

## The Early Development Instrument: A Bioecological View of School Readiness

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The issue of children's school readiness concerns parents, teachers, and policy makers. Experts warn that many children are entering school lacking the necessary skills to achieve academic and lifelong success. While public preschool programs have been established throughout the nation as a policy goal to establish kindergarten readiness (National Educational Goals Panel, 1997), schools are not prepared to recognize the contextual factors to help children become ready to learn, nor to address the multitude of social needs that children bring to kindergarten. In response to President Obama's promise of "Preschool for All" in his 2013 and 2014 State of the Union messages, the US Department of Education created a plan that recently stated that their goal was to enable every American four-year-old to attend a quality preschool (<http://www.ed.gov/early-learning>). Thus far states have provided the funds for prekindergarten expansion which, delivered through school districts, has unfolded without the expertise of other community-based early childhood programs, such as child care, Head Start, and nursery schools. Funds have been appropriated to states to develop, enhance, or expand high-quality preschool programs for low- and moderate-income families. Classroom quality, defined as children's direct experiences, has been associated with preschool children's development in academics and social competence (Mashburn, 2008; Mashburn et al., 2008), but standards vary across the various forms of early childhood education.

Despite the increased funding and public school involvement in pre-school readiness, little has been done to examine a school framework that incorporates not only the importance of children's skills, but also how important schools and communities are to the readiness concept. Consequently, the purpose of this chapter is to examine the shared responsibilities of many individuals that influence children's developmental trajectory. The dynamic nature of the relationships between children, family, teachers, and community were accounted for in an effort to measure school readiness using an innovative school readiness assessment tool called the Early Development Instrument (EDI) (Janus & Offord, 2007). We first draw from Bronfenbrenner's (1979) bioecological theory of human development to frame school readiness from a contextual, rather than developmental, stance. Next, a historical overview of EDI is reported, as well as the design and content of the instrument. A description of Early Years Institute's (EYI) use of EDI as a research tool follows. The chapter concludes with implications and conclusions related to the use of EDI in one school district.

### THE BIOECOLOGICAL THEORY OF HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Young children's development does not occur in isolation; rather it takes place in a rich context of direct and indirect influences. While some theories focus on patterns or similarities among individuals to explain human development, Uri Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1989, 1994, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Morris 2006) has provided a way to explain human variation and adaptation within general patterns. Unlike Piaget's (1952) theory of cognitive development that describes a series of stages in which children mature and acquire academic skills, Bronfenbrenner (1979, 1989, 1994, 2005) looks beyond general developmental patterns and examines the ecology of the child in various ecological settings over time.

In early publications, Bronfenbrenner provides a formal definition of the ecological model of human development. Bronfenbrenner (1979) states,

the ecology of human development involves the scientific study of the progressive mutual accommodation between active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these settings, and by the larger contexts in which the settings are embedded. (p. 21)

