor was a key resource for teachers as they sought to meet students' personal and social skill needs. The guidance counselor visited every classroom on a rotating basis and taught personal and social skills to students. A conflict management program was used by the counselor to provide students with solutions for handling troubling situations with their peers. The guidance counselor also involved students in role playing of problematic situations and then role playing appropriate ways to solve the problems.

Ms. Magenta shared specific ways in which teachers provided instruction for the purpose of developing students' personal and social skills. Teachers work with students to set concrete goals. Students keep goal folders in kindergarten. Teachers conduct team meetings with students and do a great deal of role playing. It is important for teachers to assist students in understanding

how their behaviors impact others. They must use the teachable moment and teach conflict resolution on the playground if that is when it is needed.

When asked about how she informed parents about expectations for students' personal and social skills, Ms. Magenta mentioned the following methods (a) during the kindergarten orientation meeting at the beginning of the year; (b) during kindergarten curriculum nights for parents; (c) and at parent coffees. Ms. Magenta shared that getting parent support for students who do not have the necessary personal and social skills can be challenging.

It's hard because they are struggling too. They are stressed. We try to hook them up with a parent educator or one-on-one counseling with the county's Community Services Board. We offer parent workshops and provide free babysitting. It's a shame that most of them will not take advantage of these services. (FMI15)

The final interview prompts posed to Ms. Magenta dealt with what professional development had been provided for teachers in this area and how she specifically, as the principal, assisted and guided kindergarten teachers in building students' personal and social skills. She explained that she liked to use a thematic approach to professional development each year and those themes are usually based on the social environment of the school. Development of the theme is accomplished through having the entire staff read a common book on a topic and then conducting book talks. In the past year teacher training was provide on cooperative learning and how to assist students to work in groups as an instructional strategy.

Ms. Magenta summed up how she best assisted teachers by the following statements. "I know my students. I'm always in there [classroom]. I encourage teachers and help them if they need help. I offer them support as to where they can find resources. We brainstorm together." (FMI17)

The researcher's field notes indicate that Ms. Magenta spoke easily and passionately about meeting the personal and social skill needs of students. The interview flowed like an informal conversation between two colleagues. The researcher documented in his field notes that Ms. Magenta seemed to have a genuine desire to provide any and all resources available to students and families who needed support in developing students' personal and social skills.

#### *Ms. Violet*

Ms. Violet described teaching kindergarten at Foley Elementary school as being fun because each day is different. During the first month of school Ms. Violet explained that she gets

to know her students' skills mostly by observing them. "You can tell the ones that have been around other children - the ones that have been to preschool and know how to sit and listen. For some, it's a skill they have to learn." (FVI1)

Ms. Violet reported that students who came to kindergarten and were most successful were the students who displayed motivation to learn, to try new things, and had an interest in learning to read. She said that they were good listeners and were well rounded children. When asked about kindergarten students who did not enter school with the necessary personal and social skills to be successful she responded with empathy in her voice.

They have a harder time because it's hard for them to sit and listen because they haven't done that before. I feel like they are missing pieces. If they don't get along with the other children then they are learning how to do that. It's hard for them to work as a team. If they are working on social skills and behavior and just trying to behave, it's harder for them to learn. I'm not saying that they won't or can't. It's just that part isn't there yet. (FVI4)

Ms. Violet stated that she felt disadvantaged students were more at risk for not having the necessary personal and social skills to be successful in school. "They may not have been out of this area to know what is out there – gone to the science museum, gone to the library, or had mom read books to them. Maybe they've just watched television all the time." (FVI4)

Working with students who do not possess the important personal and social skills requires providing individualized attention for these students, according to Ms. Violet. She explained that she finds herself doing a great deal of redirecting students back to the lesson and encouraging them to do what they are suppose to be doing during the lesson. According to Ms. Violet this may cause her not to be able to teach all of the lessons that she has planned for the day.

You plan for a lot of things to get done and for a lot of fun activities. You think it is going to be great! They are going to learn this but then you have a child who lacks in social skills who may be having difficulty that day. You may not get in everything you want to get in. You spend time working with the children who are not suppose to be doing what they are doing. (FVI12)

During the next portion of the interview, Ms. Violet was asked to describe students who were lacking in one of the five specific personal and social skills "Blocks" described in

Virginia's Foundation Blocks for Early Learning. She was asked what she did to support these students in gaining these necessary skills. Ms. Violet was prompted to think of specific case scenarios in order to better answer each of the questions presented to her.

Ms. Violet described ways of supporting students who do not possess a strong self-concept by building on students' strengths and providing opportunities for students to feel successful. She explained how she would provide parents with materials to assist students with difficult concepts at home so that the students would feel more successful at school when faced with mastering the challenging concepts. "You don't want them from the beginning to feel like they can't do anything. It just gets worse and worse." (FVI9)

When asked about students lacking in self-control, Ms. Violet responded, "I have children like that. They are the ones that have to sit out for awhile. I'll ask them what they could you have done differently." (FVI9) She also described a particular student who was having challenges with self-control but who was beginning to make improvements. Ms. Violet reported providing individual, positive attention to this student and taking time to praise the student for improved behaviors.

Ms. Violet expressed concern about the increased learning expectations for kindergarten students as opposed to years ago when she began teaching kindergarten. "More and more is expected of these children. They really have to be listening and working hard or they are really behind." (FVI10) She expressed that the best way that students were being assisted in the area of approaches to learning was through the extra attention provided to them during small group instruction.

This school has helped with a lot of extra staffing. During one time of the day I have my aide and a reading aide come into the room. The extra support is very good to keep those kids on task. We rotate through different things and they get a lot of different approaches. (FVI10)

Ms. Violet shared about a student who lacked the skills to appropriately interact with others. This student was very angry and aggressive. She stated that the student would hit other students or throw things at them. When asked how she assisted this student in improving she stated that she would just talk to him when he was calm and try to explain ways that he could make better choices. Ms. Violet also stated that she called his parents to see what they could do to help. She also called on the administration and they would come and remove him from the

room and let him calm down. “We had a team between the administration, parents, and me.” (FVI8)

Ms. Violet described students without social-problem solving skills as typically the students that are controlled by their anger. “These are the kids that get angry at just little tiny things. They are so upset at times that it’s hard for them to calm down and listen. It impacts their social and academic skills.” (FVI11) In working with these students to assist them to improve their social-problem solving skills, Ms. Violet stated that she sought the assistance of the school’s guidance counselor to develop a behavior plan, used time out in her classroom, used time out in another teacher’s classroom, and called on administrators to remove students from the classroom until they could calm down.

Lessons or activities that Ms. Violet reported as using for the purpose of developing students’ personal and social skills included beginning of the year sessions in practicing how to walk in a line, how to sit and raise your hand to speak and various other school and classroom procedures. She also described the use of reading books aloud to students on topics of personal and social skills in order to promote discussion surrounding skill development in these areas. Ms. Violet also had students draw pictures of what students look like when they are following the rules.

Ms. Violet was asked to discuss how she provides remediation for students in the area of personal and social skills and how students’ progress in this area is assessed according to available assessment benchmarks. Ms. Violet shared that she had to try many different things to determine what worked with each individual student. She described the process to be one that went on all year but that a significant time was spent on these skills during the beginning of the year. “We just talk all year long. It’s a constant learning process.” (FVI5) She mentioned the rules as being important to discuss with students all year long and provided the researcher with a document listing her five classroom rules. Her assessment of personal and social skills was reported as being done by observation.

Ms. Violet reported informing parents about expectations for students’ personal and social skills during her presentation at the kindergarten open house at the beginning of the year, through a class newsletter, and through one-on-one phone conferences with parents. She commented that parents support her by sharing ideas they might use with their child at home to encourage personal and social skills.

In response to the question, what resources do you have available to you and how do administrators support you with students having problems with their personal and social skills, she hesitated and responded that she wasn't sure. With additional prompts from the researcher, Ms. Violet mentioned a positive recognition program for students if they are caught being good in the resource classes or in the cafeteria and the use of a school wide zero noise level in the hallways. Ms. Violet also stated that the guidance counselor speaks with the students and uses a conflict management program with the students.

The researcher's field notes indicate that Ms. Violet may have been nervous during the interview and seemed to relax once the researcher concluded the interview by shutting off the audio tape recorder. Ms. Violet shared with the researcher that each year the number of students entering kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills was increasing. She shared her concerns with the researcher about how not having these skills negatively impacted the students.

*Ms. Pink*

Ms. Pink smiled as she shared how much she enjoyed teaching kindergarten at Foley Elementary. She chuckled and shared how funny the students were and that she and her kindergarten colleagues were always sharing humorous antidotes from their students. During the first few months of kindergarten each year, Ms. Pink explained that she can easily tell if her new students had been in day care by their ability to interact in a group setting and by their use of good manners.

Ms. Pink reported that students who came to kindergarten and were most successful were the students who displayed the ability to answer questions with relevant answers, to retain information, to follow rules, if corrected to learn from mistakes, and to get along with others. She explained that students needed to be able to communicate their needs and wants.

They need to be able to come in and tell you what they have done. They need to be able to say how they will be dismissed for the day, such as there is note in my back pack from mom. I expect them to be able to ask for help. If they are not working, they need to be able to ask for help. (FPI5)

When asked about kindergarten students who did not enter school with the necessary personal and social skills to be successful she focused on students who had a skewed view of being wronged by others. "I say maybe their perception of being wrong. For example, they

wrongly perceive that someone is sitting too close to them or that someone is taking their pencil.” (FPI6) She also mentioned a lack of trust in the teacher by the student. “Do they trust you enough that when you say something is going to happen they believe you?” (FPI6) Ms. Pink stated that these students do not quickly demonstrate growth in these areas but tend to have the same difficulties with perception and trust as the year progresses.

Ms. Pink reported feeling that the students who may be most at risk for personal and social skill deficits were students who have parents that were not successful in school. “What was the parent’s perception of school? Was it uncomfortable for them? Are they not trusting of these type of experiences?” (FVI7) She stated that students from these types of home environments were most at-risk for not having the needed personal and social skills, regardless of the socio-economic status of the family.

Working with students who do not possess personal and social skills can make the day hard, according to Ms. Pink.

It depends on what they are. A runner is hard. A runner and aggressive student is the two hardest. It makes your day hard because you don’t want to make something bigger but you don’t want to let it go either. Sometimes you have to keep repeating the same thing. It makes it hard because you hope they will not do it again tomorrow but you know that most likely they will. They are children with issues – chemical imbalance issues or home life issues. (FPI9)

During the next portion of the interview, Ms. Pink was asked to describe students who were lacking in one of the five specific personal and social skills “Blocks” described in Virginia’s Foundation Blocks for Early Learning. She was asked what she did to support these students in gaining these necessary skills. Ms. Pink was prompted to think of specific case scenarios in order to better answer each of the questions presented to her.

Ms. Pink described ways of supporting a student who did not possess a strong self-concept by the following. “He would want to do things that would draw negative attention to him. This impacted some of his academics because he would refuse to pick up a pencil. He refused to work” (FPI11) She reported providing support for this student by talking to the parents and asking the guidance counselor and administrators for assistance. She also mentioned seeking ideas from her peers at kindergarten team meetings.



When asked about students lacking in self-control, Ms. Pink described a student that his classmates could not trust because they were fearful of being harmed by him. She stated that he had difficulty with transitions and difficulty when he was not engaged in academic work. "I think if you step away from thinking about his progress in the obvious academic area you have to realize that this student's progress with his peers was impacted." (FPI12) Ms. Pink reported trying to assist him in developing self-control by keeping him busy with classroom jobs and by reinforcing his positive behaviors.

Ms. Pink shared her experience working with a student who was lacking approaches to learning skills. "This student did not have noticeable behaviors such as outburst but was not comfortable talking. It affected everything she did including even saying the lunch count. If a student is not a risk taker it just makes everything harder." (FPI14) Ms. Pink gave the student goals that she could try herself. She shared about how she would chat with the student on the playground and compliment her on the dress she was wearing or sit next to her in the classroom and pretend like she was the student's peer and needed help understanding the concepts being taught. Ms. Pink stated that her goal was to assist the child in being comfortable at school.

Ms. Pink described students without social-problem solving skills as often being unable to understand that their actions have repercussions with their friends. She mentioned one student who appeared to be very assertive and confident when he understood the concept being taught but pretended not to care about learning concepts that were more difficult for him to learn. If this student was not proficient at a skill he would refuse to work. In response to this students' actions, Ms. Pink stated that she would avoid calling on him first and keep in mind the areas of instruction that were comfortable for him and those that were more uncomfortable for him.

Lessons or activities that Ms. Pink reported as using for the purpose of developing students' personal and social skills included reading stories, modeling, and practicing skills. She mentioned following the Virginia Standards of Learning (SOL) closely and using individuals listed in the SOL such as Martin Luther King, Jr., to explain how he exhibited certain behaviors that we would want people in society to have. She provided the researcher with a copy of SOL K.8 stating that the student will demonstrate what being a good citizen involves. Ms. Pink also directed the researcher to a copy of her lesson plans from September that indicated that lessons on citizenship were taught using several different stories containing topics relating to personal and social skills.

Ms. Pink was asked to discuss how she provides remediation for students in the area of personal and social skills and how student progress in this area is assessed according to any available assessment benchmarks. Ms. Pink stated that she did not have a list of skills to use for assessment or progress monitoring of students in this area. Her approach to assisting students in the development of personal and social skills was summarized by the following.

I have to be genuine. I hope to give students two or three positives with any negative. Everything is a fresh start. I greet them everyday [as being] equal to everyone else. If I don't have a rapport with them that they can trust, then they are just going to be a trial for me. I state what I want versus stating what I don't want. I use an even tone with them. You make it more that this is what I expect of you versus this will be the repercussions.  
(FPI10)

Ms. Pink reflected on how she informed parents about expectations for students' personal and social skills. She stated that she did this through a newsletter at the beginning of the year, during kindergarten orientation before school began, and at back to school night. On a more regular basis Ms. Pink mentioned the use of a behavior note and provided the researcher an example of one. She shared that parent support for assisting her with students who needed extra support in the development of personal and social skills was mixed – from parents willing to listen and assist to others who were rude and ignored her.

In response to the question, what resources do you have available to you and how do administrators support you with students having problems with their personal and social skills, Ms. Pink quickly responded that she did not usually need a great deal of support. She stated that if she needed assistance it was usually with a student who had an Individual Education Plan for emotional disturbances or a student who was on medicine. She mentioned using a two-way radio to call for administrative help in these cases. Ms. Pink expressed concern for having to remove a student from her classroom. "I know that if they are up in the office they are missing instruction. That's the biggest thing. If they are not working it's going to make it harder for them academically. Now they have two issues to work with – social skills and academic skills."  
(FPI31)

Ms. Pink described her principal and assistant principal as having an open door policy that made it easy to seek their guidance if needed. She mentioned asking her administrators for ideas on how to work with a student when what she felt that what she was doing no longer

worked. Ms. Pink reported that an administrator or guidance counselor is always available via two-way radio to provide emergency assistance when needed. She also shared that the principal will send the staff articles to read and sometimes provide staff development on various topics. Ms. Pink stated that the staff development was usually in the form of a book that the entire staff read and then discussed.

The researchers' field notes indicate that Ms. Pink was very animated during the interview and often looked at various students' empty seats when thinking of an answer to a question, as if she was picturing the student in her mind when providing an answer. Field notes also indicate that after the interview, while the researcher was preparing to leave the room, Ms. Pink elaborated with the researcher regarding her various teaching experiences and her enjoyment of teaching at the kindergarten level. Ms. Pink shared how helpful it was to have many different adults in the room working with her students and stated that often there were three adults in the room working with students at separate tables.

*Ms. Lavender*

Ms. Lavender described teaching kindergarten at Foley Elementary as being exciting due to the fact that it is always changing. Ms. Lavender reported getting to know her new students each fall by learning her students' likes and dislikes. She commented that teaching kindergarten had become more stressful because of the high expectations for kindergarten students.

Kindergarten students who are able to adapt to the kindergarten classroom, are willing to try, and who follow the rules and procedures were reported by Ms. Lavender as being successful in kindergarten. In addition, she stated that kindergarten students need to be able to express themselves appropriately and to ask questions that will meet their needs. Ms. Lavender described students who did not have the necessary personal and social skills as being students who find it difficult to interact appropriately with other students, often tease their peers, and become jealous when they want to be a part of a group or play with a friend who is playing with someone else. She stated that disadvantaged students were most at risk for not having personal and social skills. "The children that come from poverty generally do not have the supervision, at least not to the same degree, and they do not have the communication. They don't have the conversations at dinner, telling about their day and what they did that day." (FLI3)

"Very exhausted" was the phrase Ms. Lavender used to describe working with kindergarten students who did not have personal and social skills.

Just that from the moment they walk in the door, I am aware and I really can't let a moment rest. A child might be hitting and going outside of what is acceptable. I must always be aware and always communicating. I generally stay in close proximity to the child. (FLI4)

During the next portion of the interview, Ms. Lavender was asked to describe students who were lacking in one of the five specific personal and social skills "Blocks" described in Virginia's Foundation Blocks for Early Learning. She was asked what she did to support these students in gaining these necessary skills. Ms. Lavender was prompted to think of specific case scenarios in order to better answer each of the questions presented to her.

Ms. Lavender described students who did not have a good self-concept as being argumentative, angry, and can often turn into bullies. "It's easy for them not to have a good self-concept when they are continually arguing." (FLI5) She reflected on assisting one student with the development of a better self-concept by modeling for the student how to complete a task and then as soon as the student was successful with the task provided positive feedback. She shared that recently she held a conference with this student's parents and was able to share the good news of his progress. "I let mom and dad know how well he is doing. He is able to get started on his work without arguing. He is now writing several sentences which are phenomenal for this point in the year." (FLI6)

When asked about students lacking in self-control, Ms. Lavender described how the other students' responded to a child displaying no control over his actions or emotions.

The others get upset because at first they are shocked. They think, oh my goodness, he just did this. This reaction lasts about a month. Then they get angry at the child and this lasts for a good while. Then they begin to realize that the student is not able to control himself. It impacts who the student can work with, who they can be paired up with, and the activities that can be done in the class. There are activities that I will not do in my class this year that other teachers can do with their students due to the makeup of our children. (FLI6)

Ms. Lavender shared that she often results to moving this student to an area away from the other students so he can work alone. "It changes what they can learn because they don't get that conversation when they have to sit separate from the other students." (FLI7)

Ms. Lavender commented that kindergarten students tend to be naturally inquisitive which assisted students in the development of their approaches to learning skills. “The persistence part – to have the endurance to keep on trying is the difficult part in kindergarten.” (FLI8) To encourage persistence Ms. Lavender reported providing students with a classroom rich in language and filled with access to literature. She commented that children do not have the option of not being actively involved in learning.

When we have a break, they are in the [classroom] library reading or playing with math manipulatives. They are entertained with what is available. Even the children who do not have persistence wander to something else [in the room] that is still positive and brings them back in. There are quality things.” (FLI8)

Ms. Lavender stated that it often takes a great deal of time to work with students who lack social-problem solving skills. “There is a lot of time spent getting to the non-physical problem solving.” (FLI9) She mentioned that the guidance counselor at the school assisted with these students by presenting a conflict management program during guidance lessons.

Ms. Lavender shared that the use of her classroom management system was one of the techniques that she used to teach students specific personal and social skills. She presented the researcher with a chart displaying a behavior system with stages for student behavior. The system started with the undesirable “Anarchy” stage, moved to “Bullying/Bossing”, to “Conformity/Cooperation” and finally to the goal of “Democracy”. Ms. Lavender explained that she guides the students towards the democracy level. “Democracy is when students make the right choices, right away. This is our goal. I use this [behavior system] all through the year. We refer to it [chart] all the time.” (FLI1) She shared that she had learned about this behavior system through a colleague.

The researcher’s field notes indicate that Ms. Lavender began sharing with the researcher her philosophy for classroom management and student behaviors even before the researcher began asking questions. She displayed great passion for this particular philosophy of classroom management and indicated she first learned about it from a colleague.

Ms. Lavender was asked to discuss how she provides remediation for students in the area of personal and social skills and how student progress in this area is assessed according to any available assessment benchmarks. She shared that her love of literature along with children’s natural desire to hear stories read to them made it easy to use literature in helping students gain

personal and social skills. She stated that staff development in different areas provided her with resources to review in addition to talking with the guidance counselor and parents.

Ms. Lavender reported that her knowledge of the personal and social skills that needed to be taught came mostly from her experiences. She shared that not having this experience during her first year of teaching kindergarten presented her with a challenge. She did not have the valuable background knowledge needed to be successful. Ms. Lavender did not refer to any formalized list of personal and social skills that kindergarten students needed to be taught.

When assessing students in the area of personal and social skills, Ms. Lavender keeps behavior sheets for students who are having extreme difficulties in the development of these skills. These sheets are sent home to parents on a regular basis. “Sometimes the guidance counselor and I will meet to see what behaviors we need to focus on.” (FLI4) For students without behavior sheets, Ms. Lavender reports keeping a running log or narrative to document students’ personal and social skills progress.

Ms. Lavender reflected on how she informed parents about expectations for students’ personal and social skills and how they supported her in assisting students to gain these skills.

I send home the behavior system chart at the beginning of the year with a newsletter explaining about it. I also provide parents with a Web site that explains the system. I continue to write blurbs in the newsletter. When things are extreme, I hold a conference with the parent and start a behavior plan. (FLI10)

Copies of several of Ms. Lavender’s newsletters were shared with the researcher. The researcher was able to confirm that this information is being communicated to parents via the teacher’s newsletter. Ms. Lavender shared that parents support her by volunteering in her classroom.

In response to the question, what resources do you have available to you and how do administrators support you with students having problems with their personal and social skills, Ms. Lavender responded that the two-way radio was a huge support for her. “We first address the child, the child has a time-out, the child has a time-out in another classroom – if that’s not working the principal or assistant principal will come and speak with the child.” (FLI11) She then described a student who routinely growled at her throughout the day had recently thrown an item at her. She felt complete support by the principal as the child was removed from the classroom and the principal called the family. In summarizing the support from the

administrators, Ms. Lavender stated, “If I said I needed help with someone being in on a parent conference, I would have it at the drop of a hat.” (FLI13)

Once again, Ms. Lavender expressed her appreciation for the support of the guidance counselor. She also stated that the school’s resource team was supportive in assisting kindergarten teachers with teaching of personal and social skills. The staff development opportunities that Ms. Lavender described related to students’ learning styles and instructional strategies for teaching to the different styles of learning.

*Ms. Red*

Ms. Red is the principal of Hedke Elementary School. The school serves a diverse student population from many different cultures and backgrounds. This includes a high percentage of English language learners. Ms. Red described the teaching staff as not being as diverse, culturally, as the student population. The staff is fairly stable and very hard working.

Ms. Red described some of the qualities, characteristics, and abilities that she observed in successful kindergarten students. In her description she shared mainly about personal and social skills possessed by these students.

Certain faces come to mind when I look at who the successful students are. I see students with an ability to listen, an ability to sit still for a certain amount of time, and an ability to focus and pay attention. These students realize that the adult is really the authority figure and take an interest in learning. It’s the rapport that they build and that the teacher builds with them that brings out all of the excitement and interest in learning. (HRI3)

Ms. Red stressed the importance of students having “all of those touchy, feely emotional pieces.” (HRI4) Her list of important skills included students learning to use the correct tone of voice when interacting with others and to know when to stop teasing others.

Students who are lacking in having the necessary personal and social skills to be successful in kindergarten were described by Ms. Red as not being able to listen, appropriately interact with others, and not able to communicate by asking questions.

These students are starved for attention because they don’t get it. They have learned inappropriate ways of interacting with each other – like being a bully. They don’t know a lot of typical stories that children hear at this point and time. They are uneducated in this area but are very educated as far as video games and what they listen to. They are educated worldly. (HRI4)

She also reported that a deficit in personal and social skills had a negative impact on students' academic achievement. She described a particular student who always had to be isolated from the group during times that the class gathered on the classroom rug for instruction due to the fact that he could not interact appropriately with his classmates. She stated that his lack of social interaction skills was manifested in his poor behaviors. These included invading the personal space of others, touching others, and being easily distracted. "He is not at all engaged or interested in what is happening and that directly impacts his learning." (HRI8)

When asked if certain sub-groups of students were more at-risk of not having the necessary personal and social skills, Ms. Red reflected for a moment. She provided a response that indicated that at-risk students may have many different variables contributing to their at-risk status. She expressed concerns indicating that male students being more at-risk for personal and social skill deficits. She reported that students who had an incarcerated parent were at-risk and those who were living with a foster family may be more at-risk for lacking in personal and social skills. She also expressed concerns for students whose families were transient. "One mom told me that her record in one place was sixty days. We get some children who come in for a month and then are gone. I think that impacts their social skills and readiness skills." (HRI19)

Kindergarten teachers working with students who do not have the necessary personal and social skills need to have a wide variety of skills and attributes, according to Ms. Red. She explained that a kindergarten teacher must be able to plan for a change in activities approximately every five minutes lessons need to include physical activities. She shared that kindergarten teachers must be consistent and learn to use fewer words. She stated that kindergarten teachers need to have high expectations while understanding that the at-risk factors contributing to the students' deficits may not change. She summarized the important attributes of a kindergarten teacher by stating the following. "I will tell you, it does make a difference when the teacher has a positive outlook on life in general. With a positive outlook on life, anything is possible." (FIR6)

Working with students who do not have personal and social skills impacts the role of the principal, according to Ms. Red. She expressed her role being impacted in the three categories (a) working with the children; (b) working with the teachers; and (c) working with the parents.

Ms. Red explained that her role with these students often falls under the area of discipline. She stated that the aspects of disciplining students did not bother her. If students



remained at Hedke for all of their elementary years they would know the Hedke way. She reported there were rare times that she had to suspend kindergarten students from school but that it did happen. Ms. Red explained that she did not feel that suspension solved anything.

During the next portion of the interview, Ms. Red was asked to describe students who were lacking in each of the five specific personal and social skills described in Virginia's Foundation Blocks for Early Learning. She was asked what teachers and administrators did to support these students in gaining these necessary skills. Ms Red was prompted to think of specific case scenarios in order to better answer each of the questions presented to her.

When asked about students who do not possess a strong self-concept Ms. Red thought for a few moments as she pictured a particular student in her mind and then replied, "I've got an idea of who my little child is." (HRI11). She proceeded to describe a youngster who had difficulty maintaining eye contact, who often would not communicate or answer questions, and who was docile in nature. Ms. Red shared how she supported the mother and the child by reinforcing with the mother that he is a good child. "I have met with his mom and she has cried a lot in my office because she does not know what to do with him. I remind her that he is a good boy." (HRI11) In addition to conferencing with the mother one-on-one, Ms. Red assisted in placing the student on a behavior plan and guided the teacher in helping the student to experience the feeling of success and accomplishment.

It is important to make the tasks easier and more accomplishable by him so that he can experience success. This takes talking through with the teacher that he is not a bad kid. He hasn't had what it is that he needs. And asking the teacher, what else you can do for him. (HRI12)

When asked about students lacking in self-control and social problem solving skills, Ms. Red described a student who came from a very disadvantaged home environment and came to school without exposure to toys, writing utensils, or structured group situations. The student she described used physical confrontation to resolve conflict and would attempt to run away from the learning environment. Ms. Red shared that she had to take a very active role in assisting this student, partly because the teacher did not have the skills to successfully work with the student in this area. Ms. Red reported assisting with the development of an intense behavior plan for the student. The behavior plan included one-on-one time with a variety of staff members including time in Ms. Red's office each day when she would read to him or he would complete work.

Ms. Red shared frustration with not always being successful with meeting the personal and social skill needs of students.

The frustration is we have children with such great need. We have 15 – 17 children in the classroom but there are not enough hands to go around because there are so many needs in the classroom. We are blessed with a lot of resources but I still believe we don't have enough resources. If we had additional pairs of hands, they could be in working with some of these children in small groups, which is what they need. (HRI15)

Ms. Red was asked to share about working with students who do not have skills in the area of approaches to learning. At this point during the interview, Ms. Red got out her notebook of class roles so that she could better picture a student in her mind that was lacking in this skill area. She described a student who consistently gives up on learning, is not curious about learning, is not interested in the opportunities provided, but wants to do what he wants to do. She stated that the student becomes resistant when redirected and belligerent to the point of refusing to move when asked. "This is definitely impacting his learning progress as well as his progress of interacting with the other children in the classroom." (HRI13) Ms. Red states that the teacher communicates well with the student's parents about his behaviors but has not been supported by them. The teacher, as reported by Ms. Red, provides a great deal of support and guidance to this student by using positive talk, redirecting, and maintaining high expectations for the student's behaviors. In addition, the teacher provided the student with a variety of opportunities for learning in the classroom with a variety of classmates and peer helpers.

Ms. Red was asked to share about working with students who do not have appropriate skills to effectively interact with others. She quickly thought of a student who is dishonest with other students and tries to bully them. "His poor interaction with others really does impact his behavior. He does not want to follow the teacher's directions. He wants to disrupt the other students in class." (HRI12) Interventions for this student have included working with the teacher to challenge the student, redirecting his behaviors, and being consistent with an individualized behavior plan. She reported that the student's behavior had become so severe that they are pursuing having a special education evaluation completed on him in the near future.

The questions of how kindergarten teachers know what forms of remediation to provide for students lacking in personal and social skills and what personal and social skill benchmarks do teachers use to assess students' progress were presented to Ms. Red. Ms. Red referred to the

work habits and conduct component on the school division's report card and the school division's code of conduct as being the benchmarks teachers would use for assessment. She provided the researcher with a copy of both documents. When discussing how teachers know what forms of remediation to provide for students she explained that it often depended on the teacher's level of teaching experience. "For some teachers it's very frustrating, it does not come naturally. Some of them have been doing this long enough and they should know how to do it but they still need the encouragement to write a behavior intervention plan." (HRI9) Ms. Red shared that she, the assistant principal, and the guidance counselor often worked closely with teachers in the development of the individual behavior plans.

Ms. Red shared some specific ways in which teachers provided instruction for the purpose of developing students' personal and social skills. Teachers use circle time as an opportunity to integrate teaching personal and social skills by practicing turn taking, raising your hand, using your manners, staying in your own personal space, and working in the group. Teachers also promote the development of self-concept by having a student of the day or student of the week who has the opportunity to bring in pictures that tell about themselves and their families. She also stated that the guidance counselor plays a large role in providing personal and social skill instruction by providing regular guidance lessons in the classroom.

When asked about how she informed parents about expectations for students' personal and social skills, Ms. Red replied, "I am much more of a personal person. I like them to come in. I like to see them. I am an old fashioned person and believe in face to face contact." (HRI17) She further explained how she enjoyed visiting with parents during a parent night held before school begins each year and described conversing with a parent while sitting on the front steps of the school.

The final interview prompts posed to Ms. Red dealt with what professional development had been provided for teachers in this area and how she specifically, as the principal, assisted and guided kindergarten teachers in building students' personal and social skills. She explained that she tried to help build teachers' understanding of the disadvantage environments that so many of Hedke's students come from. She mentioned that the staff had read a book together on the topic of understanding and working with children of poverty. "I want there to be a more focused understanding of teachers here that student's can't help it. They have not been given the opportunities and we need to provide them with those opportunities." (HRI15) In probing a

little deeper into the topic of professional development for kindergarten teachers in the area of personal and social skills, Ms. Red shared that no specific professional development had been offered for kindergarten teachers in this area.

Ms. Red shared that she best assisted kindergarten teachers by talking with them and helping them to better understand the students and families that they are working with each day. “We are lily white here. We can’t expect them to do and be as we were in kindergarten. They are not going to be the teacher pleasers that we were because we are all in elementary education.” (HRI18) Ms. Red first tries to facilitate conversations with teachers that encourage them to investigate what they can do to help the students even more. She also explained that she has to be directive with teachers at times and tell them exactly what they need to do such as contacting the parent, creating a behavior plan, or interacting appropriately with the student.

As we closed the interview, Ms. Red reflected on our discussion and with emotion in her voice and moisture in her eyes said, “As I am listening to you, I am thinking that we do not do enough. We do, do a lot.” (HRI19) The researcher’s field notes indicate that at the end of the interview Ms. Red appeared very reflective after discussing the topic of personal and social skill needs and stated that she felt they were not doing enough in this area. She began to question with the researcher what more could be done.

### *Ms. Orange*

The researcher’s field notes indicate that before the discussion began, Ms. Orange shared with the researcher that she had strong feelings on the topic of personal and social skill development as it pertained to school readiness and was very interested in this topic.

Ms. Orange described teaching kindergarten at Hedke Elementary as being challenging, busy, and rewarding. Ms. Orange reported getting to know her students on the first few day of school by having them draw a picture. She reported that she quickly assesses who can write their name and identify colors by this activity. Ms. Orange stated that she learns about students experiences prior to coming to kindergarten.

Ms. Orange described a successful kindergarten student as being a student who knew how to focus, to listen, and to attend. She also related the importance of the student’s parents having a clear understanding of the expectations of school. “Some parents say my child knows how to do that because they have been to preschool. The preschool or the day care setting is very different then the structured school setting. They might need an adjustment period here.” (HOI2)

Ms. Orange went on to clarify that she felt that the structure of the school setting was very different from preschool or day care.

Over the past ten years just the academics these kids are required to know in kindergarten now has changed totally. Unfortunately there is not a lot of time for socialization and learning those socialization skills. We do find it easier if they come in with some of those skills because we do have to start right away with academics. (HOI3)

Kindergarten students who were lacking in the necessary personal and social skills were described by Ms. Orange as often being students that are not use to being told “no” or are not use to having boundaries set for them. “They don’t understand the concept of having to raising your hand, waiting your turn, waiting patiently, or that they can’t just go willy nilly where they want to go.” (HOI4) She stated that it took some students until November or December to fully understand what they could and could not do in the classroom.

Ms. Orange did not identify any certain sub-group of students that were more at-risk for not possessing the necessary personal and social skills. She explained that she worked with children who were missing these skills from all different types of backgrounds, including those with a great deal of preschool experience and those without preschool experience.

“I just feel like we are on all day long. There is no down time in a kindergarten room.” (HOI7) These are the statements Ms. Orange used to describe working daily with students who do not possess personal and social skills. She further explained that she needed to be everywhere in the room and always listening to the students. She expressed the importance of holding students accountable for their behavior and that this was a constant demand on her as a teacher. Ms. Orange reported that it was very important for students to hear and see the right behaviors over and over again.

During the next portion of the interview, Ms. Orange was asked to describe students who were lacking in one of the five specific personal and social skills described in Virginia’s Foundation Blocks for Early Learning. She was asked what she did to support these students in gaining these necessary skills. Ms Orange was prompted to think of specific case scenarios in order to better answer each of the questions presented to her.

Ms. Orange told about a specific student who did not have a good self-concept. This student found school overwhelming and always had a look of fear on his face. The student responded to the teacher’s question by responding, I don’t know. Ms. Orange explained that

gradually she would not accept that answer as a response and would provide the student with additional thinking time before answering. She also reported providing his self-confidence by modeling appropriate responses for him and having him repeat them back to her. “He’s making the progress that he needs to make because he does have that confidence. It’s coming slowly but I can really see it now starting to perk up some.” (HOI12)

When asked about students lacking in self-control, Ms. Orange shared how she used the specific words, “you need to get your body under control” when redirecting students. She explained that it was important to teach students about boundaries and personal space. Remaining consistent with these students is a key for Ms. Orange as she teaches students self-control.

Using one sentence is very effective for me. You need to have a seat. You need to have a seat. They go back to their seat. I will not cave into what they wanted until they have done what I’ve asked them to do. Once they go back to their seat and raised their hand, I am all over it. What can I do for you? (HOI13)

Ms. Orange shared that she felt approaches to learning skills were an inherent skills for students. As a teacher she could not make a student proud of his work. She explained that she provided models of excellent work and praised students for accomplishing such work. She felt that kindergarten students needed constant encouragement and praise and reported that students got excited by hearing the encouragement and wanted to perform.

Ms. Orange shared about working with students who lack the skills to appropriately interact with others. She explained that she does a great deal of listening for inappropriate interactions and then models the appropriate interaction skills. The appropriate skills involve the use of manners, according to Ms. Orange. “We use manners. We say please and thank you. We apologize if we do something that’s not appropriate. That’s how I interact with them. It goes back to building that sense of community.” (HOI14)

One particular student Ms. Orange described as not having social-problem solving skills became very disruptive to the entire classroom environment. This student would crawl around on the floor, get under tables, bang on things, and often hurt himself. A technique she reported using to assist this student was working individually with him to try and make him as successful as possible. She shared that she provided him with as much praise as possible whenever he was successful. She explained that she tried to ignore the poor behaviors as much as possible but he

often had to be removed from the classroom by an administrator. Ms. Orange reported that regular classroom interventions were not successful and this student is receiving assistance in a special education classroom.

Ms. Orange stated that there was no real curriculum for teaching lessons that assist students with the development of personal and social skills. “I feel like it’s built into everyday lessons.” (HOI17) She shared about how she role plays with her students the right and the wrong way of doing something so that students can see why the wrong way is inappropriate. She referred to calendar time as being a particularly good time to implement the development of appropriate personal and social skills. During this time, she works with students on appropriate communication skills such as speaking in complete sentences and asking questions. Ms. Orange shared that the guidance counselor conducts the more formal lessons on personal and social skill development with her students twice a month. “I am kind of just flying by the seat of my pants. When I see it happen, it’s addressed. It’s not a formalized sit down lesson like the guidance counselor would do. (HOI18)

The questions of what personal and social skills should be taught to students and what personal and social skill benchmarks she uses to assess students’ progress were asked of Ms. Orange. She explained that this took place through a great deal of trial and error. “I start with a baseline of behaviors for the room and as new issues pop up we deal with those as they pop up.” (HOI6) Ms. Orange shared that she felt that kindergarten student behaviors were not always easy to predict and this made it challenging for the teacher to know how to respond ahead of time. The assessment benchmarks mentioned by Ms. Orange were the work habits and conduct section listed on the report card. However, she shared that there was not a formalized checklist of behaviors that teachers should be observing. “Unfortunately it is so much more academic now that we don’t have the time or the resources to do a check list like that and report back to the parents.” (HOI6)

When asked how she knew what forms of remediation to provide for students who did not possess personal and social skills, she stated that the key was to be craftier than the students and to be consistent with your expectations. She shared that she learned her skills and knowledge in this area from her mother during her upbringing. “If you do this, this will happen. I think there were consequences. You knew what was going to happen and you also knew it wasn’t the end of

the world.” (HOI9) Ms. Orange stated that she felt that teaching kindergarten was not for everybody and that some people could do it and some could not.

Ms. Orange reported informing parents about expectations for students’ personal and social skills through kindergarten open house, back to school night, through a behavior folder sent home to parents, and by the divisions’ code of conduct brochure. She also stated that she called parents when needed to report student misconduct. Ms. Orange shared that an important part of parent communication was to explain why the school had certain rules in order to protect the safety of the children.

Ms. Orange reported that the principal and assistant principal were very supportive of providing assistance with the development of students’ personal and social skills. She shared about inviting the principal in to speak with the entire class about specific inappropriate behaviors that needed to be corrected. She also shared about how the principal eats lunch, once a month, with two students from each classroom who have demonstrated outstanding behaviors. This was described as a big deal for kindergarten students and an effective way to draw positive attention to appropriate models of behavior. Ms. Orange commented about how well the administrators knew the students and could address each student by name. She shared how they provided individualized praise for students who may need the extra encouragement.

Ms. Orange could not remember being provided with any professional development opportunities for assisting kindergarten students with the development of personal and social skills. She shared that she gained ideas and knowledge from her colleagues as they met across grade levels to discuss behavior expectations.

The researcher’s field notes indicate that after the researcher stopped asking questions Ms. Orange shared that she felt kindergarten should be the place for students to learn personal and social skills instead of being required to learn so many academic skills.

#### *Ms. Blue*

Ms. Blue shared that it was both a unique and wonderful experience teaching kindergarten at Hedke Elementary School. She explained that teaching kindergarten was different each day and her goal was to inspire her students to love learning. During the first few months of kindergarten each year, Ms. Blue quickly observes the readiness level of her students including if they can speak English, listen to a story, use fine motor skills, and if they are self-confident and independent.



Ms. Blue shared that students who came to kindergarten and were most successful were the students that had good listening skills, could follow routines, had positive social interactions, and used good manners. Students that were not as successful when entering kindergarten were described by Ms. Blue as having poor social interactions and may be physical with their peers. Ms. Blue also shared concerns about students who did not have a dominate language that they spoke or read. She stated that these students seemed to have Spanish and English all mixed up in their heads.

Ms. Blue reported that students entering kindergarten needed to be able to sit and listen to a story, have self-control, be able to work well with peers, share, and not to constantly seek the teacher's attention. "I think if you have these basic skills, you will succeed." (HBI4) She reported that students who are lacking in personal and social skills have to be taught these skills before they can actually sit and learn.

Students must get the idea that I am here to learn. I am here to listen and to do what the others are doing. I am not here to just do my own thing. Because then, I think they are resistant to learning. When you conquer that then things go naturally. (HBI6)

Ms. Blue stated that disadvantaged students were more at-risk of not having personal and social skills along with English language learners who were from disadvantaged situations. She explained that many of these families were doing everything they could just to provide for their family and may not interact with their children as much.

Working with students who do not have personal and social skills is very tiring, according to Ms. Blue. She described the impact of needing to work with students on individualized behavior plans in order to develop their personal and social skills. "It's pretty tiring because you are trying to catch them doing the right thing and reward them." (HBI8) Ms. Blue shared that working with these students often impacts her content area instruction. She reported that sticking to the pacing guide for instruction was problematic due to the constant disruption that a student without certain personal and social skills can cause.

During the next portion of the interview, Ms. Blue was asked to describe students who were lacking in one of the five specific personal and social skills described in Virginia's Foundation Blocks for Early Learning. She was asked what she did to support these students in gaining these necessary skills. Ms Blue was prompted to think of specific case scenarios in order to better answer each of the questions presented to her.

Ms. Blue described a student who had a poor self-concept and was constantly seeking attention. “My heart went out to him. He had no confidence and felt different, like he didn’t belong. He felt like he was dumb and couldn’t learn.” (HBI10) In order to build his self-concept Ms. Blue reported focusing in on building specific behaviors through the use of a behavior plan rather than attempting to work on academics. She described a team approach that included support from administrators, guidance counselor, and the speech teacher.

When asked about students lacking in self-control, Ms. Blue stated that not having self-control skills can be a major road block, not only to that child’s learning, but to the learning of the other children in the classroom. “If a child’s causing a constant disruption, even if it’s just calling out, it’s taking up time.” (HBI4) Once again, Ms. Blue mentioned the use of a behavior plan to address the self-control skills of student with more severe problems in this area. She explained that the principal assists with the development of the plan.

When working with a student who does not have strong approaches to learning skills, Ms. Blue reported that she works to individualize instruction for the student by modifying the work or discovering an interest the student might have and building on that interest. “I get a sense for how I can hook you into something and build on that. I try to make it personal because those children really need motivation.” (HBI13)

Ms. Blue shared that working with students who did not interact with others because they were shy was not something new to her, since she herself was an extremely shy child. She described working with one of her students who refused to participate in classroom discussions. Ms. Blue worked to encourage this student and would even let the student whisper answers in her ear and then confirm with the student if it was the right answer. She worked to provide this student with opportunities to be right and avoided putting her on the spot.

Ms. Blue reported that when working with students who do not have social-problem solving skills it was important for her to enforce the classroom rules. She provided the researcher with a copy of her classroom rules. Ms. Blue also stated that a student’s lack of social-problem skills often caused her to seek assistance from the guidance counselor. The guidance counselor met with students one-on-one and in small groups to work on building these specific skills.

Lessons or activities that Ms. Blue reported as using for the purpose of developing students’ personal and social skills included reciting the rules, drawing the rules, and providing a positive reward system for students who were following the rules. The positive reward system

included providing treats for groups of students who had the most tally marks for appropriate behaviors.

When asked how she knew what personal and social skills should be taught to students and what personal and social skill benchmarks were used to assess students' progress, Ms. Blue stated, "I've been teaching so long. I don't have a formal observation thing. You just know. It's intuitive." (HBI7) She explained that she kept behavior notes on each student and referred to these when marking the student conduct area on the report card. When asked how she knew how to remediate for personal and social skill deficits, Ms. Blue referred to student behavior plans and seeking assistance from the guidance counselor.

Ms. Blue was asked to reflect on how she informed parents about expectations for students' personal and social skills. She stated that she sent home a letter containing the classroom rules. Also a daily behavior calendar was sent home to parents each day. Both of these documents were provided to the researcher. Ms. Blue also reported calling parents to seek their assistance. She described a particularly challenging incident when a student's home phone had been disconnected and she had sent notes home to the parents requesting a conference and would never receive a response from them. "I got a big piece of masking tape and put it over the child's coat and wrote, PLEASE CALL, and put the school phone number on it. It worked, they called me!" (HBI15) In other cases Ms. Blue reported needing to get the principal involved in gaining the support and assistance of parents.

In response to the question, what resources do you have available to you and how do administrators support you with students having problems with their personal and social skills, Ms. Blue quickly responded that the assistant principal and principal were always available to help. She pointed out that the administrators were always quick to assist when they noticed any student misbehaving. The principal was reported to assist with school wide expectations for behavior by holding grade-level meetings with students to discuss behavior expectations.

Ms. Blue could not recall any professional development being provided to assist kindergarten teachers with teaching students personal and social skills other than instruction on conflict resolution skills for students K-5.

As the interview came to a close, Ms. Blue began to share about her concerns for how kindergarten has changed over time and her feelings that there was no longer time for students to gain social skills.

“It’s a little scary to me that students are coming in and we are expecting them to hit the ground running with these letters. We are doing word families. Some of these kids have been home prior to kindergarten and have never been in a formal setting. You take our curriculum right now and it doesn’t allow for differences and similarities. I think we have jumped ahead with things.” (HBI20)

*Ms. Green*

Ms. Green reported that teaching kindergarten at Hedke Elementary was a new and exciting experience every year. She expressed excitement in discovering the unique personalities of her new kindergarten students each year and how the personalities shaped the dynamics of the classroom. In addition to getting to know students’ likes and dislikes during the first few months of school, Ms. Green shared that she gains an understanding of her students’ prior knowledge and the skills and abilities that they have acquired before coming to kindergarten. She reported being able to determine if students had been read to at home or had been in a formal, structured preschool environment.

A successful kindergarten student, as described by Ms. Green, enters kindergarten with the ability to share and take turns in a large group setting, is able to follow one- and two-step directions, is able to sit and focus, and is an active participant during instruction. The successful kindergartener also responds to adults and peers in an appropriate manner and follows the routines established in the classroom. Ms. Green also emphasized the importance of students being independent in the area of personal care tasks such as toileting needs and taking clothing on and off.

When asked about kindergarten students who did not enter kindergarten with the necessary personal and social skills to be successful, Ms. Green expressed that there was a disconnect for these students. “They tend to be less mature than their peers. Often they do not relate well with their peers, there is a disconnect there.” She stated that children who did not have any formal preschool experiences prior to kindergarten were the most at-risk for not possessing personal and social skills.

Ms. Green shared that teaching students who do not have personal and social skills is constant and challenging. She expressed that before formal learning can take place personal and social skills must be addressed.

I think when they walk in and everyone is all over the place, they have to learn the basic skills of how the classroom runs, what are the expectations, what are the rules, and how we are going to function as a group in a structured classroom setting. I think that the ground work really has to be laid and the time spent on that before you can even go to the next step of teaching formal academics. If you don't have that piece in check and that foundation set, I don't think you will have a productive learning environment. (HGI4)

Ms. Green shared that this is an ongoing process. There will always be certain students who need modifications and differentiation in the teaching of personal and social skills. She explained that she may have to find a specific strategy to use with an individual student who is not getting along with others. Perhaps this would be done as a mini-lesson with the class or one-on-one with the student. "I think that even if we don't have the Standards of Learning for personal and social, it is extremely important and we need to hit it down here, early on. (HGI4)

Instructional planning during the beginning of the school year is focused on getting the classroom environment to work as a well functioning machine, Ms. Green explained. She shared that development of students' personal and social skills is a natural part of each day during the first few months of school but that it continues to be a part of instruction as the year progresses; however, the instruction in this area may become more individualized as she determines the needs of students.

During the next portion of the interview, Ms. Green was asked to describe students who were lacking in one of the five specific personal and social skills described in Virginia's Foundation Blocks for Early Learning. She was asked what she did to support these students in gaining these necessary skills. Ms Green was prompted to think of specific case scenarios in order to better answer each of the questions presented to her.

Ms. Green described ways of supporting students who do not possess a strong self-concept by providing opportunities for them to get to know their classmates better, their school environment better, and the members of their school community better. She shared about a "Special Me" unit she teaches each year that assists students with becoming aware of themselves as an individual with special qualities. Through this unit students learn about characteristics that they may have in common with their classmates and how they are uniquely different from one another. Ms. Green also explained the importance of assigning classroom jobs to students in order to build their self-concept. "I find that giving students' classroom jobs and responsibilities

really is a good thing for them to gain some responsibility for the classroom environment. It is important for them to be a productive member of the classroom.” (HGI7)

Having self-control in a large group setting can be a challenge for some kindergarten students, explained Ms. Green. She reported that her students often struggle with self-regulating their emotions and for some individuals self-regulating their temper is especially challenging. To assist students with self-regulating their anger, Ms. Green shared that she teaches students how to count, sing the ABC song, or to squeeze play dough when they feel themselves getting angry. She also described the importance of providing students with an outlet for their anger that is acceptable and appropriate.

I offer a quiet place for them to go and decompress. I give them a moment to walk away and take a deep breath. You have to give them an opportunity to regroup themselves and get back into a frame of mind that they are actually going to hear you and what you are saying. I think at that point they have shut off. (HGI7)

Ms. Green shared that she worries about students who do not have skills in the area of approaches to learning. She stated that if students are not eager, excited, or curious about learning than most likely they would not be active participants in their own learning. She shared her concern that students like this may not grasp the concepts being taught because they would struggle with remaining focused and on task during instructional times. In providing support for students with these challenges, Ms. Green reported that she provided them with proximity seating so that the student would have a better chance of staying engaged. She also discussed how she worked to keep students engaged in learning through implementing a wide variety of experiences that included singing, movement, puppets, big books, and hands-on activities. “I do try to use specific strategies like pairing students with a peer and calling students up to help. Asking for student helpers always sparks their interest.” (HGI6)

When asked about working with students who lacked in their ability to interact well with others, Ms. Green told of a student who was very quiet and shy. She explained that this student would open up and speaks with certain students but would not talk much in a large group. Ms. Green stated that she did not push the student but called on the student whenever she raised her hand. This strategy was successful, according to Ms. Green, as the student became more comfortable in the large group setting and progressed throughout the year. Ms. Green shared

other techniques she used to help these students such as allowing them to work with a partner, work in a small group or one-one-one with the teacher.

Ms. Green shared that working with students without social-problem solving skills was relatively common in kindergarten. “I think at this age it is common to see kids being impulsive and reactive. They are quick to react and reflect latter. It’s hard for them to put the breaks on. That’s our job to teach them to stop” (HGI6) Ms. Green explained that after a student reacts inappropriately she walks the student through the decision making process the student used and discusses other choices the student could have made rather than reacting inappropriately. Ms. Green mentioned that an important part of this process is having the student apologize to anyone they reacted inappropriately towards.

Ms. Green shared that providing opportunities for students to interact with each other was important for the development of students’ personal and social skills. She reported that the use of student centers was a way this opportunity was provided each day. During center time students participate at designated areas in the room in activities such as legos, blocks, sand, play- dough, library, magnets, or puppets.

It’s a huge important piece for kindergarten students to work with others, to relate to their peers, to share and take turns, to creatively play and learn at the same time. I try to keep a balance of what needs to be accomplished academically and try to keep it developmentally appropriate and age appropriate as possible with movement and songs. (HGI10)

When asked how she knew what personal and social skills should be taught to students and what personal and social skill benchmarks were used to assess students’ progress, Ms. Green stated that personal and social skill development was not a part of their kindergarten curriculum. She shared that she gained knowledge in this area from experience. “Just from a lot of experience, prior knowledge, and reading on my part about what should be expected at this age for attention and personal and social skills with peers.” (HGI3) In determining what skills should be taught, Ms. Green reported that she focused on skills that were needed for students to be able to function in a large group setting such as following directions, working with different people, and working independently. She reported using observation to assess students’ personal and social skill development. Ms. Green shared that her knowledge about what forms of

remediation to provide to students lacking in personal and social skills came from her own experience and good judgment.

Ms. Green reported informing parents about expectations for students' personal and social skills at kindergarten orientation, back-to-school night, through a letter, and by daily behavior folders. She shared that she encourages parents to talk with children about poor behaviors and how they can make better choices. Ms. Green explained that sometimes she felt the support of parents and sometimes not. "I find that sometimes the students having the behavior issues are not getting support at home. I have to look at utilizing resources here and doing the most that we can here." (HGI10)

The guidance counselor is an excellent resource for students and teachers, according to Ms. Green. She commented that the guidance counselor is always available to assist and is only an e-mail away. The guidance counselor helps to brainstorm solutions and provides suggestions. Ms. Green also reported that the principal is always available to assist with challenging students and provides feedback for her. "The principal is always very supportive and always willing to discuss an issue that you may be having and will help you work out a solution to the problem." (HIG12)

Ms. Green did not report that any specific professional development had been provided in teaching kindergarten students personal and social skills but mentioned that this would be helpful. She shared that her strategies and techniques for teaching students personal and social skill development have been learned through her years of experience as a kindergarten teacher. Other resources she mentioned included workshops that she had taken outside of the school, reading, and through her colleagues.

The researcher's field notes indicate that Ms. Green was very pleasant and polite during the discussion, however; Ms. Green provided rather matter of fact answers to the researcher's questions resulting in a rather short interview.

### Document Review

The researcher collected documents pertaining to school readiness from each of the eight participants. Fifty-three documents were collected and analyzed by the researcher in order to provide for triangulation of the data. Hatch (2002) describes triangulation as the verification of information from other sources. Figure 6 displays the various types of documents submitted to the researcher by the eight participants.



<b>Division Level Documents</b>	<b>School Level Documents</b>	<b>Classroom Level Documents</b>
Vision and Mission Statement	School Wide Rules	Lesson Plans
Student Handbook	Agenda from Professional Development Meeting	Student Behavior Forms
Report Card	Positive Behavior Coupon	Classroom Management Plans
Kindergarten Parent Handbook	School Song	Book Lists for Personal and Social Skill Lessons
Classroom Guidance Brochure	School Newsletters	Behavior Chart
	Professional Development Feedback Sheet	Teacher Newsletters
		Parent Letters
		Classroom Rules

*Figure 6.* Types of documents reviewed by the researcher.

#### *Division Level Documents*

Division level documents reviewed included vision and mission statements, student handbooks, blank kindergarten report cards, a kindergarten parent handbook, and a classroom guidance brochure. Documents emphasized the importance of the entire community of school stakeholders working together to provide the best education possible for the students of the community. The importance of a safe and orderly learning environment was emphasized in the student handbooks and rules with possible consequences for breaking the rules were provided. Documents revealed teachers and principals were given the major responsibility for providing a safe learning environment through classroom management, enforcing rules consistently, providing interventions for student misconduct, and setting high expectations for student behavior. In one student handbook it was stated that students are entitled to a learning environment free from necessary disruptions, free from aggression, free from fighting, and free from unsafe student conduct. These expectations were echoed by many of the participants in this study.

One school division included an outline of guidance lessons that are provided to kindergarten through fifth-grade students by the school guidance counselor on the topic of

personal and social skill development. Kindergarten guidance lessons provided instruction in friendship skills, cooperation, responsibility for self, and consideration of others.

Both school divisions' kindergarten report cards included a section for teachers to evaluate students' work habits. Work habits evaluated included (a) follows directions; (b) follows school rules; (c) completes class work on time; (d) listens attentively; (e) participates in class activities; (d) uses time wisely; (e) works independently; (f) has developing organizational skills; (g) respects personal and school property; (h) cleans area after completing tasks; (i) controls talking; and (j) puts forth best effort. One kindergarten report card included a section for social and emotional development while the other division included a section for conduct. Although, these two sections had different titles the skills being evaluated overlapped and included (a) appears secure and confident; (b) respects authority; (c) respects the rights and property of others; (d) takes turns and shares the teacher's time; (e) cooperates; (f) demonstrates self-help skills; (g) practices self-control; (h) manages own behavior during transition time; (i) and works without disturbing others.

#### *School Level Documents*

School level documents reviewed included lists of school wide rules, a professional development meeting agenda, words from a school song, positive behavior reinforcement information, school newsletters, and a feedback sheet from a professional development event. Documents emphasized the importance of students following school rules. The rules focused on demonstrating respect for others and the learning environment. One school handed out positive behavior coupons to students who were caught displaying character qualities such as respect, kindness, initiative, manners, and patience. This school also had a school song that reinforced the personal and social skills of following rules, using manners, sharing with others, and demonstrating respect to others. Newsletters sent home by the principals of the schools emphasized the importance of students following school rules in order for a safe and orderly learning environment to be present in the classrooms and the school.

#### *Classroom Level Documents*

Classroom level documents reviewed included lesson plans, student behavior forms, classroom management plans, book lists, teacher newsletters, a behavior chart, letters to parents, and lists of classroom rules. Documents emphasized following classroom rules, development of

personal and social skills, and individualized instruction for students struggling with development of personal and social skills. Classroom rules included rules such as keeping hands and feet to one's self, following directions the first time given, taking turns to speak, and listening to others.

Lesson plans provided by two of the six teachers showed that lessons were taught containing specific personal and social skill objectives that were focused on topics such as sharing, making friends, being responsible, displaying good manners, cooperating with others, working as a team, and making good choices. Lesson plans included using instructional strategies such as reading stories on personal and social skills followed by discussion, illustrating the objective being taught, and role playing.

Four of the six teachers provided the researcher with examples of individualized behavior plans that provided parents with daily information on the status of students' behaviors. One individualized plan recorded the student's daily progress on refraining from physical aggression, using kind words, and following directions the first time given. The plan included positive reinforcement after students reached a predetermined goal.

Teacher newsletters to parents emphasized the importance of students following classroom rules and requested the parents support in assisting their students with these expectations. Newsletters provided parents with an outline of the classroom rules and asked parents to go over them with students.

### Concepts Reported by Research Question

The researcher used Lichtman's (2006) three-step data analysis: Coding to Categorizing to Concepts. Through the use of this process the researcher discovered that certain concepts that were derived from the data become prominent above all other data collected and analyzed. For the purpose of this study, a concept that was reported by four or more of the participants is referred to as a reoccurring concept and a concept that was reported by all eight of the participants is called a consensus concept. The following section reports these concepts to the reader and is organized by the four research questions guiding the study. Research questions one and two are linked with one another; therefore, the data from the first two research questions will be analyzed and reported together.

*Research Question #1: What are elementary principals' and kindergarten teachers' school readiness beliefs and expectations for students in the domain of personal and social skills?*

*Research Question #2: How well aligned are principals' and kindergarten teachers' school readiness beliefs and expectations for personal and social skills with Virginia's Foundation Blocks for Early Learning?*

The concepts regarding elementary principals' and kindergarten teachers' school readiness beliefs and expectations for students in the domain of personal and social skills are presented in this section. Analysis of the data to show how well aligned these beliefs and expectations are with Virginia's Foundation Blocks for personal and social skills are also included in this section. The Foundation Blocks include the five "Blocks" for personal and social development: (a) self-concept; (b) self-control; (c) approaches to learning; (d) interactions with others; and (e) social problem-solving (Virginia Department of Education, 2007b). Indicators are listed under each "Block" and include the specific skills needed for the development of that particular "Block" of personal and social skill development. Figure 7 displays the Foundation Blocks for personal and social development along with the participants who indicated through their discussion with the researcher that these were important skills for a successful kindergarten student to possess.

### *Self-Concept*

There are six indicators listed for the development of self-concept. Three of the six indicators for self-concept that were not reported as being an expectation or belief of the eight participants were (a) demonstrate knowledge of personal information including first and last name, gender, age, and birthday; (b) begin to recognize and express own emotions using words rather than actions; and (c) develop personal preferences regarding activities and materials. One participant reported that "demonstrating self-direction in use of materials" was an important skill. Three participants reported that "developing increased independence in school activities throughout the day" was important. The skill of "recognizing self as a unique individual and respecting the difference of others" emerged as a reoccurring concept. Four of the eight participants reported this skill as being important for kindergarten students to possess. Ms. Magenta implied that it was important for students to love themselves enough to want to do well

<b>Personal and Social Development Block</b>	<b>Magenta</b>	<b>Pink</b>	<b>Violet</b>	<b>Lavender</b>	<b>Red</b>	<b>Blue</b>	<b>Orange</b>	<b>Green</b>	<b>Documents</b>
<b>Self-Concept</b>									
Demonstrate knowledge of personal information including first and last name, gender, age, and birthday.									<b>X</b>
Begin to recognize and express own emotions using words rather than actions.									
Recognize self as a unique individual and respect the differences of others.	<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>				<b>X</b>
Develop personal preferences regarding activities and materials									
Demonstrate self-direction in use of materials.				<b>X</b>					
Develop increased independence in school activities throughout the day.	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>						<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
<b>Self-Control</b>									
Contributes ideas for classroom rules and routines.									
Follow rules and routines within the learning environment.	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
Use classroom materials purposefully and respectfully.									<b>X</b>

Figure 7. Participants' beliefs and expectations for personal and social skills aligned to foundation blocks.

(continued on next page)

<b>Personal and Social Development Block</b>	<b>Magenta</b>	<b>Pink</b>	<b>Violet</b>	<b>Lavender</b>	<b>Red</b>	<b>Blue</b>	<b>Orange</b>	<b>Green</b>	<b>Documents</b>
Manage transitions and adapt to changes in routine.		X		X					
Develop positive responses to challenges.		X							
<b>Approaches to Learning</b>									
Show interest and curiosity in learning new concepts and trying new activities and experiences.	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Demonstrate the ability to learn from experiences.		X							
Increase attention to a task or activity over time.	X			X	X	X	X	X	X
Seek and accept help when needed.		X							X
<b>Interaction with Others</b>									
Initiate and sustain interactions with other children.									
Demonstrate verbal strategies for making a new friend.		X	X						
Interact appropriately with other children and familiar adults by cooperating, helping, sharing, and expressing interest.	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X

Figure 7. (Continued)

(continued on next page)

<b>Personal and Social Development Block</b>	<b>Magenta</b>	<b>Pink</b>	<b>Violet</b>	<b>Lavender</b>	<b>Red</b>	<b>Blue</b>	<b>Orange</b>	<b>Green</b>	<b>Documents</b>
Participate successfully in group settings.			<b>X</b>						<b>X</b>
Demonstrate respectful and polite vocabulary.		<b>X</b>				<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>
Begin to recognize and respond to the needs, rights, and emotions of others.		<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>
<b>Social Problem-Solving</b>									
Express feelings through appropriate gestures, actions, and words.									
Recognize conflicts and seek possible solutions.	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>		<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>				<b>X</b>
Allow others to take turns.		<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>				<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
Increase the ability to share materials and toys with others over time.	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>				<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>
Include others in play activities.									

*Figure 7. (end of figure)*

and succeed. (FMI3) Ms. Violet stated, “If [students] don’t feel good about themselves they don’t feel they can do it. (FVI8) Ms. Lavender said, “Students not having a self-concept end up pouting or being angry.” (FLI16) Ms. Red described a student who was having difficulties in school because he did not view himself as being unique or special. (HRI1)

### *Self-Control*

There are five indicators listed for the development of self-control. Two of the five indicators for self-control were not reported as being an expectation or belief by any of the participants. They were (a) contributes ideas for classroom rules and routines; and (b) use classroom materials purposefully and respectfully. Two of the eight participants reported the indicator “manage transitions and adapt to changes in routines” as being an important skill. One participant stated that the indicator “develop positive responses to challenges” was an important skill.

A consensus concept emerged as all eight participants reported the need for kindergarten students to be able to follow rules and routines within the learning environment. Ms. Magenta stated that students needed to be able to follow the directions of the adults. (FMI2). Ms. Red described a student who was not being successful in kindergarten, “He wants to do what he wants to do, when he wants to do it and how he wants to do it.” (HRI12) Ms. Blue stressed the importance of students learning the classroom routines and doing what they are asked to do the first time they are asked. (HBI12-16) Ms. Violet stated that students need to learn to raise their hand to speak, learn safety rules, and learn how to walk down the hallways. (FVI13) Ms. Green summarized this indicator, “Part of [students] learning in school is learning how school works and how the classroom environment works.” (HGI12) Many of the documents (report cards, school and classroom rules, student handbooks, newsletters) reviewed by the researcher indicated the need for students to follow school rules and routines.

### *Approaches to Learning*

There are four indicators for the development of “approaches to learning” skills. All four indicators were mentioned as being important by at least one of the participants. One participant reported the indicator “demonstrate the ability to learn from experiences” as being an important personal and social skill for kindergarten students. One participant reported the indicator “seek and accept help when needed” as being an important skill.



The reoccurring concept of a student's ability to "increase attention to a task or activity over time" was reported as being important by six participants. Several of the participants referred to this skill as persistence. Ms. Lavender described persistence in students as having the endurance to keep trying. (FLI8) Ms. Magenta expressed her concern over trying to teach students the skill of persistence. "How do we get that persistence? It's just hard and they give up. In their home life [persistence] is not important, so give up, don't worry about it." (FMI1-2) Ms. Red described a struggling kindergarten student as being one who consistently gives up, becomes easily distracted, and wants to play." (HRI12-13) Ms. Orange explained her expectation for persistence at the beginning of the kindergarten year. "Obviously at the beginning of the year they don't have to attend for a thirty minute lesson but for ten minute blocks of time you want them to be able to focus and pay attention." (HOI2) The importance of students being persistent was also stated in several parent newsletters provided to the researcher.

Another reoccurring concept that emerged from the data was the need for students to show an interest and curiosity towards learning new concepts and trying new activities and experiences. Seven of the eight participants reported this skill as being important. Statements made by participants on this topic were brief and concise but clear that students needed to be motivated and excited about learning in order to be most successful in kindergarten. A summary of statements made by participants includes the following. "If they are not a risk taker it makes everything hard." (FPI4) "They need to have that motivation to want to learn." (FVI2) "If they are not eager, not curious, not excited about it [learning], they are not going to participate as an active learner." (HGI15) "Those who are not successful don't know what it is to learn and don't know why they come to school." (HRI3) "Those [at-risk] children really need motivation." (HBI3) Ms. Magenta summarized the challenge of working with large numbers of students without adequate "approaches to learning skills". "We have tons of children without the motivation piece, they shut down, and nothing motivates them." (FMI1)

### *Interaction with Others*

There are six indicators for the development of "interaction with others". The indicator "initiate and sustain interactions with others" was not reported as being a belief or expectation by any of the participants. Two participants reported the indicator of "demonstrate verbal strategies for making a new friend" as being important. Two participants reported the indicator of

“participate successfully in group settings” as being important. Three participants reported the indicator of “demonstrate respectful and polite vocabulary” as being an important skill.

The reoccurring concept of “recognize and respond to the needs, rights, and emotions of others” was reported as being important by five of the eight participants. Participants mentioned the importance of students using manners, a polite tone of voice, and being kind to each other. Ms. Orange explained the respectful expectations she has for students in her classroom. “I really expect [students] to use nice manners and nice words. I always say please and thank you and I expect them to do the same. I think that using manners is a good starting place for them.” (HOI4) Ms. Blue described similar attributes of successful kindergarten students. “Can they be nice to others? Are they considerate of other people?” (HBI12) Ms. Red emphasized that being successful in kindergarten requires “all of those touchy, feely, emotional pieces”. (HRI4) Documents reviewed by the researcher that verified the value of these skills included teacher lesson plans, a teacher’s newsletter, a positive recognition coupon, and a report card.

Another reoccurring concept reported by seven of the eight participants was “interacting appropriately with other children and adults by cooperating, helping, and getting along with classmates”. Ms Red summarized these skills with the following statement. “It’s the ability to get along with one another and to be a friend in the community and to interact in the community. It’s the rapport that they build and that the teacher builds with them that brings out all of the excitement and interest in learning.” (HRI3) According to Ms. Lavender the lack of having these skills impacts the learning environment negatively. “If you don’t interact well and spend most of your time arguing instead of working, it takes away from your learning and their [classmates] learning.” (FLI5) Ms Green reported that students who do not relate well with their peers often become disconnected to the learning environment. (HGI3) Ms. Violet shared how for students without the ability to interact with others struggle. “I feel like they are missing pieces. If they don’t get along with other children it’s hard for them to work as a team.” (FVI3)

### *Social Problem-Solving*

There are five indicators for the development of social problem-solving skills. Two of the five indicators for social problem-solving were not reported as an expectation or belief by any of the participants (a) express feelings through appropriate gestures, actions, and words; and (b) include others in play activities. The three remaining indicators for social problem-solving emerged as reoccurring concepts.

Four of the participants reported the need for students to be able to seek appropriate solutions to solve conflicts when they arise. Ms. Magenta described a student who would have a “melt down” when he was faced with a situation where he did not have the correct supplies to complete a task. She went on to explain how students without social-problem solving skills cannot handle problems. (FMI3) Ms. Pink shared about a student who would run out of the room when faced with a conflict or challenging situation. She explained how this type of student behavior put her as a teacher in a very difficult situation. She had to decide if she followed after the student or if she stayed in the room with the rest of her students (FPI9) Ms. Red described a student who did not have social problem-solving skills and how this student handled conflict in a physical manner. “When put in a structured setting he became very physical in resolving conflict.” (HRI4)

Four participants reported the importance of students allowing others to take turns. Five participants reported that the ability to share materials and toys was an important skill for kindergarten students to possess. Both of these indicators emerged as reoccurring concepts. Participants reflected on how sharing and taking turns were skills that impacted the classroom environment and student interactions. Ms Pink commented that the simple task of lining up to leave the classroom can become a burdensome procedure when certain students insist on being first in line. She mentioned that she had four students in her classroom who always argued over being first in line and who struggled with the concept of taking turns at being first in line. (FPI5) Ms. Red stated that a student has gained the skill of taking turns when he or she does not have to always be first in line. “To be able to hear someone say it’s not really important where you stand [in line]. We are all going to get where everybody else is going.” (HRI4) The importance of learning to share was reflected in several documents including a report card and a handbook for kindergarten parents.

#### *Skills Not Identified by Foundation Blocks*

The reoccurring concept of students being able to manage their anger in a safe and appropriate manner emerged from the data. This skill is not specifically listed as an indicator for any of the personal and social skill “Blocks”. Figure 8 displays the five participants that reported this skill as being important for kindergarten students to possess.

<b>Personal and Social Skill</b>	<b>Magenta</b>	<b>Pink</b>	<b>Violet</b>	<b>Lavender</b>	<b>Red</b>	<b>Blue</b>	<b>Orange</b>	<b>Green</b>	<b>Documents</b>
Manages anger in a safe and appropriate manner.	X		X	X	X		X		X

*Figure 8.* Participants' beliefs and expectations for student anger management skills.

Five of the participants shared concerns regarding students who could not control their anger and who displayed their anger in aggressive and harmful ways. Ms. Magenta stated that certain kindergarten students do not know how to control their anger. She described students who displayed their anger by throwing chairs or striking out. (FMI2-3) Ms. Violet shared about a student who recently got angry with her and threw a marker at her. (FVI7) Ms. Red described working with a student who was acting out by yelling, throwing crayons, pushing students and adults, and by cutting the cord on the computer. (HRI12) The five participants expressed concern for these students and how their anger impacted their learning and the learning of other students.

Two additional reoccurring concepts emerged from the data that are not listed under one of the personal and social "Blocks". They were (a) listen with an increasing attention to spoken language, conversations, and stories read aloud; and (b) use appropriate language for a variety of purposes, e.g., ask questions, express needs, get information. However, these indicators are included in Virginia's Foundation Blocks for Early Learning under the domain of literacy and oral expression (Virginia Department of Education, 2007a). Figure 9 displays the participants that reported these skills as being important for kindergarten students to possess.

Literacy Skills	Magenta	Pink	Violet	Lavender	Red	Blue	Orange	Green	Documents
Listen with an increasing attention to spoken language, conversations, and stories read aloud	X	X	X		X	X			X
Use appropriate language for a variety of purposes, e.g., ask questions, express needs, get information	X	X	X	X	X	X			X

*Figure 9.* Participants' beliefs and expectations for literacy/oral language.

Being a good listener was reported as an important skill for kindergarten students to possess by five of the eight participants. Participants stated that being able to listen, listening to the speaker, knowing how to listen, listening to a story, and being able to sit and listen were necessary skills for a successful kindergartner to possess. Ms. Violet commented that students lacking in personal and social skills came to kindergarten struggling with being good listeners. "They have a harder time because it's hard for them to sit and listen because they haven't done that before." (FVI3) Documents reviewed by the researcher indicated that being a good listener was important. Documents included a report card, a kindergarten handbook and lists of classroom rules.

Having the ability to communicate their needs and to ask questions to gain information was stated as being a necessary skill for kindergarten students to have by six of the participants. Ms. Magenta reported being concerned about students who cannot communicate effectively and how it impacts their behaviors. "They can't communicate and they are acting out in ways they wouldn't act out in other incidents." (FMI1) Ms. Lavender also reported similar concerns for students who are not successful communicators. "[Unsuccessful students are] children whose only means of communication is either fighting or crying. They are not successful in communicating what they want or need, at least acceptably" (FLI12) Ms. Red told about a student who had a difficult transition into kindergarten because he would not communicate. "He had a difficult time just answering questions. How are you today? What are you doing? Why are

you here? What are you learning?” (HRI11) Ms. Blue stated that students who could not speak English at all had difficulty communicating effectively in school. Ms Pink summarized the communication skills students need with the following phrases: “the ability to answer with relevant answers to questions, the ability to initiate conversations, the ability to ask for help, to be able to tell how they are going to dismiss for the day.” (FPI13-15)

*Research Question #3: What do kindergarten teachers report they are doing to guide and instruct students who enter kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills to be successful?*

The concepts that emerged from the discussions with participants provide insight into what kindergarten teachers and principals report teachers are doing to guide and instruct students who enter kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills to be successful. The researcher asked each participant to discuss a particular student who was lacking in one of the personal and social skill “Blocks” of (a) self-concept; (b) self-control; (c) approaches to learning; (d) interaction with others; and (e) social problem-solving. Next, the researcher asked participants to describe what they were doing to assist the student in developing that skill. After coding and categorizing the data according to each of the “Blocks”, there was one reoccurring concept that emerged to provide insight on what specific strategies or techniques participants were using to develop an individual “Block” for personal and social skill development. Four of the eight participants reported that seeking assistance from parents and providing assistance to parents was an important strategy for helping a child to develop a better self-concept. However when data from participants’ interviews were analyzed as a whole, the researcher discovered five concepts that emerged as being the most prevalent strategies and techniques teachers used to promote the development of over-all personal and social skill development. The five concepts that emerged included (a) being sensitive to the child’s needs; (b) engaging the students in learning; (c) providing consistency in classroom routines and classroom management; (d) individualizing instruction; and (e) seeking assistance from parents. This section reports each of these concepts as described by participants. Figure 10 displays the concepts that emerged from participants reporting what kindergarten teachers are doing to guide and instruct students who enter kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills to be successful.

Concepts	Magenta	Pink	Violet	Lavender	Red	Blue	Orange	Green	Documents
<b>Being Sensitive to the Child's Needs</b>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
<b>Engaging the Students in Learning</b>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Providing Consistency in Classroom Routines and Classroom Management</b>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X
<b>Individualizing Instruction</b>	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Seeking Assistance from Parents</b>	X		X	X	X	X	X	X	X

*Figure 10.* Strategies participants reported using to develop personal and social skills.

*Being Sensitive to the Child's Needs*

Being sensitive to the specific needs of the child while working to develop the child's personal and social skills emerged as a consensus concept as it was reported as being important by all eight participants. Ms. Red described a teacher who takes into consideration each child's needs and works to understand the environment the child comes from.

She is much more understanding of the needs of the children in her classroom and is more accepting. She understands that she cannot change what it is that happened to them already. But this is school, a safe place for the child to be, and this is what we are going to do to move forward. (HRI15-16)

Ms. Red further explained that as a principal she encourages teachers to always listen to the child's side of the story. (HRI17) Ms. Orange reported the importance of learning

specifically about the child's needs. "You have to figure out what makes them tick and what they want, what they don't like, and then work within those boundaries." (HOI8) She also pointed out the importance of praising students when they were successful. "I try to find something that that they have done [well] and tell them that I really like the way they did it." (HOI14) Ms. Pink stated that she "parents" her students and works to build a relationship of trust with them so they will be willing to try. "You have to give two positives for every negative or else they will just tune you out." (FPI9-10) Ms. Magenta reported that some teachers were sensitive to meet the needs of some students by attending their extracurricular activities to demonstrate support and encouragement for them.

### *Engaging the Students in Learning*

All eight of the participants reported that teachers were working to engage the students in learning in order to promote students' personal and social skill development. This emerged as a consensus concept. Participants reported this was being accomplished through a wide variety of activities such as role playing, reading and discussing stories on personal and social skill topics, and providing opportunities for students to work with partners and in small groups. Several of the participants explained how they used role playing to keep students engaged in learning the appropriate personal and social skills. Ms. Pink reported using role playing to teach manners and treating others with kindness. (FPI9) Ms. Blue, Ms. Orange, and Ms. Green all shared about how they used role playing to act out how to follow the classroom rules.

Ms. Green reported engaging students through diverse settings. "Giving them diverse types of settings where they are able to work with small groups, pairs, and one-on-one with the teacher." (HGI5) Ms. Green continued and explained that she assisted in building students' personal and social skills by providing students with daily time to interact socially with each other during an activity called "centers". "Centers are a really important part of the day. They enjoy centers such as home center, block center, computer center, sand center, puppets, or magnets." (HGI11)

Ms. Lavender described the importance of providing students with language and literature activities. "Have the classroom rich with language. I have literature everywhere. They don't have the option of just sitting and coloring in a worksheet." (FLI8) Ms. Lavender explained that providing this type of rich environment assisted those students who did not have persistence for learning. "Even the children who don't have persistence wander to something else



that is still positive and brings them back to learning.” (FLI8) Ms. Blue also shared the importance of keeping students engaged through making learning fun. “You can open the world for them. If you can make it easier or more fun, you can catch them back into learning.” (HBI12)

### *Providing Consistency in Classroom Routines and Classroom Management*

A reoccurring concept reported by seven of the eight participants was that teachers were providing consistency in classroom routines and in classroom management practices. Ms. Lavender provided the researcher with a detailed written description of the classroom management system she implements in her classroom and discussed how important this system is to the success of student behaviors. “I use this [behavior system chart] all through the year. We refer to it all the time. I send it home [to parents] at the beginning of the year with a newsletter explaining it.” (FLI1/19) The information provided by Ms. Lavender described the goals for student behavior as being responsible, dependable, and self-disciplined. The teacher’s role is to encourage students to reflect on the choices they make by asking them reflective questions and reminding students of what behaviors are expected of them. Ms. Red described a behavior management system being used by teachers that involves rewards and consequences for behaviors. She also reported the importance of teachers’ setting high expectations for students. “I ask them [teachers] to use the grown up terms when explaining what is acceptable behavior and what is not and why it is not [acceptable].” (HRI9) Ms. Blue reported the importance of enforcing the rules. “If their having problems, we talk about it. I enforce the rules. We will recite the rules.” (HBI7) Ms. Orange also shared the importance of classroom rules. “By November or December everyone is kind of on the same page - knowing what they can do and what they can’t do and what the consequences are. I don’t leave anything for them to guess.” (HOI5-6) Ms. Violet stated “All year long we talk about the rules and how you need to behave.” (FVI4) Ms. Magenta shared the importance for consistency when implementing any type of behavior modification plan. “[Teachers] must be consistent. Consistency is the rule for those plans.” (FMI10) Participants provided the researcher with copies of classroom rules and classroom management plans that indicated plans were in place for teachers to provide consistent routines and reinforcement of the classroom rules.

### *Individualizing Instruction*

A reoccurring concept reported by seven of the eight participants was that teachers were individualizing instruction in order to meet the personal and social skill needs of kindergarten students. Several of the participants shared how this individualization was accomplished through an individualized behavior plan for specific students who benefited from such a plan. Ms. Magenta stated, “Every classroom has children you work with on a behavior plan. You set them up with a behavior plan to help them be successful.” (FMI3-5) Ms. Violet shared that she received assistance in writing the behavior plans. “The guidance counselor has helped in setting up plans for them.” (FVI11) Ms. Lavender explained that she individualizes personal and social skill instruction by implementing behavior sheets for students who need them. “The children who have extreme difficulties, I have behavior sheets that go home daily. I write down the specific behavior and the consequence or the behavior and the reward.” (FLI4) Ms. Blue described the individualized plan as a behavior intervention plan and explained that it can be tiring for a teacher to implement such plans. “I’ve had children with separate intervention plans. It’s pretty tiring because you’re trying to catch them doing the right thing so you can reward it.” (HBI7-8) Ms. Green shared that she will also work with students one-on-one to provide remediation. “Some students need even more remediation and we pull them to do role playing or read them a separate story or look to work on that skill.” (HGI5)

### *Seeking Assistance from Parents*

The reoccurring concept of seeking assistance from the parents of children who were lacking in the necessary personal and social skills was reported as being used by seven of the eight participants. Participants reported they were especially focused on using this strategy when a student had a poor self-concept. Ms. Violet described her communication with parents when seeking assistance from them. “I feel like it’s easy to call them and say what can we do together to help. Maybe there is something at home that works for you that I can try here.” (FVI12) Ms. Pink explained that at times when a child is misbehaving at school she has the student call the parent. “Sometimes I have the child talk to the parents during school.” (FPI12) Ms. Orange reported requesting parents’ assistance with students’ behaviors. “I keep in contact with my parents. I’m not afraid to call them or send a note home. These are the behaviors I’m seeing. Do you see these behaviors at home?” (HOI16) Ms. Magenta shared that teachers are willing to

conduct home visits in order to communicate with parents and seek their assistance. “I have teachers who do home visits. I have a kindergarten teacher going out to a home on conference day.” (FMI8/11)

*Research Question #4: What administrative support systems are available to teachers for assisting them as they guide and instruct students who enter kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills?*

Five concepts emerged from the discussions with participants regarding what administrative support systems are available to teachers for assisting them as they guide and instruct kindergarten students who enter kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills. These concepts include (a) available and assessable administrators; (b) principal provides guidance and direction for teachers; (c) principal serves as a bridge between the school and home; (d) guidance counselor provides support and assistance; and (e) principal provides school wide behavior expectations. These five concepts are discussed in this section and displayed in Figure 11.

#### *Available and Accessible Administrators*

The consensus concept that administrators were easily accessible and available was reported by all eight participants. Administrators were often reported as being called upon at a moments' notice to assist with student behavior. This was often reported being done through the use of a two-way radio. Ms. Pink explained this practice. “I notice that listening to the two-way radio, if a teacher needs assistance someone is going to come. It could be the guidance counselor or assistant principal. An administrator always has the radio on.” (FPI31-32) Ms. Pink further reported the benefits of administrators having an open-door policy. “The easiest thing is their open door policy. If I think they are busy I will e-mail and set up a time or I'll ask if they have a minute.” (FPI33) Ms. Lavender also shared that having access to the administration or the guidance counselor through the two-way radio was a big support. (FLI11) Ms. Magenta verified that as a principal she is often contacted for assistance via two-way radio. “I get called down a lot. The radio is always going off.” (FMI5) Ms. Blue reported that the administrators were always available to assist her. “The assistant principal and principal are always available to help.

Concepts	Magenta	Pink	Violet	Lavender	Red	Blue	Orange	Green	Documents
Available and Accessible Administrators	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
Principal Provides Guidance and Direction	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	
Principal Serves as a Bridge Between the School and Home	X	X		X	X			X	X
Guidance Counselor Provides Support and Assistance	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Principal Provides School wide Behavior Expectations	X	X		X		X		X	X

Figure 11. Administrative supports available for teachers as reported by participants.

If I ask, the principal will come in the classroom to assist also.” (HBI18) Ms. Orange explained how having the principal address a behavior problem in the classroom could make a difference. “If there is a problem the principal will come in and address it. Sometimes they can listen to me say it, but hearing it from her is like hearing it from the great beyond.” (HOI19) Ms. Green also reported on the availability of the principal. “She is always available if I’m having difficulty with students in different areas.” (HGI11)

#### *Principal Provides Guidance and Direction*

The reoccurring concept that the principal provides guidance and direction for teachers in assisting students in developing personal and social skills was reported by seven of the eight participants. Ms. Magenta explained her assistance to teachers. “I encourage and help them if they need help. We brainstorm together.” (FMI16) Ms. Red shared similar ways that she assisted teachers. “I think a lot of what I do is sitting and talking with them. Facilitate for them what they can do to help. A lot of it is conversation.” (HRI18) Ms. Pink reported the principal providing

assistance to her. “I’ve gone to the principal and said this is what has happened what do you think? I can say this is what I’ve tried and it’s not working.” (FPI22-23) Ms. Lavender shared about a challenging time she was having with a group of kindergarten students and the importance of the support the principal provided for her. “I know that the principal gave me a lot of support and had a lot of people checking in with me to help out.” (FLI13) Ms. Green summarized how she feels about the principal’s assistance and guidance. “The principal is always very supportive. She is always willing to discuss any issue that you may be having. She will help you work out a solution to the problem and will give you ideas to improve those skill areas.” (HGI12)

### *Principal Serves as a Bridge Between the Home and the School*

The reoccurring concept that the principal served as a bridge between the home and the school was reported by five of the eight participants. Ms. Lavender described how the principal assisted her during difficult parent conferences. “If I said I need help with someone being in on this conference, I would have it at the drop of a hat.” (FLI13) Ms. Blue shared that when progress comes to a stand-still with a student’s poor behaviors the principal will get involved. “If nothing is getting solved - the principal gets involved.” (HBI15) Ms. Red confirmed her involvement and commitment to assisting teachers with parents as needed. “I work with parents very closely. I do sit in on some of the more difficult conferences.” (HRI17-18) Ms. Magenta explained that she works to bring parents into the school for social activities and parent education events. “We had a fitness night. Tonight is movie night for the families. We have a parent education workshop and we offer free babysitting.” (FMI14) School newsletters provided by the principals indicated that principals communicated with parents frequently and solicited parent assistance and input.

### *Guidance Counselor Provides Support and Assistance*

A consensus concept was that the school guidance counselors provide support to participants by assisting teachers with personal and social skill instruction. This was reported as being important by all eight participants. The guidance counselor serves under the supervision and direction of the school principal and is not a classroom teacher, therefore; for the purpose of this study, guidance counselors will be considered an administrative support provided to teachers. The guidance counselor’s assistance and support was described in many different ways

by participants. Ms. Magenta explained the counselor's role. "The counselor goes into the classrooms and does lessons and also has small groups to try and close the gap that they [students] have socially." (FMI5) Ms. Lavender described a conflict resolution program that the counselor teaches to students in her classroom. "The guidance program on conflict resolution fits with all [students] and certainly works here." (FVI6) Ms. Red stated that the guidance counselor also conducts lessons in each kindergarten classroom. (HRI10) Ms. Blue reported on specific topics of the guidance lessons conducted in the classroom. "Our guidance counselor comes in and teaches lessons on character, friendship, anger management, and study skills." (HBI17) Ms. Green shared that the guidance counselor is always available to her and is of great assistance. "I think the guidance counselor is really good about pulling students we are having issues with on certain skills. She will pull them as a small group and work with them. She is always open to brainstorming with us and problem solving." (HGI11) A guidance brochure outlining guidance services was provided to the researcher. This brochure described the individual, small group, and classroom lessons provided to students through the guidance counselor. The majority of the services offered by the guidance counselor, as described in this brochure, were related to the development of students' personal and social skills.

#### *Principal Provides School wide Behavior Expectations*

The reoccurring concept that the principal provided school wide behavior expectations for students was reported by five of the eight participants. Ms. Pink stated that the principal presented these expectations to parents during an orientation meeting at the start of the school year. (FPI19) She noted the importance of having school wide rules at Foley, "The children have the same expectations wherever they go, especially from a grown-up." (FPI26) Ms. Lavendar described a positive reinforcement plan promoted by the principal and used in the school's cafeteria to promote common cafeteria behaviors. (FLI13) At Hedke, several of the participants described how Ms. Red conducted town meetings with students to go over school rules and the division's code of conduct.

#### *Unanticipated Findings*

A semi-structured interview process was used by the researcher for gathering data. Since the questions used during the participants' interviews were relatively open-ended around the topic of personal and social skill development for kindergarten students, participants had the

opportunity to share a wide variety of their thoughts and feelings about kindergarten instruction and students' personal and social skill development. The researcher also had the opportunity to provide additional prompts and probes to gain a better understanding from participants about the fascinating field of school readiness. As a result of these open-ended discussions with participants, seven unanticipated concepts emerged from the researchers' data analysis. The following unanticipated concepts emerged and will be discussed in this section (a) lack of professional development for teaching personal and social skills; (b) disruption of the learning environment by certain students without social and personal skills; (c) Foundation Blocks and kindergarten Standards of Learning are not used as benchmarks; (d) preschool experiences impact students' personal and social skill development; (e) focus of kindergarten has changed from social to academic; (d) disadvantaged students are more at-risk; and (e) communication with parents regarding personal and social skills. Figure 12 displays the participants' responses for these unanticipated findings.

#### *Professional Development for Teaching Personal and Social Skills*

Professional development specifically focused on assisting kindergarten teachers to promote students' development of personal and social skills was not reported as being provided by the school or school division by seven of the eight participants, making this a reoccurring concept. Ms. Magenta described professional development that was provided to teachers that focused on students' learning styles and how to place students in cooperative groups for instruction. (FMI15) Both Ms. Magenta and Ms. Red mentioned providing books to staff members on the topic of poverty and how to assist students coming from impoverished backgrounds. (FMI15/HRI15). However, when Ms. Red was asked what professional development had been provided to kindergarten teachers in the area of personal and social skill development she shared, with emotion in voice and moisture in her eyes, the following "Nothing, I don't know. When I'm listening to you I'm thinking we don't do enough. We do, do a lot." (HRI19) Ms. Blue and Ms. Orange reported not being provided with professional development targeted at assisting kindergarten teachers with students' social and personal skill development. (HBI18/HOI19)

Teacher participants described how they learned techniques and strategies for working to develop students' personal and social skills. Ms. Lavender, Ms. Pink, Ms. Blue, and Ms. Green shared that they gained these techniques and strategies through years of experience in working

Concepts	Magenta	Pink	Violet	Lavender	Red	Blue	Orange	Green
<b>Lack of Professional Development for Teaching Personal and Social Skills</b>		X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Disruption of Learning Environment by Certain Students Without Personal and Social Skills</b>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Foundation Blocks and Kindergarten Standards of Learning Not Used as Benchmarks</b>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
<b>Preschool Experiences Impact Students' Personal and Social Skill Development</b>	X		X		X	X	X	X
<b>Focus of Kindergarten has Changed from Social to Academic</b>	X		X	X		X	X	
<b>Disadvantaged Students are More At-Risk</b>	X		X	X		X		
<b>Communication with Parents Regarding Personal and Social Skills</b>	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

Figure 12. Participants' responses for concepts that emerged as unanticipated findings.

with kindergarten students. (FPI34/FLI3/HBI7/HGI3) Ms. Violet shared that she diligently seeks her own professional development opportunities in this area. "I'm trying to find conferences to go to. I'm always reading books and reading online to find new strategies." Ms.



Orange shared that she most likely learned her skills for teaching personal and social skills from her own mother. “It’s probably how my mother was. It came from my mom. My mom had four kids in four years. There was not a lot of free for all in out house.” (HOI9)

*Disruption of Learning Environment by Certain Students without Personal and Social Skills*

The consensus concept of how disruptive certain students without personal and social skills can be to the learning environment was reported by all eight participants. Ms. Magenta described that one student was so disruptive that it took 90 minutes of her time to calm the student down. (FMI5) “It’s amazing how one [student] can stir up everything,” reported Ms. Red. (HBI8) Ms. Pink shared that one student may often cause the entire lesson to come to a halt. (FPI16) Ms. Violet reported that a students’ lack of personal and social skills may affect the pacing of instruction for the entire class. “When you have a child with lack of social skills and they are having difficulty that day you may not get in everything you want to get in that day.” (FVI2) Ms. Lavender reported avoiding certain instructional activities based on the personal and social skill level of her students. “It impacts who they can work with, who they can be paired with and the activities that can be done in the class. There are activities that I won’t do in my class this year that other teachers do - based on our children.” (FLI6-7) Ms. Blue described how certain students lacking in self-control can disrupt instruction. “A lot of children have a lack of self-control. That’s a major road block to their learning and everybody else’s learning. If I’m consumed with chasing a child around the room, it’s their learning time that is getting wasted.” (HBI4) Ms. Orange shared about a student who could scream for long periods of time. “The other kids were afraid of him. He was loud and could be throwing things and that could make them nervous.” (HOI10)

*Foundation Blocks and Kindergarten Standards of Learning are Not Used as Benchmarks*

A consensus concept emerged from the data when none of the participants reported using either the Foundation Blocks or the kindergarten History and Social Science Standards of Learning for personal and social skill benchmarks or assessments. Instead, participants reported using a variety of other benchmarks for personal and social skill development or none at all. Ms. Magenta shared that the focus was more on academic benchmarks and assessments rather than personal and social skill benchmarks and assessments. (FMI7) Ms. Red shared the following regarding benchmarks for personal and social skills. “We have our code of conduct and our

school rules. I guess those would be the benchmarks. I would say the report card. I don't think we have any other benchmarks." (HRI18-19) Ms. Orange reported that there was not a formal checklist of behaviors that she had been shown. (HOI6) Ms. Blue reported using the conduct area on the kindergarten report card for benchmarks and assessments. (HBI7) Ms. Green explained her viewpoint on formalized personal and social skill benchmarks and assessments. "It's interesting because it's not normally a part of our curriculum. I think that we don't have the SOL for social. It is extremely important. We need to hit it down here, early on." (HGI4)

#### *Preschool Experiences Impact Students' Personal and Social Skill Development*

The reoccurring concept of students' prior experiences before entering kindergarten impacting their personal and social skill development emerged from the data. Six of the eight participants reported that quality preschool experiences were important to assisting students in the development of personal and social development skills. Ms. Violet stated that many students who have been to preschool know how to sit. (FVI1) Ms. Red reported that the quality of the day care setting that students have been placed in prior to coming to school made a big difference in the students' skills. (HRI4) Ms. Blue expressed concern about students who have not attended preschool, day care, nursery school, or Head Start as being behind in their personal and social skills. (HBI20) Ms. Orange reported that she could easily tell which students had been in a preschool setting and which had not. (HOI1)

#### *Focus of Kindergarten has Changed from Social to Academic*

The reoccurring concept of kindergarten not being the same as it was many years ago because the focus of kindergarten has become more academic than social was reported by five participants. Ms. Magenta reported, "Kindergarten is not what it used to be. They now have big accountability issues like the reading and writing aspect." (FMI4) Ms. Violet stated, "Kindergarten use to be that they would come in and get those social skills. If they knew their letters that was great." (FVI10) Ms. Lavender shared that teaching kindergarten has gotten to be more stressful due to what is expected of students academically. (FLI2) Ms. Blue reported that when she started teaching first graders twenty-two years ago she was teaching them what she is now teaching to her kindergarten students. "Kindergarten then was they came in and got socialized." (FBI19) Ms. Orange explained, "Over the past ten years just the academics that these kids are required to know in kindergarten has totally changed." (HOI3)

### *Disadvantaged Students are More At-Risk*

The reoccurring concept that disadvantaged students were more at risk for not having the necessary personal and social skills was reported by four participants. One additional participant, shared that students who were in a foster home, had a parent incarcerated, or whose family was transient were more at risk of not having personal and social skills. Ms. Lavender explained the reasons she felt disadvantaged students were most at-risk. “The children that come from poverty generally don’t have the supervision, at least not to the same degree, and they don’t get that communication. They don’t have conversations at dinner telling about their day and what they did.” (FLI3)

### *Communication with Parents Regarding Personal and Social Skills*

Communicating with parents regarding the expectations for students’ personal and social skills was a consensus concept as all eight participants reported communicating with parents. The manner in which the participants communicated with parents differed among the eight participants. Ms. Magenta shared that she explains expectations for student behavior during a kindergarten orientation presentation. (FMI14) Ms. Pink reported sending parents a newsletter that included expectations for students’ behaviors. She provided the researcher with a copy of the newsletter. She also reported sending behavior notes to parents if students misbehaved. (FLI20) Ms. Lavender reported sending parents a copy of her classroom management chart and also provided the researcher with a copy of this chart. (FLI9) Ms. Violet explained that she spoke with parents regarding expectations for students’ behaviors during kindergarten open house. (FVI12) Ms. Red explained that she preferred to speak with parents in person about expectations for student behaviors and mentioned a parent event for kindergarten parents at the beginning of the school year. (HRI17) Ms. Blue, Ms. Green, and Ms. Orange all reported sending parents a grade-level newsletter that outlined expectations for student behaviors along with daily behavior folders. (HBI5/HBI16/HGI9)

### *Summary of Research Findings*

This section provides a brief summary of the research findings that were reported as reoccurring or consensus concepts. Figure 12 displays the five Foundation Blocks for personal and social skills with the 26 indicators listed. In addition, three skills that are not listed as personal and social skills within the Foundation Blocks but emerged as concepts are displayed.

Figure 13 shows that seventeen of the indicators for personal and social skill development did not emerge as consensus or reoccurring concepts. Nine of the 26 indicators for personal and social skill development emerged as concepts in this research study. Of the nine concepts, only the indicator “Follow rules and routines within the learning environment” emerged as a consensus concept. The following eight indicators emerged as reoccurring concepts (a) recognize self as a unique individual and respect differences of others; (b) show interest and curiosity in learning new concepts and trying new activities and experiences; (c) increase attention to a task or activity over time; (d) interact appropriately with other children and familiar adults by cooperating, helping, sharing, and expressing interest; (e) begin to recognize and respond to the needs, rights, and emotions of others; (f) recognize conflicts and seek possible solutions; (g) allow others to take turns; and (h) increase the ability to share materials and toys with others over time.

Figure 13 shows that the skill “Manages anger in a safe and appropriate manner” emerged as reoccurring concept even though this skill is not on the list of personal and social skill indicators included within the Foundation Blocks. Figure 13 also shows that two skills listed within the Foundation Blocks for oral expression/literacy emerged as reoccurring concepts. Participants reported that these skills were important for kindergarten students’ personal and social skill development. The oral expression/literacy concepts include the following (a) listen with an increasing attention to spoken language, conversations, and stories read aloud; and (b) use appropriate language for a variety of purposes, e.g., ask questions, express needs, get information.

<b>Personal and Social Development Block</b>	<b>Identified as Belief/Expectation by Participants (Consensus or Reoccurring Concept)</b>
<b>Self-Concept</b>	
Demonstrate knowledge of personal information including first and last name, gender, age, and birthday.	
Begin to recognize and express own emotions using words rather than actions.	
Recognize self as a unique individual and respect the differences of others.	Reoccurring Concept
Develop personal preferences regarding activities and materials	
Demonstrate self-direction in use of materials.	
Develop increased independence in school activities throughout the day.	
<b>Self-Control</b>	
Contributes ideas for classroom rules and routines.	
Follow rules and routines within the learning environment.	Consensus Concept
Use classroom materials purposefully and respectfully.	
Manage transitions and adapt to changes in routine.	
Develop positive responses to challenges.	
<b>Approaches to Learning</b>	
Show interest and curiosity in learning new concepts and trying new activities and experiences.	Reoccurring Concept
Demonstrate the ability to learn from experiences.	
Increase attention to a task or activity over time.	Reoccurring Concept
Seek and accept help when needed.	

*Figure 13.* Concepts for participants' beliefs and expectations for student's personal/social skills.

(continued on next page)

<b>Personal and Social Development Block</b>	<b>Identified as Belief/Expectation by Participants (Consensus or Reoccurring Concept)</b>
<b>Interaction with Others</b>	
Initiate and sustain interactions with other children.	
Demonstrate verbal strategies for making a new friend.	
Interact appropriately with other children and familiar adults by cooperating, helping, sharing, and expressing interest.	Reoccurring Concept
Participate successfully in group settings.	
Demonstrate respectful and polite vocabulary.	
Begin to recognize and respond to the needs, rights, and emotions of others.	Reoccurring Concept
<b>Social Problem-Solving</b>	
Express feelings through appropriate gestures, actions, and words.	
Recognize conflicts and seek possible solutions.	Reoccurring Concept
Allow others to take turns.	Reoccurring Concept
Increase the ability to share materials and toys with others over time.	Reoccurring Concept
Include others in play activities.	
<b>Skill Not Listed in Foundation Blocks</b>	
Manages anger in a safe and appropriate manner.	Reoccurring Concept
<b>Skills Listed as Oral Expression/Literacy Skills in Foundation Blocks</b>	
Listen with an increasing attention to spoken language, conversations, and stories read aloud.	Reoccurring Concept
Use appropriate language for a variety of purposes, e.g., ask questions, express needs, get information.	Reoccurring Concept

*Figure 13. (end of figure)*

Figure 14 displays the concepts that emerged from the data regarding how teachers guide and instruct students who enter kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills to

be successful. Figure 14 also displays the concepts that emerged from the data for what administrative supports are available to teachers for assisting them as they guide and instruct students who enter kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills.

Five concepts emerged as participants reported what teachers are doing to assist students in developing personal and social skills. The teacher practices of “being sensitive to the child’s needs” and “engaging the students in learning” emerged as consensus concepts. The teacher practices of (a) providing consistency in the classroom routines and classroom management; (b) individualizing instruction; and (c) seeking assistance from parents all emerged as reoccurring concepts.

Five concepts emerged as participants reported what administrative support systems are available to teachers as they work with students who do not have adequate personal and social skills. The administrative supports of “available and assessable administrators” and “guidance counselor provides support and assistance” emerged as consensus concepts. The administrative support systems of the (a) principal provides guidance and direction; (b) principal serves as a

<b>How Teachers Guide and Instruct Students in Personal/Social Skills</b>	<b>Consensus or Reoccurring Concept</b>
Being Sensitive to the Child’s Needs	Reoccurring Concept
Engaging the Students in Learning	Consensus Concept
Providing Consistency in Classroom Routines and Classroom Management	Reoccurring Concept
Individualizing Instruction	Reoccurring Concept
Seeking Assistance from Parents	Consensus Concept
<b>What Administrative Support Systems are Available to Teachers</b>	
Available and Assessable Administrators	Consensus Concept
Principal Provides Guidance and Direction	Reoccurring Concept
Principal Serves as a Bridge Between the School and Home	Reoccurring Concept
Guidance Counselor Provides Support and Assistance	Consensus Concept
Principal Provides School wide Behavior Expectations	Reoccurring Concept

*Figure 14.* Concepts for teacher practices and administrative supports.

counselor provides support and assistance” emerged as consensus concepts. The administrative support systems of the (a) principal provides guidance and direction; (b) principal serves as a bridge between the school and home; and (c) principal provides school wide behavior expectations emerged as reoccurring concepts.

Figure 15 displays seven concepts that emerged from the data that were unanticipated since they did not relate directly to one of the four primary research questions of the study. The following concepts are consensus concepts (a) lack of professional development for the teaching of personal and social skills; (b) disruption of learning environment by certain students without personal and social skills; (c) Foundation Blocks and kindergarten Standards of Learning are not used as benchmarks; and (d) participants communicate with parents regarding personal and social skills. The following unanticipated concepts emerged as reoccurring concepts (a) preschool experiences impact students’ personal and social skill development; (b) focus of kindergarten has changed from social to academic; and (c) disadvantaged students are more at risk.

<b>Unanticipated Concepts</b>	<b>Consensus or Reoccurring Concept</b>
Lack of Professional Development for the Teaching of Personal and Social Skills	Consensus Concept
Disruption of Learning Environment by Certain Students Without Personal and Social Skills	Consensus Concept
Foundation Blocks and Kindergarten Standards of Learning Not Used as Benchmarks	Consensus Concept
Preschool Experiences Impact Students’ Personal and Social Skill Development	Reoccurring Concept
Focus of Kindergarten has Changed from Social to Academic	Reoccurring Concept
Disadvantaged Students are Most At-Risk	Reoccurring Concept
Communication with Parents Regarding Personal and Social Skills	Consensus Concept

*Figure 15.* Concepts that emerged and are unanticipated findings.



### Summary

This chapter has provided the data from interviews conducted with the eight participants, from the official documents reviewed and from the insights obtained from the researcher's field notes. The researcher discovered that certain concepts became prominent above all other data collected and analyzed. Concepts were shared according to the primary research questions that guided the study. Additional data for findings that were unanticipated by the researcher were also explored. In the concluding chapter the researcher will report the findings of the study, provide implications for practice and recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION, FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE, AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This qualitative study has four primary purposes 1) to gain an understanding of the value and importance elementary principals and kindergarten teachers place on kindergarten students' personal and social school readiness skills, 2) to gain an understanding of how the principals' and teachers' values regarding personal and social skills align to the Foundation Blocks for Early Learning, 3) to explore how kindergarten teachers guide and instruct students who enter kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills needed for success, and 4) to explore what administrative support systems are available to teachers for assisting them as they guide and instruct students who enter kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills.

Through this study the researcher provides the reader with an in depth look into the phenomenon of students entering kindergarten without the necessary social and personal skills that they need to be successful in kindergarten and how this phenomenon impacts the school setting including the administrative support systems and classroom instructional practices. The reader is able to view the phenomenon through the rich descriptions provided by the researcher as he interacts with principals and kindergarten teachers who experience the phenomenon on a regular basis.

Data for this study were collected from interviews conducted with two elementary principals and six kindergarten teachers, from the researchers' field notes, and from review of official documents such as lesson plans, blank report cards, and newsletters collected from the participants. A summary and discussion for each of the research findings as they relate to the four primary research question are included in this chapter. Implications for practice are included and recommendations for future research complete the chapter. The researcher has provided an epilogue to summarize his own reflections after completion of the study.

#### Discussion and Findings

The discussion of the findings is set in the context of the four primary research questions with research questions one and two combined as they are aligned to one another and best discussed together. After determining what participants' beliefs and expectations were for

kindergarten students' personal and social skills, a revised version of the Foundation Blocks: Personal and Social Development was created by the researcher based on the findings of this study. A total of 33 findings are discussed in this section.

*Research Question #1: What are elementary principals' and kindergarten teachers' school readiness beliefs and expectations for students in the domain of personal and social skills?*

*Research Question #2: How well aligned are principals' and kindergarten teachers' school readiness beliefs and expectations for personal and social skills with Virginia's Foundation Blocks for Early Learning?*

### *Findings: Self-Concept*

*Finding #1.* Kindergarten students' ability to recognize themselves as unique individuals while respecting differences of others emerged as a reoccurring concept for the development of self-concept. Both principals and two of the six teachers reported that it is important for successful kindergarten students to be able to recognize themselves as unique individuals and respect the differences of others. This concept is consistent with the Foundation Blocks as a skill for the development of self-concept.

Ms. Magenta implied that it was important for students to love themselves enough to want to do well and succeed. (FMI3) Ms. Violet stated, "If [students] don't feel good about themselves they don't feel they can do it." (FVI8) Ms. Lavender said, "Students not having a self-concept end up pouting or being angry." (FLI16)

As documented by participants' statements, it is important for students to love themselves enough to want to do well and to succeed. This occurs when students have a healthy respect for themselves and the unique talents and skills they possess while also respecting the unique abilities and differences of other students. The National Educational Goals Panel (Kagan, Moore, & Bredekamp, 1995) includes the domain of social development and includes the skill of "respecting the rights of others" as an important aspect of school readiness.

*Finding #2.* Elementary principals' and kindergarten teachers' school readiness beliefs and expectations for students in the domain of personal and social development did not emphasize the following skills: a) demonstrate knowledge of personal information including first and last name, gender, age, and birthday; b) begin to recognize and express own emotions using words rather than actions; c) develop personal preferences regarding activities and materials; d)

demonstrate self-direction in use of materials; and e) develop increased independence in school activities throughout the day. These skills represent five out of the six skills listed by the Foundation Blocks for the development of self-concept and did not emerge as reoccurring or consensus concepts in this study. This finding was not identified in the literature review completed in this study.

### *Findings: Self-Control*

*Finding #3.* Kindergarten students must have the ability to follow rules and routines within the learning environment in order to be successful. All participants expressed this belief so it emerged as a consensus concept. This concept is consistent with the Foundation Blocks as a skill for the development of self-control.

Ms. Blue stressed the importance of students learning the classroom routines and doing what they are asked to do the first time they are asked. (HBI12-16) Ms. Violet stated that students need to learn to raise their hand to speak, learn safety rules, and learn how to walk down the hallways. (FVI13) Ms. Green summarized this concept, “Part of [students] learning in school is learning how school works and how the classroom environment works.” (HGI12) Many of the documents (report cards, school and classroom rules, student handbooks, newsletters) reviewed by the researcher indicated the need for students to follow school rules and routines.

Huey-Lin, Lawrence, and Gorrell (2003) and Heaviside and Farris (1993) found that kindergarten teachers stressed the importance of kindergarten students being able to follow directions in order to be successful in kindergarten. Wesley and Buyssee (2003) discovered that elementary principals also emphasized the importance of kindergarten students being able to follow simple rules and directions in order to be successful in school.

*Finding #4.* Elementary principals’ and kindergarten teachers’ school readiness beliefs and expectations for students in the domain of personal and social skills did not emphasize the following skills: a) contributes ideas for classroom rules and routines; b) use classroom materials purposefully and respectfully; c) manage transitions and adapt to change; and d) develop positive responses to challenges. These skills represent four of the five skills listed by the Foundation Blocks for the development of self-control and did not emerge as reoccurring or consensus concepts in this study. This finding was not identified as an issue in literature review conducted in this study.

*Findings: Approaches to Learning*

*Finding #5.* Kindergarten students' ability to show interest and curiosity in learning new concepts and trying new activities and experiences in order to be successful in kindergarten emerged as a reoccurring concept. Both principals and five out of the six teachers reported that successful kindergarten students showed interest and curiosity in learning new concepts and trying new activities and experiences. This concept is consistent with the Foundation Blocks as a skill for the development of "approaches to learning."

A summary of statements made by participants on the reoccurring concept of showing interest and curiosity includes the following. "If they are not a risk taker it makes everything hard." (FPI4) "They need to have that motivation to want to learn." (FVI2) "If they are not eager, not curious, not excited about it [learning], they are not going to participate as an active learner." (HGI15) "Those who are not successful don't know what it is to learn and don't know why they come to school." (HRI3) "Those [at-risk] children really need motivation." (HBI3) Ms. Magenta summarized the challenge of working with large numbers of students without adequate "approaches to learning skills". "We have tons of children without the motivation piece, they shut down, and nothing motivates them." (FMI1)

Huey-Lin, Lawrence, and Gorrell (2003) and Heaviside and Farris (1993) also found that kindergarten teachers rated the skill of "being enthusiastic and curious with new activities" as being very important or essential to a kindergarten student's success.

*Finding #6.* Kindergarten students' ability to be able to pay attention to a task or activity over time emerged as a reoccurring concept for success in kindergarten. Both principals and four out of the six teachers reported that it is important for successful kindergarten students to be able increase attention to a task or activity over time. This concept is consistent with the Foundation Blocks as a skill for the development of "approaches to learning."

Several of the participants referred to the skill as persistence. Ms. Lavender described persistence in students as having the endurance to keep trying. (FLI8) Ms. Magenta expressed her concern over trying to teach students the skill of persistence. "How do we get that persistence? It's just hard and they give up. In their home life [persistence] is not important, so give up, don't worry about it." (FMI1-2) Ms. Red described a struggling kindergarten student as being one who consistently gives up, becomes easily distracted, and wants to play." (HRI12-13)

Denton and et al., (2000) reported that most kindergarten students had the skill of persistence and often or very often displayed the skill. Huey-Lin, Lawrence, and Gorrell (2003) and Heaviside and Farris (1993) found that kindergarten teachers rated the skill of “finishing a task” as being very important or essential to a kindergarten student’s success.

*Finding #7.* Elementary principals’ and kindergarten teachers’ school readiness beliefs and expectations for students did not emphasize the following skills: a) demonstrate the ability to learn from experiences; and b) seek and accept help when needed. These skills represent two of the four skills listed by the Foundation Blocks for the development of “approaches to learning” and did not emerge as reoccurring or consensus concepts in this study. This finding was not identified in the literature review completed in this study.

*Findings: Interaction with Others*

*Finding #8.* Kindergarten students’ ability to interact appropriately with other children and familiar adults by cooperating, helping, sharing, and expressing interest emerged as a reoccurring concept for success in kindergarten. Both principals and five out of the six teachers reported it is important for successful kindergarten students to be able to interact appropriately with other children and familiar adults by cooperating, helping, sharing, and expressing interest. This concept is consistent with the Foundation Blocks as a skill for the development of interaction with others.

Ms. Red summarized this concept with the following statement. “It’s the ability to get along with one another and to be a friend in the community and to interact in the community. It’s the rapport that they build and that the teacher builds with them that brings out all of the excitement and interest in learning.” (HRI3) According to Ms. Lavender the lack of having these skills impacts the learning environment negatively. “If you don’t interact well and spend most of your time arguing instead of working, it takes away from your learning and their [classmates] learning.” (FLI5) Ms Green reported that students who do not relate well with their peers often become disconnected to the learning environment. (HGI3)

Ladd, Herald, and Kochel (2006) discovered that students who actively initiated and participated in social interactions with classmates and teachers during the first few months of kindergarten adjusted well to the social environment of the kindergarten classroom. Ladd, Birch, and Buhs (1999) found a relationship between the students’ level of classroom participation and their achievement in kindergarten. Students with higher levels of classroom participation had

higher levels of achievement. They found that having friends, gaining peer acceptance, and having a positive teacher relationship were the best predictors of the students' classroom participation

*Finding #9.* Kindergarten students' ability to begin to recognize and respond to the needs, rights, and emotions of others emerged as a reoccurring concept for success in kindergarten. One principal and four out of the six teachers reported that successful kindergarten students begin to recognize and respond to the needs, rights, and emotions of others. This concept is consistent with the Foundation Blocks as a skill for the development of "interaction with others".

Participants mentioned the importance of students using manners, a polite tone of voice, and being kind to each other. Ms. Orange explained the respectful expectations she has for students in her classroom. "I really expect [students] to use nice manners and nice words. I always say please and thank you and I expect them to do the same. I think that using manners is a good starting place for them." (HOI4) Ms. Blue described similar attributes of successful kindergarten students. "Can they be nice to others? Are they considerate of other people?" (HBI12) Documents reviewed by the researcher that verified the value of these skills included teacher lesson plans, a teacher's newsletter, a positive recognition coupon, and a report card.

Huey-Lin, Lawrence, and Gorrell (2003) and Heaviside and Farris (1993) found that kindergarten teachers rated the skill of "being sensitive to other children's feelings" as being very important or essential to a kindergarten student's success.

*Finding # 10.* Elementary principals' and kindergarten teachers' school readiness beliefs and expectations for students did not emphasize the following skills: a) initiate and sustain interactions with other children; b) demonstrate verbal strategies for making a new friend; c) participate successfully in group settings; and d) demonstrate respectful and polite vocabulary. These skills represent four of the six skills listed by the Foundation Blocks for the development of "interaction with others" and did not emerge as reoccurring or consensus concepts in this study. This finding was not identified in the study's literature review.

#### *Findings: Social Problem-Solving*

*Finding #11.* Kindergarten students' ability to recognize conflicts and seek possible solutions emerged as a reoccurring concept for success in kindergarten. Both principals and two of the six teachers believe it is important for successful kindergarten students to be able to

recognize conflicts and seek possible solutions. This concept is consistent with the Foundation Blocks as a skill for the development of social problem-solving skills.

Participants expressed concern regarding students who could not seek appropriate concerns to conflicts. Ms. Magenta described a student who would have a “melt down” when he was faced with a situation where he did not have the correct supplies to complete a task. She went on to explain how students without social-problem solving skills cannot handle problems. (FMI3) Ms. Pink shared about a student who would run out of the room when faced with a conflict or challenging situation. She explained how this type of student behavior put her as a teacher in a very difficult situation. She had to decide if she followed after the student or if she stayed in the room with the rest of her students (FPI9) Ms. Red described a student who did not have social problem-solving skills and how this student handled conflict in a physical manner. “When put in a structured setting he became very physical in resolving conflict.” (HRI4)

Huey-Lin, Lawrence, and Gorrell (2003) and Heaviside and Farris (1993) found that kindergarten teachers rated “having good problem solving skills” as being very important or essential to a kindergarten student’s success.

*Finding #12.* Kindergarten students’ ability to allow others to take turns and to share emerged as a reoccurring concept for success in kindergarten. One principal and four out of the six teachers reported it is important for successful kindergarten students to be able to allow others to take turns and to share. This concept is consistent with the Foundation Blocks as a skill for the development of social problem-solving skills.

Ms Pink commented that the simple task of lining up to leave the classroom can become a burdensome procedure when certain students insist on being first in line. She mentioned that she had four students in her classroom who always argued over being first in line and who struggled with the concept of taking turns at being first in line. (FPI5) Ms. Red stated that a student has gained the skill of taking turns when he or she does not have to always be first in line. “To be able to hear someone say it’s not really important where you stand [in line]. We are all going to get where everybody else is going.” (HRI4) The importance of learning to share was reflected in several documents including a report card and a handbook for kindergarten parents.

Huey-Lin, Lawrence, and Gorrell (2003) and Heaviside and Farris (1993) found that kindergarten teachers rated taking turns and sharing as very important or essential to a kindergarten student’s success.



*Finding #13.* Elementary principals' and kindergarten teachers' school readiness beliefs and expectations for students did not emphasize the following skills: a) express feelings through appropriate gestures, actions, and words; and b) include others in play activities. These skills represent two of the five skills listed by the Foundation Blocks for the development of social problem-solving and did not emerge as reoccurring or consensus concepts in this study. This finding was not identified in the study's literature review.

*Findings: Additions to Personal and Social Development Foundation Blocks*

*Finding #14.* Kindergarten students' ability to manage their anger in a safe and appropriate manner emerged as a reoccurring concept for success in kindergarten. Both principals and three out of the six teachers reported it is important for successful kindergarten students to be able to manage their anger in a safe and appropriate manner. Although this skill is not included under any of the Foundation Blocks for personal and social development, one could argue that this skill should be added as necessary for the development of self-control.

Participants shared concerns regarding students who could not control their anger and who displayed their anger in aggressive and harmful ways. Participants described students who displayed their anger by throwing chairs, striking out, hitting the teacher, or destroying school property. Concern was expressed for these students and how their anger impacted their learning and the learning of other students in the learning environment. Ms. Violet shared about a student who recently got angry with her and threw a marker at her. (FVI7) Ms. Red described working with a student who was acting out by yelling, throwing crayons, pushing students and adults, and by cutting the cord on the computer. (HRI12)

The Virginia Department of Education reports that a child who has developed self-control will show self-direction and responsibility. The child can manage transitions successfully and follow classroom routines and rules (Virginia Department of Education, 2007b). Students who can manage their anger in a safe and appropriate manner show signs of self-direction and the ability to follow classroom rules. This skill for the development of a student's self-control emerged from the data as a reoccurring concept and is not included on the list of Foundation Blocks as a skill for the development of self-control.

Bronson (2000) states that the development of students' emotional and behavioral control is related to social competence, to acceptance by peers, to school success, and to a student's future life adjustment.

*Finding #15.* Kindergarten students' ability to listen with an increasing attention to spoken language, conversations, and stories read aloud emerged as a reoccurring concept for success in kindergarten. Both principals and three out of the six teachers reported it is important for successful kindergarten students to be able to listen with an increasing attention to spoken language, conversations, and stories read aloud. Although this skill is not included as a Foundation Block for personal and social development, it is included as a skill under the Foundation Block for literacy - oral expression.

Participants reported that this skill was important to students' personal and social development. Ms. Violet commented that students lacking in personal and social skills came to kindergarten struggling with being good listeners. "They have a harder time because it's hard for them to sit and listen because they haven't done that before." (FVI3) Documents reviewed by the researcher indicated that being a good listener was important. Documents included a report card, a kindergarten handbook and lists of classroom rules.

The ability to listen with an increasing attention to spoken language, conversations, and stories read aloud may align with both the development of literacy - oral language skills and personal and social development skills. However, it could easily be listed with or linked to the development of students' "approaches to learning" as it aligns well with the existing skill of being able to increase attention to a task or activity over time.

Huey-Lin, Lawrence, and Gorrell (2003) and Heaviside and Farris (1993) found that kindergarten teachers rated the skill of "sitting still and paying attention" as being very important or essential to a kindergarten student's success.

*Finding #16.* Kindergarten students' ability to use appropriate language for a variety of purposes, e.g., ask questions, express needs, get information emerged as a reoccurring concept for success in kindergarten. Both principals and four out of the six teachers reported it is important for successful kindergarten students to be able to use appropriate language for a variety of purposes, e.g., ask questions, express needs, get information. Although this skill is not included as a Foundation Block for personal and social development, it is included as a skill under the Foundation Block for literacy - oral expression. This study found that participants reported that this skill was important to students' personal and social development. The ability to use appropriate language for a variety of purposes may align with both the development of literacy - oral language skills and personal and social development skills. However, it could

easily be included with or linked to the development of students' "approaches to learning" as it aligns well with the existing skill of being able to seek and accept help when needed.

Participants expressed concern regarding students who could not communicate effectively and reported that the lack of communication skills often negatively impacted their behaviors. Ms. Magenta reported being concerned about students who cannot communicate effectively and how it impacts their behaviors. "They can't communicate and they are acting out in ways they wouldn't act out in other incidents." (FMI1) Ms. Lavender also reported similar concerns for students who are not successful communicators. "[Unsuccessful students are] children whose only means of communication is either fighting or crying. They are not successful in communicating what they want or need, at least acceptably" (FLI12) Ms. Red told about a student who had a difficult transition into kindergarten because he would not communicate. "He had a difficult time just answering questions. How are you today? What are you doing? Why are you here? What are you learning?" (HRI11)

Huey-Lin, Lawrence, and Gorrell (2003) and Heaviside and Farris (1993) found that kindergarten teachers rated the skills of "communicating needs, thoughts, and wants in primary language" and "communicating needs and thoughts" as being very important or essential to a kindergarten student's success.

*Research Question #3: What do kindergarten teachers report they are doing to guide and instruct students who enter kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills to be successful?*

#### *Finding: Teacher Support Systems*

*Finding #17.* Being sensitive to an individual child's needs in order to promote the development of a student's personal and social skills emerged as a consensus concept. Both principals and all six teachers reported that this strategy was being used by kindergarten teachers to promote the development of students' personal and social skills.

Ms. Red described a teacher who takes into consideration each child's needs and works to understand the environment the child comes from.

She is much more understanding of the needs of the children in her classroom and is more accepting. She understands that she cannot change what it is that happened to them

already. But this is school, a safe place for the child to be, and this is what we are going to do to move forward. (HRI15-16)

Ms. Red further explained that as a principal she encourages teachers to always listen to the child's side of the story. (HRI17) Ms. Orange reported the importance of learning specifically about the child's needs. "You have to figure out what makes them tick and what they want, what they don't like, and then work within those boundaries." (HOI8)

Rimm-Kaufman, et al.(2005) found that students' behavior problems were less frequently observed in kindergarten classrooms where teachers' interactions with students included the teachers' sensitivity toward individual children.

*Finding #18.* Engaging students in learning as a way of promoting the development of students' personal and social skills emerged as a consensus concept. Both elementary principals and all six teachers reported the importance of teachers engaging students in learning in order to assist in the development of students' personal and social skills.

Participants reported this was being accomplished through a wide variety of activities such as role playing, reading and discussing stories on personal and social skill topics, filling the classroom with rich literature, providing learning centers filled with hands-on activities and providing opportunities for students to work with partners and in small groups. Ms. Green reported engaging students through diverse settings. "Giving them diverse types of settings where they are able to work with small groups, pairs, and one-on-one with the teacher." (HGI5) Ms. Lavender described the importance of providing students with language and literature activities. "Have the classroom rich with language. I have literature everywhere. They don't have the option of just sitting and coloring in a worksheet." (FLI8) Ms. Blue also shared the importance of keeping students engaged through making learning fun. "You can open the world for them. If you can make it easier or more fun, you can catch them back into learning." (HBI12)

Bronson (2000) explains that for students to increase independence and self-direction they need to be actively engaged in learning. Bronson (2000) states that students need many opportunities during their day to experience and attempt tasks that are challenging. The result of students being in classrooms that do not provide engagement for them may be students who are frustrated and do not view themselves as competent.

*Finding #19.* Providing consistency in classroom routines and using classroom management techniques to promote the development of students' personal and social skills emerged as a reoccurring concept. Both principals and five out of the six teachers reported the importance of providing consistency in classroom routines and using classroom management techniques to assist in the development of students' personal and social skills.

Participants emphasized the importance of consistently reinforcing classroom rules and being especially consistent in any type of behavior modification plans that were being implemented for individual students. Ms. Lavender provided the researcher with a detailed written description of the classroom management system she implements in her classroom and discussed how important this system is to the success of student behaviors. "I use this [behavior system chart] all through the year. We refer to it all the time. I send it home [to parents] at the beginning of the year with a newsletter explaining it." (FLI1/19) Ms. Magenta shared the importance for consistency when implementing any type of behavior modification plan. "[Teachers] must be consistent. Consistency is the rule for those plans." (FMI10) Participants provided the researcher with copies of classroom rules and classroom management plans that indicated plans were in place for teachers to provide consistent routines and reinforcement of the classroom rules.

Pianta, Cox, and Snow (2007) found that for students to see teachers as a resource to assist them in learning, teachers must provide consistent and responsive interactions with students and provide an environment for students to feel safe to explore and discover. Rimm-Kaufman, et al., (2005) also found that student's behavior problems were less frequently observed in kindergarten classrooms where teachers' interactions with the students included the teachers' use of proactive approaches to discipline and establishment of stable routines.

*Finding #20.* Using individualized instruction to meet students' needs and to promote the development of students' personal and social skills emerged as a reoccurring concept. Both principals and five out of the six teachers reported that teachers used individualized instruction to meet students' needs and to promote the development of students' personal and social skills.

Several of the participants shared how this individualization was accomplished through the creation of individualized behavior plans for specific students who benefited from such a plan. Ms. Magenta stated, "Every classroom has children you work with on a behavior plan. You set them up with a behavior plan to help them be successful." (FMI3-5) Ms. Lavender

explained that she individualizes personal and social skill instruction by implementing behavior sheets for students who need them. “The children who have extreme difficulties, I have behavior sheets that go home daily. I write down the specific behavior and the consequence or the behavior and the reward.” (FLI4) Ms. Green shared that she will also work with students one-on-one to provide remediation. “Some students need even more remediation and we pull them to do role playing or read them a separate story or look to work on that skill.” (HGI5)

Rimm-Kaufman, et al., (2005) found that students’ behavior problems were less frequently observed in kindergarten classrooms where teachers’ interactions with the students included the teachers’ use of individualized instruction to meet each child’s needs. Individualized instruction should be done in academic and personal and social skill areas.

*Finding #21.* Seeking assistance from the parents of their students in order to promote the development of a student’s personal and social skills emerged as a reoccurring concept. Both principals and four out of the six teachers reported that this strategy was being used to assist in the development of students’ personal and social skills.

Participants reported that they regularly communicated with parents regarding students’ personal and social skills and sought the assistance of parents whose children were struggling with the development of these skills. Ms. Violet described her communication with parents when seeking assistance from them. “I feel like it’s easy to call them and say what can we do together to help. Maybe there is something at home that works for you that I can try here.” (FVI12) Ms. Orange reported requesting parents’ assistance with students’ behaviors. “I keep in contact with my parents. I’m not afraid to call them or send a note home. These are the behaviors I’m seeing. Do you see these behaviors at home?” (HOI16) Ms. Magenta shared that teachers are willing to conduct home visits in order to communicate with parents and seek their assistance. “I have teachers who do home visits. I have a kindergarten teacher going out to a home on conference day.” (FMI8/11)

Webster-Stratton, Reid, and Hammond (2004) found that a parent and teacher partnership was very important to the successful development of a child’s personal and social skills. In their study they found the best strategies for improving a student’s severe behavior problems were to provide training for parents, teach specific social skills to the child, and provide training for the teacher to ensure a positive classroom environment. Final results of the study revealed that a combination of parent training with child training and teacher training may be the most effective

treatment for young children with severe classroom behavior disorders (Webster-Stratton & Reid, 2004).

*Research Question #4: What administrative support systems are available to teachers for assisting them as they guide and instruct students who enter kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills?*

*Findings: Administrative Supports*

*Finding #22.* School administrators being available and assessable to support and guide teachers as they work with students who enter kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills emerged as a consensus concept. Both principals and all six teachers reported that administrators were available and assessable to support and guide teachers.

Administrators were often reported as being called upon at a moments' notice to assist with student behavior. This was often reported being done through the use of a two-way radio. Ms. Pink explained this practice. "I notice that listening to the two-way radio, if a teacher needs assistance someone is going to come. It could be the guidance counselor or assistant principal. An administrator always has the radio on." (FPI31-32) Ms. Magenta verified that as a principal she is often contacted for assistance via two-way radio. "I get called down a lot. The radio is always going off." (FMI15) Ms. Pink further reported the benefits of administrators having an open-door policy. "The easiest thing is their open door policy. If I think they are busy I will e-mail and set up a time or I'll ask if they have a minute." (FPI33) Ms. Blue reported that the administrators were always available to assist her. "The assistant principal and principal are always available to help. If I ask, the principal will come in the classroom to assist also." (HBI18) Ms. Green also reported on the availability of the principal. "She is always available if I'm having difficulty with students in different areas." (HGI11)

Richards (2003) reports the findings from a study conducted to discover the most valued principal behaviors and attitudes as reported by kindergarten through eighth-grade teachers. One of the top five most valued principal behaviors as reported by teachers is that the principal has an open door policy and is easily accessible.

*Finding #23.* The principal providing guidance and direction to teachers as a way of supporting them as they work with students who enter kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills emerged as a reoccurring concept. Both principals and five out of the

six teachers reported that the principal provided guidance and direction to teachers as a way of supporting them as they worked with students who entered kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills

Ms. Magenta explained her assistance to teachers. “I encourage and help them if they need help. We brainstorm together.” (FMI16) Ms. Red shared similar ways that she assisted teachers. “I think a lot of what I do is sitting and talking with them. Facilitate for them what they can do to help. A lot of it is conversation.” (HRI18) Ms. Pink reported the principal providing assistance to her. “I’ve gone to the principal and said this is what has happened what do you think? I can say this is what I’ve tried and it’s not working.” (FPI22-23) Ms. Green summarized how she feels about the principal’s assistance and guidance. “The principal is always very supportive. She is always willing to discuss any issue that you may be having. She will help you work out a solution to the problem and will give you ideas to improve those skill areas.” (HGI12)

*Finding #24.* The principal serving as a bridge between the school and the home as a way of assisting teachers as they work with students who enter kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills emerged as a reoccurring concept. Both principals and three out of the six teachers reported that the principal served as a bridge between the school and the home as a way of assisting teachers as they worked with students who entered kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills

Participants explained that the principal served as a bridge between the school and the home by assisting the teacher with challenging parent-teacher conferences, facilitating parent events at the school, and communicating with parents regarding expectations for students’ behaviors. Ms. Blue shared that when progress comes to a stand-still with a student’s poor behaviors the principal will get involved. “If nothing is getting solved - the principal gets involved.” (HBI15) Ms. Red confirmed her involvement and commitment to assisting teachers with parents as needed. “I work with parents very closely. I do sit in on some of the more difficult conferences.” (HRI17-18) Ms. Magenta explained that she works to bring parents into the school for social activities and parent education events. “We had a fitness night. Tonight is movie night for the families. We have a parent education workshop and we offer free babysitting.” (FMI14) School newsletters provided by the principals indicated that principals communicated with parents frequently and solicited parent assistance and input.



The principal's role in assisting teachers to develop home and school partnerships is vital. The National Association of Elementary School Principals (2005) emphasizes that principals should provide assistance to teachers by serving as a bridge between the school and home so parents and teachers are working as a team to improve the child's behavior.

*Finding #25.* The school guidance counselor providing support and assistance to teachers as they work with students who enter kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills emerged as a consensus concept. Both principals and all six teachers reported that the school guidance counselor provided support and assistance to teachers as they worked with students who entered kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills.

The guidance counselor's assistance and support was described in many different ways. Ms. Magenta explained the counselor's role. "The counselor goes into the classrooms and does lessons and also has small groups to try and close the gap that they [students] have socially." (FMI5) Ms. Lavender described a conflict resolution program that the counselor teaches to students in her classroom. "The guidance program on conflict resolution fits with all [students] and certainly works here." (FVI6) Ms. Red stated that the guidance counselor also conducts lessons in each kindergarten classroom. (HRI10) Ms. Blue reported on specific topics of the guidance lessons conducted in the classroom. "Our guidance counselor comes in and teaches lessons on character, friendship, anger management, and study skills." (HBI17) A guidance brochure outlining guidance services was provided to the researcher. This brochure described the individual, small group, and classroom lessons provided to students through the guidance counselor. The majority of the services offered by the guidance counselor, as described in this brochure, were related to the development of students' personal and social skills.

*Finding #26.* The principal providing school wide behavior expectations as a way of supporting teachers as they work with students who enter kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills emerged as a reoccurring concept. One principal and three teachers reported that the principal provided school wide behavior expectations as a way of supporting teachers as they worked with students who entered kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills

Participants emphasized that it was important for students to have the same consistent behavior expectations wherever they went in the school. Ms. Pink stated that the principal presented these expectations to parents during an orientation meeting at the start of the school

year. (FPI19) She noted the importance of having school wide rules at Foley, “The children have the same expectations wherever they go, especially from a grown-up.” (FPI26) Ms. Lavendar described a positive reinforcement plan promoted by the principal and used in the school’s cafeteria to promote common cafeteria behaviors. (FLI13) At Hedke, several of the participants described how Ms. Red conducted town meetings with students to go over school rules and the division’s code of conduct. The researcher observed school wide rules posted in common areas such as the hallways, cafeteria, and media centers.

Kindergarten teachers need the support and assistance of the principal when it comes to setting expectations for student behaviors. The National Association of Elementary School Principals (2005) emphasizes that principals should assist teachers of young students in organizing the learning environment and should help teachers to develop classroom management skills that reduce poor student behaviors.

### Unanticipated Findings

Seven unanticipated findings emerged from the researchers’ analysis of the study data. These findings were not anticipated by the researcher as he sought answers to the four primary research questions. The literature review conducted by the researcher may address some of the findings but is not inclusive of all of the unanticipated findings since they were not identified issues in the literature review.

*Finding # 27.* A lack of professional development activities focused on providing kindergarten teachers with specific techniques and strategies to promote the development of students’ personal and social skills emerged as a reoccurring concept. One principal and five of the six teachers reported a lack of professional development activities focused on providing kindergarten teachers with specific techniques and strategies to promote the development of students’ personal and social skills.

Most teachers reported learning most techniques and strategies for teaching personal and social skills through the experiences of teaching kindergarten, by reading professional books, searching online for information, and through other resources not provided directly by the school division or school. Ms. Lavender, Ms. Pink, Ms. Blue, and Ms. Green shared that they gained these techniques and strategies through years of experience in working with kindergarten students. (FPI34/FLI3/HBI7/HGI3) Ms. Violet shared that she diligently seeks her own professional development opportunities in this area. “I’m trying to find conferences to go to. I’m

always reading books and reading online to find new strategies.” Ms. Orange shared that she most likely learned her skills for teaching personal and social skills from her own mother.

(HOI9) Both Ms. Magenta and Ms. Red mentioned providing books to staff members on the topic of poverty and how to assist students coming from impoverished backgrounds.

(FMI15/HRI15).

*Finding #28.* Students who lack personal and social skills can frequently cause a disruption to the learning environment. This concern emerged as a consensus concept. Both principals and all six teachers reported that the frequent disruptions caused by these students negatively impacted the learning environment by taking away from the teacher’s instructional time with the remainder of the students.

Ms. Magenta described that one student was so disruptive that it took 90 minutes of her time to calm the student down. (FMI5) “It’s amazing how one [student] can stir up everything,” reported Ms. Red. (HBI8) Ms. Pink shared that one student may often cause the entire lesson to come to a halt. (FPI16) Ms. Violet reported that a students’ lack of personal and social skills may affect the pacing of instruction for the entire class. “When you have a child with lack of social skills and they are having difficulty that day you may not get in everything you want to get in that day.” (FVI2) Ms. Blue described how certain students lacking in self-control can disrupt instruction. “A lot of children have a lack of self-control. That’s a major road block to their learning and everybody else’s learning. If I’m consumed with chasing a child around the room, it’s their learning time that is getting wasted.” (HBI4)

*Finding #29.* The Kindergarten Standards of Learning or the Foundation Blocks for Early Learning are not being used as a benchmark for assessment of students’ personal and social skill development in kindergarten. None of the participants reported the use of the kindergarten Standards of Learning or the Foundation Blocks for Early Learning are being used as a benchmark for assessment of students’ personal and social skill development in kindergarten.

Some participants did not report using any particular benchmarks for the assessment of students’ personal and social skill development while other participants reported using a variety of benchmarks. Ms Magenta shared that the focus was more on academic benchmarks and assessments rather than personal and social skill benchmarks and assessments. (FMI7) Ms. Red shared the following regarding benchmarks for personal and social skills. “We have our code of conduct and our school rules. I guess those would be the benchmarks. I would say the report

card. I don't think we have any other benchmarks.” (HRI18-19) Ms. Orange reported that there was not a formal checklist of behaviors that she had been shown. (HOI6) Ms. Blue reported using the conduct area on the kindergarten report card for benchmarks and assessments. (HBI7) Ms. Green explained her viewpoint on formalized personal and social skill benchmarks and assessments. “It's interesting because it's not normally a part of our curriculum. I think that we don't have the SOL for social. It is extremely important. We need to hit it down here, early on.” (HGI4) Report cards reviewed by the researcher included sections for teachers' notations of students' social and emotional development, work habits, and conduct.

*Finding #30.* Kindergarten students' preschool experiences impact their personal and social skill development. This finding emerged as a reoccurring concept and was reported by one principal and four out of the six teachers.

Participants reported that a quality preschool setting assisted students in obtaining personal and social skills. Ms. Violet stated that many students who have been to preschool know how to sit. (FVI1) Ms. Red reported that the quality of the day care setting that students have been placed in prior to coming to school made a big difference in the students' skills. (HRI4) Ms. Blue expressed concern about students who have not attended preschool, day care, nursery school, or Head Start as being behind in their personal and social skills. (HBI20) Ms. Orange reported that she could easily tell which students had been in a preschool setting and which had not. (HOI1)

Virginia's Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (November 2007) found that principals reported that Virginia Preschool Initiative programs for at-risk four-year-olds substantially increased the students' social ability to be successful in school.

*Finding #31.* The focus of kindergarten has shifted over time from being an environment mainly focused on promoting students' personal and social skills to an environment focused on the obtainment of academic skills. This finding emerged as a reoccurring concept and was reported by one principal and four of the six teachers.

Participants shared their concern about not having enough time in today's standards-driven classrooms to teach important personal and social skills. Ms. Magenta reported, “Kindergarten is not what it used to be. They now have big accountability issues like the reading and writing aspect.” (FMI4) Ms. Violet stated, “Kindergarten use to be that they would come in and get those social skills. If they knew their letters that was great.” (FVI10) Ms. Lavender

shared that teaching kindergarten has gotten to be more stressful due to what is expected of students academically. (FLI2) Ms. Blue reported that when she started teaching first graders twenty-two years ago she was teaching them what she is now teaching to her kindergarten students. “Kindergarten then was they came in and got socialized.” (FBI19) Ms. Orange explained, “Over the past ten years just the academics that these kids are required to know in kindergarten has totally changed.” (HOI3)

*Finding #32.* Disadvantaged students are more at-risk of not having the necessary personal and social skills needed in kindergarten. This finding emerged as a reoccurring concept and was reported by one principal and three of the six teachers. One additional participant did not use the category of disadvantaged when describing students who were most at-risk but used descriptors that would most likely place a student in a disadvantaged category such as having a parent who was incarcerated. Ms. Lavender explained the reasons she felt disadvantaged students were most at-risk. “The children that come from poverty generally don’t have the supervision, at least not to the same degree, and they don’t get that communication. They don’t have conversations at dinner telling about their day and what they did.” (FLI3)

Denton & et al.(2000) state that teachers perceive children, whose mothers have a lower education, whose mothers are single, or whose families have received public assistance, as being less likely to have the social skills of accepting peer ideas and forming friendships with their peers. Teachers are less likely to rate children from families with two parents living in the home as having behavior problems as they are to rate children from single-mother families as having behavior problems.

*Finding #33.* Communicating with parents regarding students’ personal and social skill development is important in the development of students’ personal and social skills. Both principals and all six teachers reported communicating with parents regarding students’ personal and social skill development.

The manner in which they communicated with parents was reported in a variety of ways including sending home newsletters, hosting kindergarten orientation meetings, calling parents on the phone, conducting parent-teacher conferences, and sending home daily behavior charts. Ms. Magenta shared that she explains expectations for student behavior during a kindergarten orientation presentation. (FMI14) Ms. Pink reported sending parents a newsletter that included expectations for students’ behaviors. She provided the researcher with a copy of the newsletter.

She also reported sending behavior notes to parents if students misbehaved. (FLI20) Ms. Lavender reported sending parents a copy of her classroom management chart and also provided the researcher with a copy of this chart. (FLI9) Ms. Violet explained that she spoke with parents regarding expectations for students' behaviors during kindergarten open house. (FVI12) Ms. Red explained that she preferred to speak with parents in person about expectations for student behaviors and mentioned a parent event for kindergarten parents at the beginning of the school year. (HRI17)

### Summary of Findings

Clearly elementary principals and kindergarten teachers stressed the importance of kindergarten students possessing strong personal and social skills. All five of the personal and social skill "Blocks" of Virginia's Foundation Blocks for Early Learning was emphasized as being vital to students being successful in kindergarten. Nine of the 26 indicators or skills listed in the Foundation Blocks were specifically emphasized by participants as being necessary for students' success in kindergarten. Several additional skills that easily correspond to the Foundation Blocks were also found to be important personal and social skills for kindergarten students to possess.

Findings of the study show that elementary principals, kindergarten teachers, and school guidance counselors are striving to increase the personal and social skill levels of students who have deficits in this area of development. Elementary principals have put support systems in place to assist and guide teachers as they work directly with students to increase their personal and social skill development. These administrative support systems are clearly valued by kindergarten teachers and used by them as they face the challenges of working with students who require extensive assistance and instruction in obtaining certain personal and social skills that are missing or not adequately developed. Kindergarten teachers are implementing a wide variety of instructional strategies, classroom management practices, and parent communication tools in order to facilitate and strengthen these students' personal and social skills. School guidance counselors play a significant role in assisting teachers with classroom instruction on personal and social skills and in working directly with students who require remediation of these skills. Educators are working together as a team to decrease the personal and social skill deficit that exists for some kindergarten students.

Findings of this study revealed a need to increase awareness among elementary principals and kindergarten teachers of the Foundation Blocks for Early Learning: Personal and Social Skill Development and the Standards of Learning (K.8) for Civics that emphasizes certain personal and social skills. Additional technical assistance is needed from state-level and division-level early childhood leaders in how these two sets of standards can better be utilized by elementary principals and kindergarten teachers to guide and inform instruction, set benchmarks for personal and social skill assessments, and be used for frequently monitoring the progress of students. In addition, professional development specifically designed for the implementation of effective instructional practices that promote the development of kindergarten students' personal and social skills must be provided on an ongoing basis for kindergarten teachers.

### Implications for Practice

#### *Implications for Practice: Self-Concept*

- Early childhood educators and kindergarten teachers should implement instructional strategies that assist and guide students in recognizing themselves as unique, while at the same time teaching students to respect the unique differences of others. Participants stressed the importance of students having a strong self-concept in order to succeed. School division leaders and elementary principals should provide professional development opportunities for teachers to receive training in how to develop students' self-concept.
- Early childhood leaders and Virginia Department of Education staff should review the Foundation Block skills that are recommended for the development of self-concept to determine if some of the skills should be emphasized more and be of greater priority as technical assistance and professional development is provided to early childhood educators, kindergarten teachers, and elementary principals. Participants did not emphasize five of the six skills included in the Foundation Blocks for the development of self-concept. The five skills not emphasized by participants include (a) demonstrate knowledge of personal information including first and last name, gender, age, and birthday; (b) begin to recognize and express own emotions using words rather than actions; (c) develop personal preferences regarding activities and materials; (d)

demonstrate self-direction in use of materials; and (e) develop increased independence in school activities throughout the day.

*Implications for Practice: Self-Control*

- Kindergarten teachers must work to enhance students' self-control and compliance with classroom rules and routines. One participant summarized many of the statements of the other participants when she stated that an important aspect of learning in school is for students to learn how school works and how the classroom environment works. School division leaders and elementary principals must provide professional development opportunities for kindergarten teachers to receive training in how to develop students' self-control and ability to comply with classroom rules and routines.
- Early childhood leaders and Virginia Department of Education staff should review the Foundation Block skills for the development of self-control to determine if some skills should be emphasized more and be of greater priority as technical assistance and professional development is provided to early childhood educators, kindergarten teachers, and elementary principals. Participants did not emphasize four of the five skills included in the Foundation Blocks for the development of self-control. The four skills not emphasized by participants include a) contributes ideas for classroom rules and routines; b) use classroom materials purposefully and respectfully; c) manage transitions and adapt to change; and d) develop positive responses to challenges.

*Implications for Practice: Approaches to Learning*

- Kindergarten teachers must develop students' interest and curiosity in learning new concepts and trying new activities and experiences. Participants reported the need for students to be active learners who demonstrated eagerness in learning new skills. School division leaders and elementary principals must provide professional development opportunities for kindergarten teachers to receive training in how to develop students' interest and curiosity for learning new skills.
- Kindergarten teachers must work to develop students' ability to stay focused on a task or activity. Several participants referred to this skill as persistence and stressed its importance for success in kindergarten. School division leaders and elementary principals



must provide professional development opportunities for teachers to receive training in instructional strategies and practices that promote students' persistence.

- Early childhood leaders and Virginia Department of Education staff should review the Foundation Block skills for the development of “approaches to learning” to determine if some skills should be emphasized more and be of greater priority as technical assistance and professional development is provided to early childhood educators, kindergarten teachers, and elementary principals. Participants did not emphasize two of the four skills included in the Foundation Blocks for the development of “approaches to learning”. Skills not emphasized by participants include (a) demonstrate the ability to learn from experiences; and (b) seek and accept help when needed.

*Implications for Practice: Interaction with Others*

- Kindergarten teachers must implement instructional strategies that assist and guide students in interacting appropriately with other children and familiar adults by cooperating, helping, sharing, and expressing interest. One of the principal's comments best summarized participants statements when she stated that students need to be able to get along with one another, to be a friend in the school community and learn to interact in this community. School division leaders and elementary principals should provide professional development opportunities for teachers to receive training in instructional strategies and practices that promote students' ability to interact appropriately with others in the school and classroom settings.
- Kindergarten teachers must implement instructional strategies that assist and guide students in learning to recognize and respond to the needs, rights, and emotions of others. Participants mentioned the importance of students being kind and respectful to each other and being sensitive to the feelings of other students. School division leaders and elementary principals should provide professional development opportunities for teachers to receive training in instructional strategies and practices that promote students' ability to recognize and respond to the needs, rights, and emotions of others.
- Early childhood leaders and Virginia Department of Education staff should review the Foundation Block skills listed for the development of “interaction with others” to determine if some skills should be emphasized more and be of greater priority as technical assistance and professional development is provided to early childhood

educators, kindergarten teachers, and elementary principals. Participants did not emphasize four of the six skills included in the Foundation Blocks for the development of “interaction with others”. Skills not emphasized include a) initiate and sustain interactions with other children; b) demonstrate verbal strategies for making a new friend; c) participate successfully in group settings; and d) demonstrate respectful and polite vocabulary.

*Implications for Practice: Social Problem-Solving*

- Kindergarten teachers must implement instructional strategies that promote students’ ability to recognize conflicts and seek possible solutions. Participants described the challenges of working with students who were not able to appropriately solve conflicts and find appropriate solutions to problems. Participants expressed concern when students responded to conflict in a physically aggressive manner. School division leaders and elementary principals should provide professional development opportunities for teachers to receive training in instructional strategies and practices that promote students’ ability to recognize conflicts and seek possible solutions.
- Kindergarten teachers must implement instructional strategies that promote students’ ability to allow others to take turns and to share. Participants reflected on how taking turns and sharing were skills that impacted the classroom environment and student interactions. Participants shared how students need to learn the ability to take a turn when providing an answer or when speaking during classroom discussions. School division leaders and elementary principals should provide professional development opportunities for teachers to receive training in instructional strategies and practices that promote students’ ability to allow others to take turns and to share.
- Early childhood leaders and Virginia Department of Education staff should review the Foundation Block skills listed for the development of social problem-solving to determine if some skills should be emphasized more and be of greater priority as technical assistance and professional development is provided to early childhood educators, kindergarten teachers, and elementary principals. Participants did not emphasize two of the five skills included in the Foundation Blocks for the development of “interaction with others”. Skills not emphasized by participants include (a) express

feelings through appropriate gestures, actions, and words; and (b) include others in play activities.

*Implications for Practice: Additions to Personal and Social Development Foundation Blocks*

Aligning teachers' belief systems and instructional practices with state standards is often an ongoing and evolving process. Since this study did not include a statewide representation of kindergarten teachers and elementary principals, the results of the study are limited in how they can impact statewide standards for early childhood. However, the results do provide insights into the current beliefs and practices of some kindergarten teachers' and elementary principals' regarding the development of students' personal and social skills. Results of the study merit review and discussion if the state ever conducts a revision of the Foundation Blocks for Early Learning. Figure 16 shows what skills the Foundation Blocks for Early Learning: Personal and Social Skill Development would include if they were revised based on the findings of this study. The revised Foundation Blocks include the addition of findings #14, #15, and #16 and the deletion of the seventeen skills that did not emerge as findings from the study data.

- Early childhood leaders and Virginia Department of Education staff should discuss and study the possibility of adding the skill of “managing anger in an appropriate and safe manner” to the Foundation Blocks as a skill needed for the development of self-control. Participants shared concerns regarding students who could not control their anger and who displayed their anger in aggressive and harmful ways. Concern was expressed for these students and how their anger impacted their learning and the learning of other students.
- Early childhood leaders and Virginia Department of Education staff should discuss and study the possibility of adding or linking the skills of “being able to listen with an increasing attention to spoken language, conversations, and stories read aloud” and “using appropriate language for a variety of purposes, e.g., ask questions, express needs, get information” to the list of skills needed for the development of “approaches to learning”. These skills are currently included as Foundation Block skills needed for the development of oral expression and literacy. Participants reported that these skills were important to students' personal and social skill development.

<b>Foundation Blocks for Early Learning: Personal and Social Development</b> <b>Revisions Based on Findings of Study</b>	
<b>Self-Concept</b>	
Recognize self as a unique individual and respect the differences of others.	
<b>Self-Control</b>	
Follow rules and routines within the learning environment.	
Manage anger in a safe and appropriate manner.	
<b>Approaches to Learning</b>	
Show interest and curiosity in learning new concepts and trying new activities and experiences.	
Increase attention to a task or activity over time.	
Listen with an increasing attention to spoken language, conversations, and stories read aloud.	
Use appropriate language for a variety of purposes, e.g., ask questions, express needs, get information.	
<b>Interaction with Others</b>	
Interact appropriately with other children and familiar adults by cooperating, helping, sharing, and expressing interest.	
Begin to recognize and respond to the needs, rights, and emotions of others.	
<b>Social Problem-Solving</b>	
Recognize conflicts and seek possible solutions.	
Allow others to take turns.	
Increase the ability to share materials and toys with others over time.	

*Figure 16.* Revised foundation blocks originally based on Virginia Department of Education (2007b).

*Implications for Practice: Teacher Supports*

- Kindergarten teachers must be sensitive to the needs of each individual student and implement practices that support this sensitivity. One participant stated that teachers should determine what makes the students tick, what they don't like, and then work within those boundaries. Participants reported that teachers should be sensitive by listening to students, praising individual students, building on students' strengths, and taking an interest in students' interests outside of the school environment. Kindergarten teachers must provide students with activities that are challenging and engaging for all students as a way to promote the students' personal and social skill development. A participant shared that teachers could open the world for students if they made learning fun. Participants reported that teachers should engage students in learning by role playing activities, reading and discussing stories on personal and social skill topics, filling the classroom with rich literature, providing learning centers filled with hands-on activities and providing opportunities for students to work with partners and in small groups.
- Kindergarten teachers must provide consistent and responsive interactions with students and provide an environment for students to feel safe to explore and discover. Participants stressed the importance of students knowing the expectations for school and classroom behaviors. Participants reported that teachers must reinforce classroom rules, be consistent in implementing behavior modification plans, and provide students with clear expectations for behaviors along with consequences for not meeting those expectations.
- Kindergarten teachers must individualize instruction to meet the individual academic and personal and social skill needs of each student. Participants stressed the importance of needing to work one-on-one with students to meet students' needs. Participants reported that teachers must create individualized behavior plans for students who struggle with inappropriate behaviors, seek the assistance of the guidance counselor in the development of individualized behavior plans, and make time to work with the student individually on targeted skills.
- Kindergarten teachers should seek assistance from students' parents in order to promote the development of students' personal and social skills. Participants stressed the importance of communicating with parents regarding personal and social skill development in addition to seeking the advice of parents in how to work with their

children in this developmental area. Participants reported that teachers should seek parents' assistance by phone conversations, parent-teacher conferences, written communication, and through development of individualized behavior modification plans that include the parent as a member of the development team.

*Implications for Practice: Administrative Supports*

- Elementary principals must be available and easily accessible to kindergarten teachers to guide and assist them in working with students who do not have appropriate personal and social skills. Participants shared how administrators were called upon at a moments' notice to provide support to teachers working with challenging student behaviors. Participants reported that administrators should be available through the use of a two-way radio, should work to build a positive relationship with teachers where communication flowed easily, and should have an open door policy for teacher to have access to them.
- Elementary principals must provide guidance and direction to kindergarten teachers as a way of supporting them in their work with students who enter kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills. The support and guidance of the school principal was stressed as being important by participants. Participants reported that principals should brainstorm solutions with teachers for meeting students' needs and should facilitate what needs to be accomplished to meet the needs of students struggling with personal and social skill deficits.
- Elementary principals must serve as a bridge between the school and the home. Teachers shared how they valued the support of the principal when working with parents on challenging student behaviors. Participants reported that elementary principals should assist the teacher with parent-teacher conferences that are challenging, facilitate parent involvement at school events, and communicate with parents regarding expectations for students' behaviors.
- Elementary principals must encourage and support the work of the school guidance counselor as he or she provides support and assistance to kindergarten teachers in developing students' personal and social skills. Participants emphasized how helpful the school's guidance counselor was in providing support for the development of students' personal and social skills. Participants shared the importance of the guidance counselor providing classroom lessons on personal and social skills and providing small-group or

one-on-one assistance in the development of personal and social skills. Principals must support this collaboration between the guidance counselor and kindergarten teachers in order to facilitate students' personal and social skill development.

- Elementary principals must provide school wide behavior expectations for students and clearly communicate these expectations to students and their parents. Participants emphasized the importance of students having the same consistent behavior expectations wherever they went in the school. Participants reported that principals should support a school wide positive behavior plan and clearly communicate expectations for students' behavior to all stakeholders.

*Implications for Practice: Unanticipated Findings*

- School division leaders and elementary principals must provide professional development opportunities specifically designed for the purpose of providing training to kindergarten teachers in effective and appropriate instructional strategies for the development of students' personal and social skills. Participants described very few if any professional development opportunities offered by the school or school division on the topic of development of kindergarten students' personal and social skill development. In order to provide kindergarten teachers with a more in-depth knowledge and expertise in providing students with personal and social skill instruction, school division leaders and elementary principals must provide ongoing professional development opportunities specifically designed for the purpose of providing training to kindergarten teachers in effective and appropriate instructional strategies for the development of students' personal and social skills.
- Students who are extremely disruptive to the learning environment must be provided with immediate support for the development of the appropriate personal and social skills in order to mitigate the disruption to the learning environment and to provide these students with the needed personal and social skills to be successful in kindergarten. Participants shared that the frequent disruptions negatively impacted the learning environment. Participants reported that remediation of personal and social skills should be conducted in a team approach that includes an administrator, guidance counselor, kindergarten teacher, and the parent or guardian. Other individuals may be needed to assist the student as determined by the student's individual needs.

- Early childhood leaders, Virginia Department of Education staff members, school division leaders, and elementary principals should work to promote the use of the Foundation Blocks for Early Learning: Personal and Social Skill Development and the Kindergarten History and Social Science Standards of Learning (K.8 - Civics) by kindergarten teachers as they plan for personal and social skill instruction and assessment of these skills. Participants did not report using these standards for use as instructional benchmarks. Professional development and technical assistance must be provided to kindergarten teachers as they implement these standards into their instructional practices and assessments of students' personal and social skill development.
- State policy makers, local government leaders, school division leaders, and elementary principals must advocate for increasing access to high-quality preschool programs for all four-year-old children who may be at-risk of school failure. Participants shared that quality preschool experiences were important to assisting students in personal and social skill development.
- School division leaders and elementary principals must provide professional development opportunities designed to instruct kindergarten teachers in how to integrate the teaching of personal and social skills while also teaching content area skills in the academic arena. Participants shared their concern regarding not having enough time to teach personal and social skills in today's standards driven classroom. Training in how to integrate personal and social skill instruction with content area instruction will assist teachers with the challenges they reported relating to the limited amount of time for teaching personal and social skills due to the increase in the academic standards that must be taught in kindergarten.
- Elementary principals and kindergarten teachers must be aware that disadvantaged student may enter kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills and be prepared, if necessary, to provide them with immediate assistance. Participants reported that disadvantaged students were more at risk of not having the necessary personal and social skills to be successful in kindergarten.

#### Recommendations for Future Research

1. Further research is needed on what specific instructional strategies and teacher practices are most effective for the development of each of the five personal and social



development “Blocks” and for each of the skills included for development of that particular “Block”. Results of this research would benefit school division leaders, early childhood leaders and elementary principals as they plan and implement professional development opportunities for kindergarten teachers and as they develop or purchase curriculum for early childhood classrooms. The results of this research would also provide direction for kindergarten teachers as they plan and implement instruction to remediate the skills of students lacking in the personal and social skills needed for success in kindergarten.

2. In order to gain a better understanding of how kindergarten students without the necessary personal and social skills impact the role and responsibilities of the elementary principal, a similar study to this researcher’s study should be conducted with a larger pool of elementary principal participants. This study would provide additional insights into how principals are directly impacted by the phenomenon being studied.
3. A study to determine how the lack of students’ personal and social skills impacts their academic progress in kindergarten and in successive grades would provide valuable information for educational leaders as they allocate resources, plan for professional development, and as they develop standards and assessments for personal and social development.
4. Future research is needed to determine what administrative support systems are most effective for assisting kindergarten teachers as they guide and instruct students in the development of personal and social skills. Study results would provide direction for elementary principals as they make decisions about instructional resources, staffing roles and responsibilities, curriculum, and professional development opportunities.
5. A study to explore the role of the school guidance counselor and how the counselor can be most effective in assisting kindergarten teachers with promoting students’ personal and social skill development is needed.
6. Further research is needed to determine how the Virginia Preschool Initiative program is impacting the development of students’ personal and social skill development as they enter kindergarten classrooms in Virginia. Results of this research would assist Virginia Preschool Initiative leaders in developing or revising personal and social skill standards.

7. Future research is needed to determine if the personal and social skills currently included in the Foundation Blocks but not emphasized as being important by participants in this study should continue to be included within the Foundation Blocks.
8. Future research is needed to determine if school divisions across Virginia are aligning personal and social skill benchmarks included on kindergarten report cards with the Foundation Blocks, with the kindergarten Standards of Learning (K.8 – Civics), and with the personal and social skills determined to be most important by kindergarten teachers and elementary principals.
9. Future research is needed to determine what appropriate assessment instruments should be used to monitor the progress of kindergarten students in personal and social skill development. Assessments are needed in order to provide a tool for kindergarten teachers to frequently monitor students' personal and social skill development so that intervention strategies can quickly be implemented to remediate any skill deficits.

### Concluding Statements

This study explored one aspect of kindergarten school readiness and the phenomenon of students entering kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills they need to be successful in kindergarten. The extensive number of findings along with the implications for practice that resulted from the researcher's study is indicative of the complexity of the phenomenon explored. Students who enter kindergarten without having the necessary personal and social skills present a unique set of challenges for kindergarten teachers and elementary principals as these professionals seek to provide appropriate resources and to use the appropriate methods to meet the individual needs of these students.

Educators' desire for children to be successful in kindergarten and to continue the exciting journey of learning that began at birth and that should continue throughout all of life. Kindergarten is an important step on the pathway of life-long learning and every child needs to be fully equipped for the trip, including having the necessary personal and social skills to be successful on the journey.

### Epilogue

My career of 25 years spans a continuum of experiences related to elementary instruction including work as a school bus driver, instructional assistance, elementary teacher, elementary

assistant principal, elementary principal of three different schools, and currently director of elementary instructional services for the Virginia Department of Education. When I began the search for a research topic, I had a plethora of ideas to pull from my many different experiences as an educator and instructional leader. However, the concept of kindergarten school readiness stood out in my mind as being one of the most crucial issues impacting the achievement of elementary students in our schools today. Specifically, I have seen how the lack of kindergarten school readiness skills in the area of students' personal and social development can stall the achievement of the students lacking in these skills and can also negatively impact the progress of their kindergarten peers. As my research study points out, the impact of these students' personal and social skill deficit does not stop at the classroom door, it begins to impact the roles and responsibilities of other school staff including the guidance counselor and assistant principal and principal.

As I conducted in depth discussions with participants during my study, I knew that I had selected the right research topic for the right time. Participants' insights, concerns, and ideas served as a catalyst for me as one aspect of my work with the Virginia Department of Education has been focused on the area of early childhood development and school readiness. I was energized by the principals' and teachers' persistence in working to meet the needs of students who came to kindergarten without the personal and social skills needed to be successful in school. Their enthusiasm and dedication in working to come up with strategies and techniques to meet the unique needs of students' who were experiencing great difficulty with the transition to kindergarten has inspired me to continue in my own exploration of the personal and social skill development of kindergarten students. I have been inspired to continue to explore research on best practices for the development of personal and social skill development in the kindergarten classroom and how instructional leaders at all levels can support teachers as they implement these practices.

When I asked one principal at the end of a lengthy interview if there was anything else she wanted to add to our discussion, she looked at me with the hint of a tear in her eye and said, "When I'm listening to you, I am thinking we don't do enough." Those words will echo in my mind as I continue to explore ways to guide and assist educators in the development of kindergarten students' personal and social skills.

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APPENDIX A  
PROPOSED INFORMED CONSENT FORM

**VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY**

**Informed Consent for Participants  
in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects**

**Title of Project:** A qualitative study of kindergarten school readiness and personal and social skills

**Investigator:** Mark R. Allan

**I. Purpose of this Research/Project**

This study has four primary purposes 1) to gain an understanding of the value and importance elementary principals and kindergarten teachers place on kindergarten students' personal and social school readiness skills, 2) to explore how kindergarten teachers guide and instruct students who enter kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills needed for success, 3) to explore what administrative support systems are available to teachers for assisting them as they guide and instruct students who enter kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills; and 4) to gain an understanding of how the principals' and teachers' values regarding personal and social skills align to the Foundation Blocks for Early Learning.

Two elementary principals and six teacher participants will be interviewed. Principals must serve schools that meet the following criteria 1) has at least 40 percent of students considered as disadvantaged, 2) the principal has served in the role of principal at the school for at least two years; and 3) the kindergarten team includes four or more teachers in order to provide a large enough pool of volunteers to serve as participants. The teacher participants for this study will be purposefully selected from kindergarten teachers at the identified elementary schools who meet the following criteria: (a) full-time teacher; and (b) taught kindergarten at their current Virginia school for at least the past three years. These criteria were selected in order to ensure that participants had plenty of opportunities to experience the phenomenon being studied.

**II. Procedures**

This study utilizes a semi-structured interview with each of the participants. Participants will be asked to participate in one interview lasting between 45 minutes to one hour. Interviews will take place at the participants' elementary school. With the permission of the participants, the interview will be recorded and then transcribed.

Teachers will be asked to provide the researcher with the following official documents that are available and that participants are willing to share with the researcher: a) classroom management plan; b) newsletters to parents that outline behavior expectations for students; c) list of classroom rules; and d) lesson plans or units of study that may include personal and social skill objectives. Principals will be asked to provide the researcher with following official documents that are available and that they are willing to share with the researcher: a) current

student handbook; b) current blank report card; c) list of school rules; d) agendas from any professional development activities provided for kindergarten teachers over the past year; e) and school newsletter to parents from the past year. The researcher will make copies of any of the documents as needed. In addition, the researcher will take photographs of the classroom and school setting. Pictures will be taken after school hours and will not include individuals. Photographs will be used to assist the researcher in describing the learning environment as it applies to the personal and social skill domain of learning.

The interview transcripts and documents collected will be analyzed by the researcher using a “coding to categorizing to concepts” approach. Validity and reliability of findings will be addressed through triangulation of multiple sources of data.

### **III. Risks**

There is minimal foreseen risk to elementary principals and kindergarten teachers participating in this study.

### **IV. Benefits**

Participants will not be compensated for participation in this study. However, little research exists on the lived experiences of principals and kindergarten teachers who assist kindergarten students that enter kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills to be successful in school. Participants will assist the researcher in gathering data that will contribute to the limited literature available on this topic.

### **V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality**

A structured system for data management will be used for this study. Participants will remain anonymous. Pseudonyms will be used throughout the interview process and all documents will be labeled with pseudonyms. Names of schools and participants will be eradicated from all documents. Interview data from the eight participants will be kept on duplicate sets of audio tapes. Each tape will be labeled with the pseudonyms for the schools and participants along with the dates the interviews were conducted. Audio tapes will be kept in a secure location in the researchers' home. Recorded interviews will be transcribed by a transcriber who will only have access to pseudonyms. Audio tapes will be destroyed within one year after completion of the study. Documents will also be stored in a secure location in the researcher's home under the pseudonym for each participant. Results of the study will be reported using pseudonyms.

### **VI. Compensation**

Participants will not be compensated for their participation in this study.

## VII. Freedom to Withdraw

Participants are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. Participants are free not to answer any questions or to provide any of the requested documents.

## VIII. Subject's Responsibilities

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. I have the following responsibilities:

- To review the informed consent form
- To participate in the semi-structured interview with the researcher
- To allow the interview to be audio-recorded
- To permit the researcher to use direct quotes from the interview only if a pseudonym is used by the researcher
- To provide requested documents that are available and that the participant is willing to share with the researcher
- To allow the researcher to take photographs of the classroom and school settings after school hours without any individuals in the photograph

## IX. Subject's Permission

I have read the Consent Form and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Subject signature

\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Witness (Optional except for certain classes of subjects)

Should I have any pertinent questions about this research or its conduct, and research subjects' rights, and whom to contact in the event of a research-related injury to the subject, I may contact:

Mark R. Allan, Researcher (804) 550-1393, [mracla@comcast.net](mailto:mracla@comcast.net)

Dr. Travis Twiford, Faculty Advisory (757) 363-3930, [ttwiford@vt.edu](mailto:ttwiford@vt.edu)

David M. Moore (540) 231-4991, [moored@vt.edu](mailto:moored@vt.edu)

NOTE: Subjects must be given a complete copy (or duplicate original) of the signed Informed Consent

## APPENDIX B

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### Demographic questions for principals

1. How many years have you been an elementary principal?
2. How many years have you served as principal of this school?
3. How many years have you been a principal in this school division?
4. What grades did you teach before becoming an administrator?

#### Demographic questions for teachers

1. How many years have you taught?
2. How many years have you taught kindergarten?
3. What other grades have you taught?
4. What has been the focus of any specialized training or graduate work that you have taken?

#### *Semi-structured interviews*

##### Teacher Questions

1. What is it like being a kindergarten teacher?
2. As a kindergarten teacher, tell me some of the things you learn about your students as you get to know them and their skills during the first month of school.
3. What qualities, characteristics, or abilities typify a successful kindergarten student?
4. Please describe students who come to kindergarten and do not have the necessary skills to be successful in kindergarten?
5. What personal and social skills do students need to be successful in kindergarten?
6. How would you describe students who are lacking in personal and social skills?
7. What, if any, subgroups of students are more at-risk for not possessing the necessary personal and social skills than other subgroups of students?
8. What assessment benchmarks or standards do you follow in making instructional and assessment decisions regarding students' personal and social skills?
9. How would you describe a day in the life of a kindergarten teacher working with students who do not have the necessary personal and social skills?

10. How do you know what forms of remediation to provide for students lacking in personal and social skills?
11. Without using students' names, please tell me about case scenarios you have had with students who did not possess one or more of the following personal and social skills: self-concept; self-control; approaches to learning; interactions with others; and social problem-solving. What were the results of the students not having a skill or skills? How did you provide support to these students?
12. Tell me about several lessons or activities that you have implemented to assist students with improving their personal and social skills.
13. How does the lack of students' personal and social skills impact you as a teacher and your instructional planning?
14. How do you inform parents about your expectations for students' personal and social skills? How do parents assist you in providing support for students who do not have the needed personal and social skills?
15. How have you been supported in assisting students who do not have appropriate personal and social skills? What resources do you have available to assist you?
16. What would you like to add that we have not talked about?

#### Principal Questions

1. Please describe your interactions with kindergarten students during the first few months of school. How do you get to know your kindergarten students?
2. What qualities, characteristics, or abilities typify a successful kindergarten student?
3. Tell me about students who come to kindergarten and do not have the necessary skills to be successful in kindergarten.
4. What personal and social skills do students need to be successful in kindergarten?
5. How would you describe kindergarten students who are lacking in personal and social skills?
6. What, if any, subgroups of kindergarten students are more at-risk for not possessing the necessary personal and social skills than other subgroups of kindergarten students?
7. How would you describe a day in the life of a kindergarten teacher working with students who do not have the necessary personal and social skills?

8. How does the lack of kindergarten students' personal and social skills impact you as a principal? How does their lack of personal and social skills impact the achievement of kindergarten students?
9. What assessment benchmarks or standards do you follow in providing kindergarten teachers with direction for making instructional and assessment decisions regarding students' personal and social skills?
10. How do kindergarten teachers know what forms of remediation to provide for students lacking in personal and social skills?
11. What are some examples of instructional practices for personal and social skills that are being implemented in your kindergarten classrooms?
12. Without using a students' names, please tell me about case scenarios you have had with students who did not possess one or more of the following personal and social skills: self-concept; self-control; approaches to learning; interactions with others; and social problem-solving. What were the results of the students not having a skill or skills? How did you provide support to these students?
13. How do you inform parents about expectations for students' personal and social skills? How do parents assist in providing support for students who do not have the needed personal and social skills?
14. Tell me about any professional development activities that have been provided for kindergarten teachers on the topic of personal and social skill development and instructional practices that assist students in gaining these skills.
15. How is the need for specific personal and social skills being communicated to parents and teachers during the kindergarten school year?
16. What would you like to add that we have not talked about?

## APPENDIX C

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS CORRESPONDING WITH RESEARCH QUESTIONS

**Research Question #1:** What are elementary principals' and kindergarten teachers' School readiness beliefs and expectations for students in the domain of personal and social skills?

#### **Corresponding Interview Questions**

##### **Teacher**

- What is it like being a kindergarten teacher?
- As a kindergarten teacher, tell me some of the things you learn about your students as you get to know them and their skills during the first month of school.
- What qualities, characteristics, or abilities typify a successful kindergarten student?
- Please describe students who come to kindergarten and do not have the necessary skills to be successful in kindergarten?
- What personal and social skills do students need to be successful in kindergarten?
- How would you describe students who are lacking in personal and social skills?
- What, if any, subgroups of students are more at-risk for not possessing the necessary personal and social skills than other subgroups of students?
- What assessment benchmarks or standards do you follow in making instructional and assessment decisions regarding students' personal and social skills?
- What would you like to add that we have not talked about?

##### **Principal**

- Please describe your interactions with kindergarten students during the first few months of school. How do you get to know your kindergarten students?
- What qualities, characteristics, or abilities typify a successful kindergarten student?
- Tell me about students who come to kindergarten and do not have the necessary skills to be successful in kindergarten.
- What personal and social skills do students need to be successful in kindergarten?
- How would you describe kindergarten students who are lacking in personal and social skills?
- What, if any, subgroups of students are more at-risk for not possessing the necessary personal and social skills than other subgroups of students?
- What assessment benchmarks or standards do you follow in providing kindergarten teachers with direction for making instructional and assessment decisions regarding students' personal and social skills?
- What would you like to add that we have not talked about?

**Research Question #2:** How well aligned are principals' and kindergarten teachers' school readiness beliefs and expectations for personal and social skills with Virginia's Foundation Blocks for Early Learning?

### **Corresponding Interview Questions**

#### **Teacher**

- As a kindergarten teacher, tell me some of the things you learn about your students as you get to know them and their skills during the first month of school.
- What qualities, characteristics, or abilities typify a successful kindergarten student?
- Please describe students who come to kindergarten and do not have the necessary skills to be successful in kindergarten?
- What personal and social skills do students need to be successful in kindergarten?
- How would you describe students who are lacking in personal and social skills?
- What would you like to add that we have not talked about?

#### **Principal**

- Please describe your interactions with kindergarten students during the first few months of school. How do you get to know your kindergarten students?
- What qualities, characteristics, or abilities typify a successful kindergarten student?
- Tell me about students who come to kindergarten and do not have the necessary skills to be successful in kindergarten.
- What personal and social skills do students need to be successful in kindergarten?
- How would you describe kindergarten students who are lacking in personal and social skills?
- What would you like to add that we have not talked about?

**Research Question #3:** What do kindergarten teachers report they are doing to guide and instruct students who enter kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills to be successful?

#### **Teacher**

- How would you describe a day in the life of a kindergarten teacher working with students who do not have the necessary personal and social skills?
- How do you know what forms of remediation to provide for students lacking in personal and social skills?
- Without using students' names, please tell me about case scenarios you have had with students who did not possess one or more of the following personal and social skills: self-concept; self-control; approaches to learning; interactions with others; and social problem-solving. What were the results of the students not having a skill or skills? How did you provide support to these students?
- Tell me about several lessons or activities that you have implemented to assist students with improving their personal and social skills.
- How does the lack of students' personal and social skills impact you as a teacher and your instructional planning?



- How do you inform parents about your expectations for students' personal and social skills? How do parents assist you in providing support for students who do not have the needed personal and social skills?
- What would you like to add that we have not talked about?

**Principal**

- How do kindergarten teachers know what forms of remediation to provide for students lacking in personal and social skills?
- What are some examples of instructional practices for personal and social skills that are being implemented in your kindergarten classrooms?
- Without using a students' names, please tell me about case scenarios you have had with students who did not possess one or more of the following personal and social skills: self-concept; self-control; approaches to learning; interactions with others; and social problem-solving. What were the results of the students not having a skill or skills? How did you provide support to these students?
- What would you like to add that we have not talked about?

**Research Question #4:** What administrative support systems are available to teachers for assisting them as they guide and instruct students who enter kindergarten without the necessary personal and social skills?

**Teacher**

- How have you been supported in assisting students who do not have appropriate personal and social skills? What resources do you have available to assist you?
- What would you like to add that we have not talked about?

**Principal**

- How would you describe a day in the life of a kindergarten teacher working with students who do not have the necessary personal and social skills?
- How does the lack of kindergarten students' personal and social skills impact you as a principal? How does their lack of personal and social skills impact the achievement of kindergarten students?
- Without using a students' names, please tell me about case scenarios you have had with students who did not possess one or more of the following personal and social skills: self-concept; self-control; approaches to learning; interactions with others; and social problem-solving. What were the results of the students not having a skill or skills? How did you provide support to these students?
- How do you inform parents about expectations for students' personal and social skills? How do parents assist in providing support for students who do not have the needed personal and social skills?
- Tell me about any professional development activities that have been provided for kindergarten teachers on the topic of personal and social skill development and instructional practices that assist students in gaining these skills.
- How is the need for specific personal and social skills being communicated to parents and teachers during the kindergarten school year?
- What would you like to add that we have not talked about?

## APPENDIX D

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

#### I. Introduction/Purpose

- a. Welcome and thank participant for volunteering.
- b. Provide participant with bottled water.
- c. Review the four primary purposes for the study with participant.

#### II. Consent Procedures

- a. Provide the participant with the informed consent form and review the information contained in this form.
- b. Provide time for the participants to ask questions as needed.
- c. Obtain the signature of the participant on the informed consent form.
- d. Establish a pseudonym for the school and for the participant.

#### III. Semi-structured Interview

- a. Begin interview discussion using the pseudonym selected throughout the interview.

At the conclusion of the interview, thank the participant for their assistance with the study.

APPENDIX E  
OFFICIAL DOCUMENTS COLLECTED AND ANALYZED

Hedke	Foley
<p>Division Level Documents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Kindergarten Report Card</li> <li>▪ Student Handbook</li> <li>▪ Vision and Mission Statement</li> </ul> <p>School Level Documents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ School Motto</li> <li>▪ School Rules</li> <li>▪ School Newsletters</li> </ul> <p>Participant Red</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Principal's Newsletter</li> <li>▪ Discipline Letter</li> </ul> <p>Participant Blue</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Classroom Rules</li> <li>▪ Daily Behavior Sheet</li> <li>▪ Kindergarten Code of Conduct</li> </ul> <p>Participant Orange</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Parent Letter</li> <li>▪ Classroom Rules</li> </ul> <p>Participant Green</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Parent Letter</li> <li>▪ Classroom Rules</li> </ul>	<p>Division Level Documents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Kindergarten Report Card</li> <li>▪ Student Handbook</li> <li>▪ Mission and Vision Statement</li> <li>▪ Kindergarten Parent Handbook</li> <li>▪ Classroom Guidance Brochure</li> </ul> <p>School Level Documents</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Positive Behavior Coupon</li> <li>▪ School Song</li> <li>▪ Agenda from Professional Development Meeting</li> <li>▪ Professional Development Feedback Sheet</li> <li>▪ School Rules</li> </ul> <p>Participant Magenta</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Principal's Newsletter</li> <li>▪ School Newsletter</li> </ul> <p>Participant Pink</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Parent Letter</li> <li>▪ Classroom Rules</li> <li>▪ Lesson Plans</li> <li>▪ Behavior Note</li> </ul> <p>Participant Violet</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Lesson Plans</li> <li>▪ Classroom Rules</li> </ul> <p>Participant Lavender</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Classroom Management Plan</li> <li>▪ Book Lists for Personal and Social Skill Lessons</li> <li>▪ Student Goal Chart</li> <li>▪ Teacher Newsletters</li> </ul>

## APPENDIX F

### IRB APPROVAL LETTER



**Office of Research Compliance**  
 Institutional Review Board  
 2000 Kraft Drive, Suite 2000 (0497)  
 Blacksburg, Virginia 24061  
 540/231-4991 Fax 540/231-0959  
 e-mail [moored@vt.edu](mailto:moored@vt.edu)  
[www.irb.vt.edu](http://www.irb.vt.edu)

FWA00000572( expires 1/20/2010)  
 IRB # is IRB00000667

DATE: December 19, 2007

MEMORANDUM

TO: Travis W. Twiford  
 Mark Allan

FROM: David M. Moore 

Approval date: 12/19/2007  
 Continuing Review Due Date: 12/4/2008  
 Expiration Date: 12/18/2008

SUBJECT: **IRB Expedited Approval:** "A Qualitative Study of Kindergarten School Readiness and Personal and Social Development", IRB # 07-631

This memo is regarding the above-mentioned protocol. The proposed research is eligible for expedited review according to the specifications authorized by 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. As Chair of the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board, I have granted approval to the study for a period of 12 months, effective December 19, 2007.

As an investigator of human subjects, your responsibilities include the following:

1. Report promptly proposed changes in previously approved human subject research activities to the IRB, including changes to your study forms, procedures and investigators, regardless of how minor. The proposed changes must not be initiated without IRB review and approval, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.
2. Report promptly to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.
3. Report promptly to the IRB of the study's closing (i.e., data collecting and data analysis complete at Virginia Tech). If the study is to continue past the expiration date (listed above), investigators must submit a request for continuing review prior to the continuing review due date (listed above). It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain re-approval from the IRB before the study's expiration date.
4. If re-approval is not obtained (unless the study has been reported to the IRB as closed) prior to the expiration date, all activities involving human subjects and data analysis must cease immediately, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.

**Important:**

If you are conducting **federally funded non-exempt research**, this approval letter must state that the IRB has compared the OSP grant application and IRB application and found the documents to be consistent. Otherwise, this approval letter is invalid for OSP to release funds. Visit our website at <http://www.irb.vt.edu/pages/newstudy.htm#OSP> for further information.

cc: File

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VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE UNIVERSITY AND STATE UNIVERSITY

*An equal opportunity, affirmative action institution*