

INTRODUCTION

School Readiness

- **School readiness** is defined as "a quality that renders the child able to participate successfully in a regular public school curriculum" (Carton & Winsler, 1999).
- A child's academic and behavioral readiness upon entering kindergarten can have immediate and long term consequences.
 - Kindergarten children who are academically and behaviorally behind their peers are at greater risk for future school failure (Boethel, 2004).
- School readiness is associated with several ecological factors: (a) socioeconomic status; (b) the child's health; (c) family background characteristics such as the mother's education, single parent status, and mental health; (d) the home and school environment which includes risk factors and literacy related factors; and (e) some participation in a preschool program (Boethel, 2004).
- An ecological approach to school readiness focuses not only on promoting the skills and abilities of the child, but also on enhancing the curriculum of the home and parental competencies.

Protective Factors

- **Curriculum of the home** is specific actions (structure, routine, environmental supports) parents take to facilitate their child's learning and educational success.
 - Emphasis is on the *home environment as a learning environment*, and family/parental influences on a child's academic, motivational, behavioral, and social growth and performance.
- Parents who read to their children encourage reading attainment, as well as their child's later language and literacy development (Wood, 2002).
 - Reading aloud aids in the development of word knowledge, understanding the meaning of print, and awareness of written letters and words (Senechal, Lefevre, Thomas, & Daley, 1998).
- Cognitive development is also facilitated by organized family routines and developmentally appropriate play materials (Paats & Walsh, 1996).
- **Parental sense of competence** or parents' beliefs in their ability to engage in activities influencing their child's learning fosters the curriculum of the home, comprised of two unique factors:
 - Efficacy – "the degree to which a parent feels competent and confident in handling child problems"
 - Satisfaction – "the quality of affect associated with parenting" (Johnson & Mash, 1989, p. 251).
- Parental competence is highly related to parenting behaviors across a variety of domains (e.g., Jones & Prinz, 2005) and is significantly related to children's social and emotional development (e.g., Coleman & Karraker, 2003).

Risk Factors: Poverty and Parental Depression

- Family risk poses a threat to a child's school readiness; cumulative risk (rather than individual risk factors) accounts for the largest proportion of variance in a child's IQ scores by age four (Paats & Walsh, 1996, p.119).
- Familial socioeconomic disadvantage (SES) significantly interferes with school readiness (Dearing, McCartney, & Taylor, 2003) as resources available to families are limited (e.g., number of books in the home, opportunities to participate in extra curricular activities).
 - Preschool children of low SES commonly have lower school readiness scores, higher levels of grade failure, and lower school completion and literacy rates (Baydar, Brooks-Gunn, & Furstenberg, 1993; Gibo, Brooks-Gunn, & Harris, 1996).
- **Parental depression** taps the emotional reserves of the caregiver, limiting her ability to attend to the child and engage in meaningful activities that will prepare him/her for school.
 - A child whose parent suffers from depression is at risk for a range of social and interpersonal problems along with significant school difficulties (Dearing, McCartney, & Taylor, 2001; Koverola, Pappas, Potts, Murtangh, Black, & Dalowitz, 2005).

PURPOSE OF STUDY

- To determine the predictive role of specific familial factors (i.e., curriculum of the home, parental sense of efficacy, and parental mental health status) in determining children's school readiness outcomes, specifically for children raised in socioeconomic disadvantage.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- To what degree does the "curriculum of the home" (family literacy activities) predict children's school readiness for children raised in poverty?
- To what degree does parental sense of competence and mental health (depression) contribute to the curriculum of the home?

METHODS

Table 1. Participants

	Children N = 129	Parents N = 129
Age	Mean = 42.79 months (range 36 to 52 months)	Mean = 28.87 years (range 19 to 62 years)
Ethnicity	32% White 20% Black 21% Latino/Hispanic 4% American Indian 24% Other	47% White 17% Black 24% Latino/Hispanic 4% American Indian 9% Other
Gender	54% Male 46% Female	
Identified Disability	13%	
Respondent		87% Mothers 5% Fathers 3% Grandmothers 2% Stepmother 2% Foster Mother 2% Other
Marital Status		45% Married/with partner 21% Divorced/separated 35% Single/never married
Parental Education		16% Less than high school diploma 25% High school diploma, GED, or some training beyond high school 40% one or two year degree 19% four year degree or more

Measures

The Family Inventory-Revised (Taylor, 2001) – Family Literacy Activities Subscale

- 68 items, 5-point Likert scale measuring specific characteristics representative of the curriculum of the home
- Items include: "we talk with our children as we play, during daily routines;" "we read things aloud;" "we help our children follow verbal directions"
- Internal consistency = 0.69

Number of Children's Books in the Home (Sheridan & Edwards, 2006)

- 1 item, 4-point Likert scale measuring the number of books in the home
- Based on parental report: 2% no children's books; 11% one to seven children's books; 11% eight to 15 children's books; 77% more than 15 children's books

Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D; Radloff, 1977)

- 12-item, 4-point Likert scale used to measure levels of depressive symptomatology among the caregivers
- Internal consistency = 0.84 - 0.90

Parental Sense of Competence Scale (PSOC; Johnson & Mash, 1989)

- 16 items, 6-point Likert scale measuring levels of efficacy and satisfaction in their parental
- Internal consistency = 0.79

The Bracken Basic Concepts Scale-Revised (Bracken, 1998)

- 308 items across 6 subtests measuring child school readiness (School Readiness Composite, Direction/Position, Self-Social Awareness, Texture/Material, Quality, Time/Sequence, and Total Test)
- Internal consistency = 0.96 - 0.99

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	SD	Internal Consistency
Family Literacy Activities ¹	4.62	0.38	0.69
Depression (CESD) ²	11.37	9.65	0.88
Parental Competence (PSOC) ³	4.61	0.68	0.84
Bracken Total Test ⁴	91.93	12.56	--

¹ Scores range from 0 - 5

² Scores range from 0 - 60; score of 16 represents clinical cut-off for depression

³ Scores range from 1 - 6; higher scores indicate greater sense of competence

⁴ Standard score with mean = 100, SD = 15

Analytic Techniques

- Correlation regression analyses were conducted.
- Hierarchical regression analyses were utilized to investigate the predictive effects of children's books in the home and literacy activities on children's school readiness.
- Multiple regression analyses were utilized to investigate the effects of depression and parenting competence on family literacy activities.

RESULTS

Table 3. Bivariate Correlations

	Family Literacy Activities	Books in the Home	Depression (CESD)	Parental Competence (PSOC)	School Readiness (Bracken)
Family Literacy Activities	1.0				
Books in the Home	0.31***	1.0			
Depression	0.19*	0.00	1.0		
Parental Sense of Competence (PSOC)	0.26**	0.03	-0.35***	1.0	
School Readiness (Bracken)	0.21*	0.02*	-0.07	0.01	1.0

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

Research Question 1: The curriculum of the home predicts school readiness

- Step 1: F (1,110) = 4.94, p < .05; number of children's books significantly relates to children's school readiness scores on the Bracken; as families reported more books, children scored higher on the measure of school readiness.
- Step 2: F (2,109) = 4.52, p < .05; after controlling for the number of books in the home, family literacy activities significantly positively predicted children's school readiness scores on the Bracken.

Table 4. Summary of Hierarchical Regression Predicting School Readiness

Model	B	SE B	β
Step 1 (Constant)	78.85	6.28	
Number of books	3.71	1.67	0.21*
Step 1 (Constant)	51.24	15.15	
Number of books	2.88	1.70	0.16
Family Literacy Activities	6.57	3.30	0.19*

Note. Step 1 R² = 0.049, adjusted R² = 0.03; Step 2 R² = 0.039, adjusted R² = 0.06.

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

Research Question 2: Factors contributing to family literacy activities

- Multiple regression analysis, including depression, parental competence and the interaction term as independent variables, was used to predict family literacy activities. The model was statistically significant; F (3,121) = 9.68, p < .001.
- The interaction is significant (Figure 1). The main effects of depression and parental sense of competence are misleading and should not be interpreted.
 - For parents with low levels of depression, higher levels of parental competence relate to higher family literacy activities.
 - For parents with high levels of depression, parental sense of competence is not related to family literacy activities.

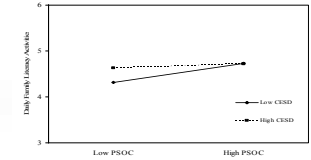
Table 5. Multiple Regression Predicting Family Literacy Activities

Model	B	SE B	β
(Constant)	4.60	0.03	
Depression (CESD)	0.01	0.004	0.20*
Parental sense of competence	0.18	0.05	0.33***
Interaction CESD x PSOC	-0.01	0.01	-0.23***

Note. R² = 0.19***; adjusted R² = 0.17.

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001

Figure 1. Predictive Effects of Depression and Parenting Competence on Family Literacy Activities



DISCUSSION

- The curriculum of the home, defined as a family's literacy activities, predicts school readiness.

- After controlling for number of books in the home, family literacy activities is more predictive of school readiness as defined by Bracken total test scores than books alone.
- Actions parents take in the home such as talking and reading together, spending time working, involving children in choices, and having fun and supporting each other is a significant predictor of a child's school readiness.
- Parental sense of competence is predictive of school readiness for parents who are not depressed.
 - For parents low in depression, feelings of positive parental satisfaction and efficacy relates to higher expressions of the home as a learning environment.
 - For parents high in depression, feelings of satisfaction and efficacy is not predictive of home support activities; the relationship between competence and home support is unclear when mental health issues are present.

IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- Early learning environments are highly influential and predictive of school readiness and early school learning.
- School psychologists are in ideal positions to interface with families and promote the curriculum of the home in early childhood.
- Parent consultation or training can promote parents' roles in learning and education, develop parents' skills in specific actions that influence learning, reinforce their efforts to support their child, and encourage their competence and confidence.
- Parental mental health – specifically depression – matters.
 - Efforts to encourage parents' sense of competence in supporting their child's learning may not result in a supportive learning environment (including daily activities regarding learning) if the parent is experiencing depression.
 - To support children's school readiness and early learning, school psychologists should help coordinate services for parents with depression. Once mental health issues are addressed, interventions can focus on enhancing parental sense of competence and embellishing the child's early learning environment/curriculum of the home.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

- Measurement of key constructs should be refined:
 - Validity of The Family Inventory - Revised (family literacy activities/daily routine subscale) to measure "curriculum of the home" is uncertain; psychometric studies are needed to determine the use of this instrument for this purpose.
 - The PSOC measures a narrow band of constructs associated with parenting competence (i.e., general efficacy and satisfaction), and not competence around providing learning opportunities for the child. Measures of parenting competence and self-efficacy related to their roles vis à vis their child's learning are necessary.
- Sample was comprised of young children in Head Start settings and their parents. Caution should be exercised when generalizing findings to other families (e.g., non-poverty families; economically disadvantaged families whose children are not enrolled in Head Start).
- Future research may identify other parenting behaviors that are predictive of school readiness, such as parent-child interaction patterns or skills at communicating and collaborating with professionals.
- Research is needed to understand how parenting competence contributes to the learning of children and families from diverse backgrounds.
- Future research may investigate the short- and long-term effects of interventions aimed at promoting the curriculum of the home through enhanced parental sense of competence during early childhood.