

PERCEPTIONS OF POLICYMAKERS REGARDING
TRANSITIONAL KINDERGARTEN AS A
POLICY INITIATIVE

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CERTIFICATION OF APPROVAL

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DEDICATION

To my children and grandchildren. I love you.

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ABSTRACT

Limited research is available on California's transitional kindergarten (TK). Transitional kindergarten was established in the Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2010 (Simitian, 2010) which sought to change the kindergarten start age from four years and nine months old to five years old by September 1. This qualitative study was conducted to understand the perceptions of policymakers and political stakeholders regarding transitional kindergarten as a policy initiative. Six interviews were conducted to capture the policymakers and political stakeholders' views of TK. The interviews were transcribed and thematized. These themes present themselves differently between two groups of participants. The creator group included participants involved in the birth and development of the Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2010 which established transitional kindergarten. The implementer group included participants involved in the implementation of this policy within school districts. The results created a descriptive microhistory (Brewer, 2014) of transitional kindergarten through the perceptions of these policymakers and political stakeholders. Using the principle of interest convergence stemming from critical race theory (Bell, 1980, 2004; Delgado, 2006) as a theoretical frame it appears that transitional kindergarten came into existence based on the interest convergence of several stakeholder groups. These groups include teachers' interests to meet accountability issues, the California Teachers Association to maintain funding in Prop. 98 and teachers' jobs, Early Edge

California in expanding early learning opportunities for children, and the state legislature in finding budget saving measures.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Prior to 2010, California had been one of four states including Connecticut, Michigan, and Vermont, that allowed children to start kindergarten at the age of 4. All other states had a kindergarten entry age of 5 years old. This changed for California when Senate Bill 1381, The Kindergarten Readiness Act (2010) was signed into law. With this new law the kindergarten start age was changed from 4 years and 9 months to 5 years old by September 1.

This legislation first began when two Palo Alto teachers, Natalie Bivas and Kiana Argenti, began a grassroots effort to change the kindergarten start age (KQED, 2010). These teachers noticed that the youngest kindergarten children struggled to meet the California State Standards. They attributed this struggle to the lack of developmental maturation in these young learners. Through the statewide efforts of these teachers Senator Joe Simitian was encouraged to introduce Senate Bill 1381, The Kindergarten Readiness Act.

According to the Fact Sheet: Senate Bill 1381 (Simitian) from Senator Simitian's website, "This bill [The Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2010] changes the kindergarten entry age in California from 5 years old by December 2 to 5 years old by September 1. For those 'young fives' (i.e., children turning 5 between September 2 and December 2) whose kindergarten is delayed, the bill creates a transitional

kindergarten.” This establishes a 2-year transitional kindergarten for 4-year-old children who fall in the gap between September 2 and December 2.

In recent decades early childhood education has gained attention across the nation. Much of this is due to the fact that more parents are working and more children are in childcare and preschool settings than ever before (Committee on Ways and Means, 1998). This has brought attention to childcare settings, early childhood education, and the qualifications for childcare providers (Barnett, 2011). Additionally, increased attention on early education that shows the importance of high quality early childhood programs has been the focus of many research studies by neuroscientists and cognitive theorists (Blair et al., 2007).

Currently, early childhood education has gained recognition in legislation because of the economic argument that it is a “societal investment.” Investment in early childhood education saves taxpayers money over the course of a child’s life. For example, an investment of \$12,356 per child for services from birth to 5 years old results in \$70,876 savings over the child’s lifetime (Lamb & Ahnert, 2006). These economic savings come in the form of fewer special education services, less welfare support for these children as they become young adults, and less incarceration of these children as they come into adulthood (Lamb & Ahnert, 2006; Shonkoff & Meisels, 2000).

Meanwhile, educational reforms such as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 brought accountability measures to hold school districts answerable for student achievement. Therefore, the formal schooling atmosphere changed with

rigorous testing, standards, and the expectations that all students, including those in subgroup populations such as race, economic status, and English learners, would meet designated targets. Kindergarten in California has a set of California State Standards outlined by the California Department of Education (CDE, 2015) that require students to achieve academic targets.

In contrast to academic achievement targets, “school readiness” is a term that designates certain competencies such as social, behavioral, and self-regulatory skills that allow children the ability to engage and persist in educational environments (Duncan, et al, 2007). The construct of school readiness and the developmental needs of young children, and the demands of standards-based education have brought kindergarten to the attention of policymakers and educators in California.

With the concern for what is best for children, the economic impact for society, and accountability reform measures, policy initiatives that address the needs of young children have been brought to mainstream attention. One of these recent policy initiatives in California is the Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2010 (Simitian, 2010), which established transitional kindergarten and changed California’s school start age. Transitional kindergarten implementation started in 2012 after The Kindergarten Readiness Act (Simitian, 2010) was signed into law by California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger.

Statement of the Problem

A research team from the California State University, Stanislaus Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership Program (Ed.D.), P-12 concentration embarked

on a capstone project which would culminate in four distinctive and individual final dissertations, seeking to understand transitional kindergarten as a policy initiative.

The collaboration provided a 360-degree view of the phenomenon studied. The four areas of exploration include perceptions of four different stakeholder groups regarding transitional kindergarten (TK). The stakeholder groups were families, teachers, administrators, and policymakers. This researcher's study addresses the gap in the literature regarding transitional kindergarten as a policy initiative seeking to understand policymakers' perceptions.

Purpose

The purpose of this individual study among the four in the capstone project was to understand how policymakers perceive transitional kindergarten and their role in the policy initiative. The study will contribute to filling the gap in the limited research on the recently implemented Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2010. The differences among stakeholders regarding levels of policy implementation needs further research (Cobb, Donaldson, & Mayer, 2013). This research addresses the policymakers' view of TK legislation.

The exploration of this research was to gather perceptions of policymakers on transitional kindergarten as a policy initiative. This was guided by the research question, What are the perceptions of policymakers regarding the Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2010 establishing transitional kindergarten and how do they view this policy's conception, articulation, and implementation for the community they serve?

Significance of the Study

This study contributes to relevant research regarding early education policy implications. The results of this study will help practitioners, policymakers, and researchers to better understand the implications of transitional kindergarten as a policy initiative. As it is a new policy not much is known regarding transitional kindergarten and its impact on issues of equity, its influence on developmentally appropriate practice discussions, and whether this policy is a first step to providing universal preschool for all 4-year-old children in California. Additionally, there is no research on transitional kindergarten and the nature of the relationship between community need and policy implementation.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review provides context for this research study's focus on the Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2010 and California's transitional kindergarten as a policy initiative. Transitional kindergarten was implemented in 2012 after The Kindergarten Readiness Act (Simitian, 2010) was signed into law by Governor Schwarzenegger. This law changed the kindergarten start age in California and provided transitional kindergarten to support those 4-year-old students who now miss the new eligibility date for enrollment in the regular kindergarten program.

This legislation came into being when two Palo Alto teachers began a grassroots effort to change California's kindergarten start age from 4 years 9 months old to 5 years old by September 1. These teachers felt that younger students were struggling with today's kindergarten standards due to a lack of developmental maturity to reach those standards (KQED, 2010). This literature review addresses early childhood education, kindergarten today, transitional kindergarten legislation, and critiques and concerns of transitional kindergarten legislation.

Early Childhood Education

In this research, the term early childhood education will be used to pertain to all early learning environments prior to entry to elementary school such as day care, home-based childcare, preschool, and public and private centers. As children grow and move through developmental stages, early childhood education can mediate this

process through instruction using developmentally appropriate practice (DAP) to change developmental outcomes (National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 2014). Through intentional care and instruction in healthy environments, children are supported through critical periods of development.

The foundations for early childhood education lie in the theoretical and philosophical perspectives of child development theory. The practice of early childhood education is based on child development theory focusing on children from birth through age 8. Child development is an interdisciplinary field which includes biologists, anthropologists, psychologists, and sociologists.

Child Development

Early childhood education bases its practice on the theory and research that focus on children's developmental needs. This includes the study of mental, psychological, and physical changes that occur in children from birth through adolescence (Berk, 2011). Current neurological science supports that young learners have developmental stages that need to be addressed (Center on the Developing Child, 2010).

The field of child development began gaining recognition in the 1960s and 1970s and thus the use and application of child development theory came into play. Two factors influenced this new interest in child development. First, more children were in childcare settings outside of the home due to mothers entering the work force; this included both single mothers and mothers from dual-earner families. For example, rates in labor force participation of mothers of preschoolers rose from 20%

in 1960 to 62% in 1995 (Committee on Ways and Means, 1998). Second, new research regarding benefits of supporting a child's first years of life became publicized (Bjorklund, 2005; Rathus, 2004). Additionally, the data on high quality early childhood education and interventions for high-risk children were seen as an opportunity to close the widening achievement gap for struggling students in our school systems (Barnett & Masse, 2005).

Kindergarten as Early Childhood Education

Friedrich Froebel, a child development theorist, is considered the father of kindergarten. In 1837 he created what he referred to as a "child's garden" for children ages 3 to 7 to develop cognitive, social, and emotional skills through creative pursuits and play. For example, Froebel believed that children needed to observe shapes and use manipulatives in an educational environment (Noddings, 2007). In 1856, Margaret Schurz opened the first kindergarten in the United States in Watertown, Wisconsin. Schurz had studied under Froebel in Germany. Other kindergartens followed and by the late 1800s there were hundreds of kindergarten classes in the U.S. (Noddings, 2007, Public Policy Institute of California (PPIC), 2014).

Kindergarten gained momentum in the U.S. Caroline Winterer (1992) states, "As they [kindergartens] grew in popularity in the 1880s and 1890s, they began to be seen as a way to assimilate and educate the children of the impoverished and ill-educated immigrants." This initial view of early education as support for at-risk children still resonates in arguments for early childhood education today.

Equity

The belief that education is a social equalizer has fueled many education reforms. For decades, policies at the federal level attempted to improve education. One of the first federal policies regarding education was the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 (Anyon, 2005). This policy established vocational education to prepare students to live and work in industrialized areas (p. 67). Initially, this policy's purpose was to improve the economy through an educated workforce. This is something continually demanded of educational policy; however, a new focus in the policy realm is equity.

The shift from economic impact reform policies to social equalizer reform policies happened in 1954. The 1954 Supreme Court ruling in *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* established the commitment of the federal government to desegregation in schools. This is one of the first known K-12 policies at the federal level focused on the goal of increasing educational equity (Anyon, 2005). While initial federal reforms in education had focused on having a well-trained workforce to support the economy, now equity regarding educational opportunities came to the forefront.

On the heels of desegregation in 1954 with the *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka* Supreme Court ruling, poverty as an equity issue gained attention in the 1960s. President Lyndon B. Johnson proclaimed the "War on Poverty" in the late 1960s. As poverty presented a developmental risk to children, Johnson enhanced the government's role in education and healthcare (Office of Head Start [OHS], 2014). The 1965 federal Head Start program was a policy initiative to

support low-income children. Head Start aimed to provide services such as early childhood education, as well as health, nutrition, and parent involvement programs (OHS, 2014). The rationale for this policy was that Head Start would be a cost saving investment in education and would increase social responsibility (Zigler, 2011; Barnett & Masse, 2005).

Various research studies using a variety of methodologies have shown Head Start as beneficial to young learners, (Administration for Children and Families, n.d (a, b); Datta, 1976; Deming, 2009; Garces, Thomas, & Currie, 2002; Head Start Impact Study, 2012; Lee, 2011; Love, n.d.; Seitz, Abelson, Levine, & Zigler, 1975; Vogel, Xue, Moiduddin, Kirsker, & Carlson, 2010). Several well-known studies such as the Abecedarian Study (Carolina Abecedarian Project, 2000; Lamb & Anher, 2006) and the High Scope Perry Preschool Project (Lamb & Anher, 2006; Schweinhart et al., 2005; Schweinhart & Weikart, 1997;) showed long-term beneficial effects of early intervention programs such as Head Start.

Counter to these claims, some studies dispute the benefits of Head Start. One argument is that too much trust is put on these early interventions and their outstanding outcomes. This perspective is supported by the reported “fade out” effect found in research (Barnett, 1993; Barnett, 1995; Barton & Coley; 2010; Belsky et al, 2007; Lee & Loeb, 1995; Puma, Bell, Cook, & Heid, 2010; Vandell et al., 2010; Vogel et al., 2010). This research has shown that students lose the gains made in preschool through the early elementary school years.

Despite contrary claims regarding the benefits of Head Start as a policy initiative, it is evident that children of poverty begin school behind their middle-class counterparts. Hart and Risley (1995) documented vast language gaps between middle-class children and children of poverty. Their research reported that children in poverty hear eight million fewer words a year than their middle-class peers. This shows that an achievement gap exists between these groups of children well before school entry. Students in poverty enter school with fewer academic skills than their advantaged peers and entry level kindergarten skills determine future academic success or failure (Meisels, 1999). The disparity among vocabulary development alone is significant far before kindergarten. By the age of 3, middle-class children have a vocabulary of roughly 1,100 words versus children of poverty with 525 words (Howard, Grogan-Dresser, & Dunklee, 2009). This is evidence that the process of closing the achievement gap must begin before children enter formal schooling. Children who begin school with a deficit are unlikely to catch up, which only widens the achievement gap in subsequent grades (Coley, 2002; West, Denton & Reaney, 2001).

In 2007, the beginning of The Great Recession, the childhood poverty rate in the United States increased by 49% (Fowler, 2013). This increase is significant because children in poverty are most at risk of failing within the K-12 educational system (Burger, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2010; Kozol, 1991). Early childhood programs work to rectify this disparity (Burger, 2009). With the current increase in childhood poverty, more young children will start school behind their more affluent

peers. As stated earlier, the achievement gap is present before children enter formal schooling. Children from higher socioeconomic status (SES) groups score on average 60% above the scores of the lowest SES groups in cognitive abilities (Anyon, 2005; Fowler, 2013). This makes early childhood education a significant area for educational equity and reform efforts.

Equity has historically been linked to democracy in education since *Brown v. Board of Education*. Newer federal reform efforts such as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2001) and school finance reforms such as California's recent Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) focus attention on equity in education. All of these reform efforts aim to equalize opportunities for underserved students who have yet to develop the social and cognitive skills to achieve at high levels in school. As seen by the efforts of Head Start, early childhood education has been a part of the reform picture with the intent to level the playing field for less advantaged children.

Kindergarten Today

Kindergarten as a grade level in formal schooling encompasses debate regarding its role within the public school system. Initially, kindergarten was seen as a transition from home to the formal school setting. Currently, issues such as attendance requirements, age-appropriate instructional standards, and kindergarten start age remain at the forefront (Bryant & Clifford, 1992; Zaslow et al. 2010).

Kindergarten Participation

Currently, kindergarten is not mandatory in California and is an option for families. School attendance is, however, mandatory for students between the ages of

6 and 18. The compensatory education law for school attendance requires students to start school by age 6. Mandatory attendance at 6 years of age means the child must be enrolled in school in either kindergarten or first grade. Eligibility for first grade is set at 6 years old on or before September 1 (California Department of Education, 2014). Today, 97% of eligible children attend kindergarten but not all show up to class with the same skill level (Lee, Burkam, Ready, Honigman, & Meisels, 2006).

The most beneficial kindergarten programs are seen as those that support children's smooth transition, both socially and emotionally, from home to school (Bryant & Clifford, 1992). However, new pressures have arisen for kindergarten as a grade level in the public schools. Accountability measures are now influencing kindergarten programs.

Accountability

One of the most recent major federal reform efforts is the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB, 2001). This reform effort under the George W. Bush administration increased the focus on testing and assessment with sanctions for schools who did not meet adequate yearly academic progress for students based on the test results. Analysis of disaggregated data by subgroups, including ethnicity and socioeconomic status, meant that all student groups were expected to succeed. This legislation brought new accountability to school districts across the nation. This pressured states to increase academic standards at all levels, including kindergarten, in order to prepare students to score well on the standardized tests administered to measure student achievement (Bland, 2014).

With a new focus on achievement-based practices came achievement tests, standards, pacing guides, and progress monitoring. These achievement-based practices now moved from the upper elementary grades down to the lower grades and to younger children to prepare them for the academic rigor of formal schooling. This brought a push-down effect of developmentally inappropriate practices on younger children. Prior to NCLB, kindergarten programs focused on developmental processes rather than on academic outcomes. Academic standards for reading and math have now reached kindergarten classrooms. Kindergarten children now receive instruction in reading, writing, mathematics, and science (Clark, 2001; Ray & Smith, 2010).

Out of this pressure for more academic outcomes at younger ages came the 2000 National Education Goals that stated, “all children will start school ready to learn” (National Education Goals Panel, 1998, p.1). The term “school readiness” was born and thus standards-based practices influenced early childhood education. Early childhood educators pushed back on aggressive academic standards-based practices that were not developmentally appropriate for young children and the National Education Goals Panel began their emphasis on “ready schools” (National Education Goals Panel, 1998, p.5). This encouraged schools to create transition practices to connect schools to families, preschools, and the community. This ecological perspective is based on the belief that relationships and contextual factors influence children’s transition to and success in kindergarten (Pianta, & Cox, 1999).

Kindergarten Start Age

As kindergarten became more widespread, children's adjustment to school gained attention. Transitional practices for students entering kindergarten implemented by the elementary school began. These practices included conducting home visits; contact by phone or mail regarding kindergarten information; parent orientations; and visits to the kindergarten classroom by parents and students prior to the start of the school year. (Pianta, Cox, Taylor, & Early, 1999; Schulting, Malone, & Dodge, 2005).

With the new "school readiness" term, some schools and parents choose to delay the start of kindergarten for students due to the belief that this delay will benefit the child's maturity level and readiness for school. When parents choose to delay kindergarten entry for their child, the term commonly used for this is "redshirting." This borrowed term from college athletics is where athletes are recruited to play a sport but sit out or are "redshirted" for their freshman year to gain strength and skill before they use their eligible playing years for the best interest of the team (Frick, 1986; Jones & Sutherland, 2001). There are arguments for and against this practice regarding kindergarten start age. Some research shows there are significant academic advantages for older students at the start of school but these advantages decrease later in the kindergarten year and delaying school start age does not create long-term advantages (Oshima & Domaleski, 2006).

In spite of this research, California chose to change the school start age for its young kindergarten students. Prior to 2012, children in California could enter

kindergarten classes as young as 4 years and 9 months old, with the entry cut-off date of December 2 of the year in which the child would turn 5 years old. This entry date is now changed due to the Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2010 (SB1381), the focus of this research. The Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2010 moved up the school start age to require children to be 5 years old by September 1 of the school year in which they begin school. For those students that now fall in the birthday gap between September 1 and December 2 (the prior school start age) a new optional program is provided called transitional kindergarten (TK).

Transitional Kindergarten Legislation

Over the past two decades there has been increased attention toward the importance of children's first few years of life and elementary school. President Obama's State of the Union Address (2014) encouraged preschool for all. Reform efforts such as the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001) have pressured academic institutions to require academic success at younger and younger ages. This next section will review the legislative history that paved the road for the legislation that created transitional kindergarten.

History of California Early Childhood Education Legislation

Legislative history regarding efforts to support the learning of young children in California began in 1998 with California Proposition 10 (Prop 10). Prop 10 was officially named "The Children and Families First Act." This proposed a tobacco tax to fund early childhood education. With the passage of Prop 10, the First 5 California Commission was established. In addition to the state commission, each county in

California has its own branch of the commission. The First 5 focus is on the needs of families and young children and one of their goals is children's school readiness and transitioning into formal schooling.

Next on the legislative timeline was the initial bill to support universal preschool for California's youngsters. This was Proposition 82, California's Preschool for All Act (2006). This bill sought to provide free, voluntary, public preschool education for all 4-year-old children by taxing high income earners (Barnett, Ackerman, & Robin, 2006). A bill in the California legislature requires a two-thirds majority to pass. Proposition 82 failed, with 60.9% of the electorate casting votes against it. This vote clearly showed that California voters did not support preschool for California's 4-year-olds by increasing taxes on high income earners.

Legislation to Establish Transitional Kindergarten

Four years after the failure of Proposition 82 came Senate Bill 1381, The Kindergarten Readiness Act (Simitian, 2010). This bill did not directly establish preschool for 4-year-olds but sought to change the kindergarten entry age from 5 years old by December 2 to 5 years old by September 1. Because of the new kindergarten entry age, a transitional kindergarten was established for the 4-year-old children who fell in the gap between the new September 1 entry date and the previous December 2 entry date. For these children, now with birthdays between September 2 and December 2, a new 2-year kindergarten program would be provided called transitional kindergarten (TK). The TK program accommodates 4-year-old children

falling in this birthdate gap with a 2-year kindergarten program that begins when they are 4 years old. The Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2010 was signed into law by Governor Schwarzenegger in 2010 and resulted in the current transitional kindergarten program. These TK students are funded through the California public schools average daily attendance (ADA) funding formula. This bill is the focus of this study in an effort to better understand how policy initiatives such as this impact early childhood education.

Transitional kindergarten should not be confused with transitional retention or remediation programs. Research shows that transitional programs for retention or remediation produce short-term benefits but are in question due to the impact of negative long-term consequences (Cannon & Lipscomb, 2011; Jacob, & Lefgren, 2007; Jimerson, 2001; National Center for Education Statistics, 2006; Roderick & Nagaoka, 2005).

Influences of Birth through Three Advocacy

With the passage of the Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2010, Senate Bill 837 was introduced by Senator Darrell Steinberg in 2014. This bill sought to provide transitional kindergarten as universal preschool to all 4-year-olds regardless of birthdate and not just the 4-year-old children already served by Senate Bill 1381. The intention of this bill was to bring transitional kindergarten to all 4-year-olds, essentially adding universal preschool as another grade level, TK, to the K-12 public school continuum. This bill was to be funded through ADA, as all other grade levels in the state are funded. During the revision process the funding for Senate Bill 837

was reduced. Conflict emerged between “birth-to-three” advocates and universal preschool advocates. First 5 and other birth-to-three advocates voiced their opinions at a senate budget hearing which provided a forum for expressing their dilemma. These childcare program budgets had been severely cut in 2008; yet, they were still operating at 2008 levels. Birth-to-three advocates, including First 5, sought to have the funding cuts from the 2008 recession restored in lieu of new programs such as TK for all 4-year-olds. Senate Bill 837 was revised as a trailer bill that restored funding to early education programs previously cut and provided professional development funds for teachers of TK (Edsource, 2014).

Critiques and Concerns of Transitional Kindergarten Legislation

Transitional kindergarten is a program caught between the ideal of universal pre-K for all 4-year-olds and the birth-to-three childcare debate in California. With severe budget cuts to the California state budget after the financial crisis of 2008 many state-funded child care programs suffered severe financial losses. With the state’s current financial rebound, re-funding previous programs including those for the birth-to-three population became a priority for legislators. Difficult trade-offs were made regarding funding of programs for 4-year-olds. Programs face the complexity of funding sources from the federal, state, and local levels and compete for finite resources (Hustedt & Barnett, 2011). This continues to impact the TK program in the state of California.

Two years after the enactment of the Kindergarten Readiness Act (2010), Governor Brown wanted to eliminate TK funding beginning in the 2012-13 school

budget year as a cost-saving effort. This would have saved the state \$223.7 million by eliminating ADA funding for the children in transitional kindergarten programs in 2012-13 and subsequently saving \$672 million in 2014-15 (Gilroy Dispatch, 2012).

Because of the unstable nature of the legislation of this program, districts were left in limbo. In a March 2012 article in the San Diego Union-Tribune, a school superintendent stated that her district had no plans to offer the transitional kindergarten program when she heard the governor was opposing it. But, subsequently, Superintendent Leslie Fausset stated, “There’s been confusion about whether you’re required to do it (TK), clearly if we’re required, we will do it (San Diego Union-Tribune, 2012).” Following the governor’s lead, this superintendent believed her district would not have to offer TK, leaving her to reverse her stance when it became clear that TK might be required. Many districts were caught off guard when the state’s Assembly budget subcommittee on education rejected the governor’s plan to eliminate TK (San Diego Union-Tribune, 2012).

A new kindergarten start age has been established in California. Transitional kindergarten has been implemented to capture those students missing the cut-off school entry age and provide them transitional support into kindergarten. Current literature shows that policies alone are not adequate to raise student achievement for all students (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Fowler, 2013; Kozol, 1991). Transitional kindergarten as a policy initiative needs further study to discover if children benefit from this reform effort.

Research supports the theory that developmental stages in young children can be mediated to increase children's learning. Children in poverty experience developmental delays behind the rate of their more affluent peers. The literature clearly supports that early childhood education is effective to equalize opportunity for all children (Barnett, 1995; Schweinhart et al., 2005; Garces et al., 2002). When developmental gaps are recognized, early childhood education can intervene and provide developmental support as needed for young children.

The purpose of this research is to fill the gap in the research and to find out what people know about transitional kindergarten and how this initiative impacts families, teachers, administrators, and policymakers. To date there is little empirical research specifically on California's Transition Kindergarten. Concerns have been expressed regarding the enactment of this educational policy. The David and Lucile Packard Foundation has supported research in this area (including this study) to fill this research gap regarding transitional kindergarten as a policy initiative.

TK is largely understudied and as such this research is needed to better understand the implications of funding and implementing this policy. Benefits and cautions for similar future policy initiatives can be determined and suggestions for further policy implementation will be made. Recommendations will be made as contributions to the fields of education and educational policy.

CHAPTER III
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to fill the gap in the research to understand how policymakers perceive transitional kindergarten and their role in the policy initiative. This study will contribute to filling the gap of the limited research on the recently implemented Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2010. The differences among stakeholders regarding levels of policy implementation needs further research (Cobb, Donaldson, & Mayer, 2013). This research will address policymakers' view of TK legislation.

The epistemological framework is a critical policy analysis. This will be an examination of transitional kindergarten policy through a critical theory lens. Diem, Young, Cumings-Welton, Mansfield, and Lee (2014) state,

Critical theories facilitate the exploration of policy roots and processes; how policies presented as reality are often political rhetoric; how knowledge, power, and resources are distributed inequitably; how educational programs and policies, regardless of intent, reproduce stratified social relations; how schools institutionalize those with whom they come in contact; and how individuals react to such social and institutional forces.

How policymakers view this policy and their expectations as to how TK will accomplish what it states it will accomplish was the focus of this research.

This study attempted to answer two questions:

1. How do policymakers and political stakeholders such as legislators, school board members, and superintendents view transitional kindergarten for the communities they serve?
2. How do the perceptions of these policymakers and political stakeholders such as legislators, school board members, and superintendents compare and contrast with the educational policy that established Transitional Kindergarten?

Theoretical Framework

The lens through which this research was viewed was a critical policy analysis. When viewing educational policies through this lens there are five fundamental concerns:

First, attention is often given to the difference between policy rhetoric and practiced reality.... The second concern focuses on the policy, its roots, and its development.... A third concern is with the distribution of power, resources, and knowledge and the creation of 'winners' and 'losers'.... A fourth and related concern, focuses on the broader effect a given policy has on relationship of inequality and privilege.... Finally, many critical policy scholars are interested in members of nondominant groups who resist

processes of domination and oppression and who engage in activism and use participatory methods to employ agency within schools. (Diem et al., 2014)

These five concerns provided a critical framework to view transitional kindergarten as a policy initiative. The scope of these five concerns provided the opportunity to investigate this phenomenon in depth and to provide a thorough investigation and thick description of the phenomenon being studied.

Methods

Research Design

This qualitative study explored state, county, and local policymakers' and political stakeholders' perceptions regarding the Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2010. The methods used include observing, interviewing, and analyzing documents through participant observation. Schwandt (2001) states, "Broadly conceived, participant observation is a methodology that includes activities of direct observation, interviewing, document analysis, reflection, analysis, and interpretation." Participant observation was used to understand the perceptions of the policymakers and political stakeholders.

Participants

This purposive nonrandom sampling encompassed political stakeholders who included legislative policymakers and school officials influencing policy or implementing policy. A purposive approach (Schwandt, 2001) was used to select participants based on characteristics that lent them to contributing to the phenomenon of study. The participants were chosen based on professional characteristics that

provided a heightened insight on policy procedures and implementation of TK. Six policymakers were sought using a nonprobability sampling technique (Schwandt, 2001). Snowball, chain, or network sampling was utilized to identify relevant participants for this study (Glesne, 2011). This means that participants were found through others who recommended the participant for this study. Interpreting, understanding, and illuminating participants' perspectives on TK was the goal of this qualitative inquiry. This study's researcher and advisors arranged access to policymakers who were influential in policy process or played a role in SB1381, The Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2010.

This study is one of four studies researching the perceptions of stakeholders on transitional kindergarten. In this study focusing on the perceptions of policymakers and political stakeholders, four of the six participants serve or have served the students of the Central Valley of California. Because this study includes participants who were involved in the legislative process, two participants are from the state of California at large. The location of this four-part dissertation study for the remaining three researchers that include the perceptions of families, teachers, and principals, encompasses California's Central Valley community. Their participants were drawn from a district within a rural county with over 20 school districts. The nexus of the research for the companion studies was a district within a community of 80,000 residents. Among the district students in 2013-2014, one fifth (20.6%) were English Learners. The demographic breakdown is as follows: 70.5% Hispanic or Latino, 17.4% White or Caucasian, 6.1% Asian and 3.1% Black or African American

(California Department of Education, 2015). There is a TK classroom at every elementary site (California Department of Education, 2014).

This district is in geographical proximity to the research team. Additionally, the district has granted permission to the research team to participate in this study and allow access to school site personnel and documents necessary for review. The County Office of Education in which this school district resides received a Packard grant to assist in the implementation of transitional kindergarten to the schools within the county. This research is also supported with a David and Lucile Packard Fellowship Award.

Data Collection

Semistructured interviews and document analysis were used in this exploratory study to capture these stakeholder's perceptions of TK. Regarding interviews, Glesne (2011) states,

In conventional approaches, researchers ask questions in the context of purposes often important primarily to themselves. Respondents answer questions in the context of dispositions (motives, values, concerns, needs) that researchers need to unravel in order to make sense out of the words that their questions generate (p.102).

Glesne continues, "Generally, qualitative researchers begin with some interview questions and remain open to reforming and adding to them throughout the research process" (p.102).

Document analysis included but was not limited to press releases, newspaper articles and editorials, letters to the editor, political briefings, and the legislation as it was written. In-person interviews and a follow-up contact were completed with each policymaker. The semi-structured interview ranged in time from 1 to 1.5 hours. Interviews were audiotaped and transcribed for analysis.

The interview data, field notes, and related documents such as news releases and legislative documents were analyzed drawing from Constant Comparison Method of Inductive Coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Interviews were transcribed and began with open coding analysis. Open coding refers to the initial review of the data using an expansive viewpoint to identify any segment of data that may prove useful (Merriam, 2009, p.178). This process allowed categories to be constructed. As data categories were constructed data analysis was done using the Dedoose web application to code data thematically. Interview responses reflecting the purpose of the study and all subcomponents were identified. Merriam states that data analysis begins when answer segments of the interviews are identified as responsive to the interview protocol (p.176). These segments were identified and coded in Dedoose, and thematic responses were revealed.

Trustworthiness

When research is noteworthy it is due to the quality of its investigation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Four criteria serve to establish trustworthiness: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility refers to the researcher assuring that participants' responses are

represented appropriately as the participant intended. Transferability refers to the ability to provide enough information to establish similarity to other research.

Dependability refers to the process being logical and documented and confirmability refers to the data collected and presented as authentic and appropriate. To maintain trustworthiness in this research the researcher ensured that the data were presented to the participants in a credible manner by member checking in the interview process. This allowed participants to verify their responses for confirmability and accuracy in the research study (Schwandt, 2001). Finally, conclusions were determined by linking the data, analysis, and research site clearly (Guba 1981, Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

A thick description (Schwandt, 2007) was written to base an understanding of the Transitional Kindergarten Policy Initiative. Thick description entails the complete literal description of the topic of investigation (Merriam, 2009).

Triangulation occurred through multiple types of data sources. These data sources included interviews, research journal and field notes, and document collection (Glesne, 2011). Additionally, this research study was performed by one part of a comprehensive research team investigating transitional kindergarten from four different perspectives: the policymakers, the principals, the teachers, and the families. This provided multiple types of data sources and multiple investigators to a broader triangulation process (Glesne, 2011).

Positionality

I have interest in this research as I have been a school administrator for the last 10 years working primarily with socially economically disadvantaged students and English learners. I have been immersed in the public school educational system which allows me to be sensitive to confidential practices, to understand the complexities of district politics, and to be sensitive to issues in a small community. My position as a school administrator contributed to my ability to build rapport with my research participants. I bring an innate view to education in the personal desire to see all stakeholders succeed. This includes children, families, teachers, principals, district office staff, and all other stakeholders that support public education.

Conclusion

Transitional kindergarten is now at full implementation in California schools after a 3-year phase in beginning in 2012. The impact of this legislation will affect student success and this research will contribute to exploring the effectiveness of this policy. The opportunity to speak to policymakers regarding the political process of this legislation in one county in the Central Valley and in the broader context of the entire state will provide foresight to the implementation of future educational policies. The results of this research will show how qualitative research can inform the policy decision-making process.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

This chapter discusses the qualitative methods described in Chapter III. Semistructured interviews were conducted with six participants regarding their perceptions of transitional kindergarten as a policy initiative. Participants included policymakers and political stakeholders at several levels in the educational policy realm in the state of California. These include levels of stakeholders that influence policy through leadership. These policymakers include a director of early childhood programs, a district assistant superintendent, a county assistant superintendent, a former California State School Board member, a former California State legislative staffer, and a former California State legislator. Four of the six participants serve or formerly served students in California's Central Valley.

Purposeful sampling provided different participant perspectives in the roots and development of transitional kindergarten. Key themes emerged throughout the coding process. These themes present themselves differently between two categories of participants: creators and implementers. The creator category includes the policymakers who influenced the birth and beginnings of the policy which created the Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2010 and subsequently transitional kindergarten. The creators consist of the former California State School Board member, the former California State legislative staffer, and the former California State legislator. The themes that emerged for the creators include start-age concerns, emergence of the

policy, influence of interest groups on policy development, bill passage drama, and perceived results of the legislation.

The implementer category includes the political stakeholders that were first to define and implement this policy for school districts through their leadership. The implementers consist of the director of early childhood programs, the district assistant superintendent, and the county office assistant superintendent. Three themes emerged in the implementer category. These themes are start age concerns, confusion related to phase-in and implementation, and misunderstanding of early childhood education and priority conflicts. The results in this study provide insight into the perceptions of policymakers and political stakeholders regarding transitional kindergarten as a policy initiative. Themes will be presented and discussed from the creators' and implementers' perceptions.

This study examines the historical narrative of transitional kindergarten through the views and perceptions of the creators influencing policy that led to transitional kindergarten and through the views and perceptions of the implementers of transitional kindergarten. The researcher asked the questions:

1. How do policymakers and political stakeholders such as legislators, school board members, and superintendents view transitional kindergarten for the communities they serve?
2. How do the perceptions of these policymakers and political stakeholders such as legislators, school board members, and superintendents compare and contrast with the educational policy that established transitional kindergarten?

Critical policy analysis is interdisciplinary in practice (Diem, Young, Welton, Mansfield, & Lee, 2014). The focus of this study was on the roots and development of transitional kindergarten policy through the perceptions of the two groups, the creators and the implementers. The results provide a microhistory of transitional kindergarten. According to Brewer (2014), “Microhistories often take as their subject a single event or person immersed in a rich and complex social and cultural conjuncture. (p274)” The microhistory in this study refers to a single event, in this case the Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2010 establishing transitional kindergarten. As Brewer (2014) states, microhistories provide, “a healthy respect for the specificity of a historical moment (p. 275).” A detailed examination of the sociohistorical context shows the influences of social dynamics shaping the practice of policy-making and problem definition (Ball, 1994). The following results illustrate the social dynamics shaping the policy-making of transitional kindergarten to address the policy problem of California kindergarten students starting kindergarten at a young age.

The results of this study are presented in three parts. First, is a focus on the historical narrative of the creators’ perceptions on TK and a summary of the historical narrative of the creators’ perceptions through a microhistory lens. Second, is a focus on the historical narrative of the implementers’ perceptions of TK and a summary of the implementers’ perceptions also using a microhistory lens. Substantial quotes are used to fully capture the perceptions of the interviewees related to this microhistorical event. Finally, to conclude the results, is a summary of the historical narratives of the

perceptions of both the creators and the implementers looking at problems solved through the policy process.

Creators—TK Roots and Development

Start Age Concerns

The Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2010 began as a grassroots effort by teachers. The early start age for California kindergarten students was an issue that teachers felt needed to be addressed because they believed that the younger students were struggling both academically and socially. They seemed to feel that children starting kindergarten at 5 years of age would benefit academic performance and social development. The beginnings of this effort are recalled by the state legislator:

I was approached by first one teacher from Palo Alto Unified School District just casually at my sidewalk office hours, which is just what it sounds like, I hold office hours out in the Farmer's Market, so-called sidewalk office hours. The teacher came by and talked to me about the age for kindergarten. I was polite but frankly not very encouraging because what I told her was, "You don't need to make a believer out of me, I think kids are starting too young in California. I do think 5 is a more appropriate start than 4 years and 9 months. Being 5 by September or the start of the school year makes more sense than the situation which we had, when kids turn 5 by December 2, if I remember correctly. But I also told her that the conversation had been going on in the capitol for 25 years and had gotten nowhere whatsoever and that I didn't think

there was much likelihood that such an effort would be successful for a variety of reasons.

This concern regarding a young start age for California school children was also addressed by the legislative staffer. The following response was stated when asked why TK came about:

So it goes way back and it wasn't always referred to as TK, there was this long-standing issue with California having a later birthdate eligibility cutoff than most other states so we had this cohort of kids who were still 4 when they started kindergarten that I think had been identified as a policy problem a long time ago. It sort of started to come to a head as kindergarten became more academic and more rigorous, for lack of a better word, that policy issue kind of became more and more acute. So even long before the idea of solving it through transitional kindergarten came along, there were a lot of policy conversations and pieces of legislation that failed.

Here the staffer differentiates between the start age concerns and the emergence of transitional kindergarten. Kindergarten start age had been established by the state of California in 1891 (Edsource, 2014). However, these comments show that the roots of the concerns regarding the early start age of California kindergarteners go back for more than 25 years. This acute "policy issue" regarding young children meeting rigorous kindergarten standards, as referred to by the staffer, shows that no progress had been made on changing the kindergarten start age prior to this 2010 legislation.

The former California State Board member also shared his insight that this early start age had been an issue historically. He also said that this was an issue he had formerly addressed decades prior when he was superintendent of a Central Valley school district. He described a program implemented in the district he served that addressed developmental stages for kindergarten children. The children were tested and tracked into classes based on their developmental level. Moreover, they had to meet specific developmental goals in order to progress and be admitted to first grade.

It appears that kindergarten start age became a policy problem due to the increase in academic rigor in the kindergarten state standards which were established to prepare young children academically and socially for later success within the high-stakes accountability context. This new effort by Palo Alto teachers brought attention to the needs of kindergarten students who were required to meet rigorous academic standards. This, however, called into question the feasibility of 4-year-olds attending and being successful in kindergarten and led the legislator to introduce the Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2010 (KRA).

Emergence of the Policy

With persistence by a now growing group of teachers, the effort to form new legislation to change the kindergarten start age began to emerge. The state legislator commented:

It made sense to pursue the bill in part because I thought the fundamental notions, the fundamental argument was a good one, which was that we were starting youngsters at an age when they were less likely to be successful. It

was 2010 so I had a couple of years left before I was termed out of the senate, 2012, so that gave me 2010, 2011, 2012. If you are going to try and tackle something that seems like a big lift you want a little runway in front of you, it's not doing it your last year, for example, and be termed out. But, again, [I was] not very optimistic about the outcome of the bill and introduced it more with the notion that it was a conversation worth having again, getting restarted in the Capitol and maybe someone would pick it up after I left the Capitol...so I introduced the bill and it didn't get much, didn't generate a lot of interest, in part, because, as I said, for 25 years this issue had gone nowhere, it's not that it hadn't come up, it had, Democrats and Republicans had raised the issue, legislators and governors had raised the issue.

It appears that changing the start age had been a bipartisan political conversation that legislators and governors had addressed prior to the KRA but as a policy problem it had gained no traction. However, complications emerged that would influence this kindergarten start age legislation. One of the complications was that the deficits in the California state budget were looming heavily for legislative decision-making. This 2010 conversation about kindergarten start age was happening as California legislators were working to survive the economic challenges stemming from the Great Recession of 2008. Politics and budget deficits began to influence the bill when it was realized that changing the kindergarten start age would also result in a substantial fiscal savings.

The legislator continued to describe his efforts:

So I introduced the bill, no thought whatsoever of TK at this point, all about the benefits [of changing the start age] But one of the first problems you face is, and it's a sort of only in Sacramento problem, is, well, wait a minute, you say you are going to save money, yes, well how does that work? Well you're going to save roughly \$700 million a year because 25% of the 500,000 youngsters who ordinarily start kindergarten will not start, they will be delayed. And then people say, "Isn't that a one-time only savings?" and you say, well, yes, but it's a one-time only savings that happens every year for thirteen years in a row, because if you have a cohort that is now 375,000 kids instead of 500,000 kids, that smaller cohort will, of course, be a smaller cohort when they start kindergarten but they stay a smaller cohort when they are in first grade, and second grade, and third grade, and fourth grade, and all the way through K-12, 13 years. So if that saves you roughly \$700 million a year in state funding times 13 years, now all of a sudden you are talking about \$9.1 billion and in the midst of a budget crisis of immense proportion people say, "Whoa, that is serious money, what do you want to do with the money?" And I made an early decision that did not involve TK that was pretty, the decision was pretty sort of, I wouldn't say it was analytically made, well look, why don't we put half of the money toward expanded funding for Pre-K around the state because presumably some of these youngsters who would no longer be starting kindergarten would need Pre-K, and that was sort of a way to respond

to that concern and it seemed fair, you know, half of it goes here, half of it goes there, off we go.

The legislator realized a two-fold benefit. The original intent of the bill was to change the kindergarten start age; however, it soon became evident that this would also provide fiscal savings that could assist in the general budget to help deal with the recession. The legislator described how a smaller cohort of children moving through the public school system saves the state money over 13 years. Also, he addressed how the age change would aid in alleviating the state budget woes. Maintaining half of the fiscal savings to expand state preschool indicates he was aware that many students not able to attend kindergarten would need access to additional state preschool slots. These additional slots would have allowed a larger number of less advantaged students to access preschool services.

Influence of Interest Groups on Policy Development

The fact that this bill also served as a budget savings measure caught the attention of more stakeholders. Now this was not just an education bill to address the kindergarten start age, it was a bill that would also address budget deficit issues in California. The bill began to gain momentum and the legislator continued:

Well, the bill got out of the Senate Education Committee on which I sat and through the appropriations committee and then off the floor of the Senate with a pretty healthy bipartisan vote. And in the whole education establishment which had largely been disinterested, and I don't say that in a pejorative way, the education establishment was disinterested because, okay, here's another

fool's error [sic] in 25 years of trying and it's never gotten anywhere, all of the sudden there was not only a bill, it was out of committee it was through "appropriations," it was off the floor and headed to the assembly and then good news is you are off the senate floor, bad news is now a bunch of people decide that they need to weigh in.

Here the legislator emphasized that for 25 years there was no interest in kindergarten start age but once the bill became a budget-saving measure people paid attention.

As the bill gained momentum, other stakeholders started to pay attention including Preschool California (now known as Early Edge California), a nonprofit statewide policy and advocacy organization fiscally sponsored by an organization called Community Initiatives, the California Teachers Association (CTA), which is the teachers' union, parents, and other legislators. Addressing the issues of these special interest groups, the legislator stated:

The folks at Preschool California were seeing this as an opportunity to get a foot in the door on preschool, and there was yet another issue that didn't really have an organized constituency but that was starting to get some time and attention. If you have 125,000 kids who are no longer going to be starting kindergarten that means that you have 250,000 parents in the midst of a recession who are being told you are no longer going to be able to send your kid to kindergarten and we hope you can make it work by either paying for childcare out of your pocket in the midst of a recession or by staying home

with your youngster rather than going to work in the midst of a recession. And you've got a lot of unhappy parents out there which translates into a lot of questions for my colleagues. You have this great idea about starting kindergarten at the right age but absent someplace for them to go, you want me to get parents throughout my district upset that I'm taking away the right of their kid to go to school come September first of whatever year we start the program. So you've got CTA's concern about certified teaching staff, you've got Preschool California's interest in trying to get at least a foot in the door on preschool here in California and you have sort of a free floating concern about what impact will this have on California parents and families in the absence of a place for their youngsters to go on the first day of school if 125,000 kids are told to wait until next year.

Similar to the legislator's comments above on the fiscal nature of the bill, the legislative staffer comments on two interest groups: Preschool California's efforts to expand preschool and CTA's efforts to keep the fiscal savings in the K-12 system. These two groups began the conversation that would eventually lead to the formation of the transitional kindergarten program. The legislative staffer explained:

It [The Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2010] began as a bill that did try to capture savings by not serving that cohort of kids [whose birthdays fall between September second and December second] and plow the savings instead into general budget balancing at a time when the state was in need of a solution to try to balance a budget that had become totally out of balance. So

he [Senator Simitian, the author of the bill] had initially proposed to take half, if I recall, of the savings and use it as a budget balancer overall and the other half he wanted to put into childcare for low income families.... The interest groups that are very powerful in the Capitol were not going to let him get this bill out of the Assembly unless he found a way to take the resources and keep them in K-12. So that was how TK was born because it was technically still part of K-12 though it was tailored a little differently to those kids.

Here is a key moment in the bill's development where significant changes occurred from Senate drafts to Assembly drafts. The number of historical narrators influencing the transitional kindergarten story expanded to include influential interest groups. Previously the legislator proposed using one half of the savings for childcare and the other for general budget deficits in the state of California. The staffer explains that CTA, representing teachers across the state, wanted to maintain 100% of the funding in Prop. 98 (state funding for schools) and not lose funding from Prop. 98 to other budget deficit areas of the California state budget.

It appears one reason that CTA was intent on keeping 100% of the funds in Prop. 98 was to maintain teaching staff. The transitional kindergarten program was created and those jobs that would have been lost due to the decrease in kindergarten enrollment would be maintained to serve in the transitional kindergarten program. This also meant a place for the displaced 4-year-old students who would now be in transitional kindergarten and served by certificated teachers. So with regard to the special interest groups, Early Edge was able to establish services for 4-year-old

children and CTA was able to maintain jobs for its teachers by way of the transitional kindergarten program.

The result of the legislation was that transitional kindergarten would be phased in over a 3-year period. The phase-in began by allowing students with November birthdays to attend TK during the first year of implementation. The following year students with birthdays in both October and November could attend TK, and the last year of implementation allowed students with birthdays including September, October, and November, essentially all the eligible TK students, to attend TK. Addressing the phase-in, the legislator stated:

I felt it was important to give people time to plan. I thought, I want the program to be a success. If you want your program to be a success, then give people time to plan so that it has the absolute best chance of success. I also thought the 3-year [phase-in] was wise, I also thought that the flexibility about implementation was wise. I think that all of those things have proven to be true. And while there was some pushback it was relatively modest really and I think in a significant part because we had those accommodations built in.

The phase-in period allowed education leaders (implementers) to plan and implement what would become a new grade level in the now TK-12 continuum. Although much was accomplished in addressing the concerns of both Early Edge and CTA, the process of passing the bill was not without drama.

Bill Passage Drama

Legislative challenges impacted the bill on its journey through the legislature. The bill at one point hit the eleventh hour and almost did not pass. It appears fatigue from the legislators played a role in the confusion of understanding what the legislation actually meant for everyone. The legislative staffer commented on the communication to legislators regarding what the bill would mean for them and their constituents:

Well, it's just from the logistics, there are deadlines by which bills in a certain session have to be passed. The session ends at midnight on the date and every year there are bills that get left behind because there is not enough time. I mean you would think that somebody, the legislature would figure out how to get it all done, but there can be delaying tactics by certain members and, you know, just like what happens in Congress, you have filibusters, and those are just process oriented tactics used to delay bills. I was tasked with trying to make sure as it moved through the committee process that if there were any hiccups that I tried to help smooth those over. It was late, late at night when it, for procedural reasons, it got called back to the Senate Appropriations Committee and needed to be heard. There were a couple of members on the committee who I think didn't understand what the bill did. These were Democrats and they were really, I think part of it was fatigue, I think the members, they get really tired.... It didn't get to the floor until after 11:00,

tick, tock, and there were other bills in front of it but (a) senator actually moved it ahead in the queue and took it up in time for it to get passed.

Speaking to the intensity of the moment and the subsequent wait for Governor Schwarzeggar to sign the bill, the legislator explained:

We finally got the bill out of committee and at 11:52 when I had taken the bill up on the floor with 8 minutes to spare, I only had 19 votes and I needed 21. I had to turn to a colleague who had voted no already on the bill and explain quickly and persuasively to him why he should vote aye, he turned and announced he was changing his vote from no to aye. That gave us 20. I had to turn to another colleague who had not yet voted who had a last minute question about the bill which I was able to answer literally over my shoulder across two desks and he went from not voting to aye and we got our twenty-first vote including by the way, one Republican, without whose vote the bill would never have passed, at 11:53 of the last night of session, at which point we went to an uncertain fate in the governor's office, the governor had 30 days to sign the bill. He did not sign it until 9:15 pm on the thirtieth day.

This drama regarding the passage of the KRA signifies a crescendo in the historical moment of the creation of transitional kindergarten.

Perceived Results of the Legislation

Addressing the results of the legislation the creators' (the legislator, the staffer, and the state board member) comments ranged from optimism to skepticism.

The legislator was very optimistic about the results of the policy. He stated:

I thought, “this is ideal, this solves the political problem of 250,000 unhappy parents who can’t send their kids to school because instead of taking something away from them, we’re going to say actually, bonus for you, your kid gets the benefit of an extra year good for you, congratulations.” So you take the negative and you flip it and it’s a positive and it’s real! You know, it’s an extra year of instruction you know, if your kid wants it, take it, you absolutely can send your kid, your kid is going to get this extra year. It solved the CTA problem, the CTA problem solved a lot of political problems in the assembly, which historically has been more sensitive to CTA’s political views than the State Senate, it’s just the nature of the house. And most importantly, it just made all the sense in the world to me from a policy standpoint that if you could provide these kids with the opportunity to not only start at the right age but give them a year of quality instruction from a certificated staff member as certainty before they started at the right age that really is a win-win, that is the best of all possible worlds.

The staffer said:

Well if it works as designed we will see more kids demonstrating proficiency in reading and math by Grade 3, fewer special ed. placements, less grade level retention, higher graduation rates, you know, all down the line. That is what it is intended to do for these children. I think that if you look at the costs that are averted and the human costs, not just monetary costs that are averted by

making sure that kids have a better start, I think those could over time have significant impacts on systems.

The state board member, however, was more skeptical:

There is always an element of unexpected consequences, unanticipated problems, each year they will come and the legislature in all of its wisdom will try to fix them rather than let the schools do it. Schools know how to fix them and some communities know how to fix them better than others because they are different kinds of communities. But when the legislature tries to fix them you end up with so many regulations that it becomes confusing and parents really don't know. And I think if you allow schools to make the adjustments that are necessary to help them, help kids succeed, they will figure out ways to do it, you don't need more laws. But we will get them, they will keep coming.

And one last quote from the legislator:

People say one person can't make a difference, well here's what I think, I think two people who showed up in my office are in a position to say, but for their effort we wouldn't have 125,000 kids starting school every day in a TK program. And we wouldn't have 6 million kids in the system, all of whom started at the right age and that's because a couple of people showed up and got listened to and the system actually worked in this case and it's a heartening thing for people who are looking for a few more heartening things in our political process.

Summary of Creators

All three of the creator participants, the former State of California Board member, the legislative staffer, and the legislator, acknowledged the political processes, political nature, and the changes over time of the Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2010 establishing transitional kindergarten. The start age for kindergarten students in the state of California had been a political issue for over 25 years and the increase in the rigor of kindergarten brought this policy issue to the forefront. The Kindergarten Readiness Act emerged as a policy when it proved to also provide a cost-saving benefit to a cash-strapped California state budget. The influence of the budget crisis and interest groups such as Early Edge and CTA brought forth the transitional kindergarten aspect of a bill that ultimately began as an effort to simply change the kindergarten start age. The effort in the eleventh-hour drama of the passage of this bill appears to show how tentative an effort can become and how just a few minutes can mean the difference between the life or death of legislation that affects young children and families in California. The creators perceptions of the microhistory shows the emergence of the KRA, how it changed over time to establish the transitional kindergarten program, and how it contributed to improving the budget issues of the State of California.

Implementers—TK Roots and Development

The following section addresses the perceptions of the implementers. The implementers were stakeholders charged with the implementation of the KRA

legislation that ultimately resulted in transitional kindergarten. These political stakeholders included the director of early childhood programs, the district assistant superintendent, and the county office assistant superintendent. For the purpose of anonymity all the implementers will be referred to as school district leaders. Three themes emerged from the implementers' perceptions of the transitional kindergarten interviews. These themes were start age concerns, confusion related to the phase in and implementation of transitional kindergarten, and the misunderstanding of early childhood education and resulting priority conflicts. The first theme regarding start age concerns was common to both the creators and the implementers of this policy.

Start Age Concerns

The theme of kindergarten start age was addressed by the school district leaders charged with implementing the legislation. These leaders were concerned that with the change to a more rigorous, standards-based program that a placement in kindergarten was no longer developmentally appropriate for 4-year-old children. One school district leader responded to this concern stating,

To address the start age specifically, I mean that is something we've wrestled with for a long time. You know, you see those very young children in kindergarten and many of them are really struggling. So having worked in the school system and having seen that firsthand it was sort of the answer to the big, "ask" (question) that our kindergarten teachers have been putting out there for a very long time. "These little ones are little, why are we having them in the classroom with their Kinder peers who are nearly a year older?"

Another school district leader shared these concerns:

So we heard something is coming down about the change in kindergarten age and having been a kindergarten teacher I was excited about that because that December cut-off date, you did always have these young kiddos that started school, and you wonder, what do I do with these babies, and why California had a December first cutoff date and other states had August and September, it didn't make sense.

She continued to share her thoughts about the shift this legislation caused by refocusing efforts on early childhood education:

I think kindergarten teachers, or the few that I've spoken with were excited about it because many kindergarten teachers do have early childhood backgrounds. And, I think because of what's happened at K-8 in the past several years like with EDI (explicit direct instruction) and some things that have been happening that kindergarten teachers were saying, you know, "What happened to the block area and dramatic play?" because there was a time we did that in kindergarten. Now we sit them at desks and make them do worksheets and so I think some kindergarten teachers were excited about that, "Yay! Early childhood is coming back like it's supposed to be!

From these implementers' viewpoints it is clear that there had been a concern that 4-year-old children were too young to begin kindergarten. These educators substantiated the concerns the creators brought forth by describing specific issues regarding developmentally appropriate practices for 4-year-old students. All of the

implementers seemed to feel that this legislation would solve the problem of 4-year-olds being placed in an inappropriate academically focused environment.

Confusion Related to Phase-in and Implementation

As previously stated, the KRA legislation included a phase-in component for transitional kindergarten to allow for planning and implementation by districts in coordination with the county offices of education. One of the school district leaders commented about what surprised her and may have led to confusion regarding the implementation of transitional kindergarten:

I suppose the actual way it rolled out, just going from about zero to 120. Here you go, here's transitional kindergarten, and off you go...districts you will have a TK classroom. That was a little surprising to me, but working with the state department long enough, here we go again. We'll do it, whatever you say, we'll do it, but I think the rollout was not handled as well as it could have been.

It appeared that the speed of the roll out contributed to the perplexity of this policy. She continued with other insights regarding the role of the county office to support school districts:

So it put the county office in the position of taking the lead in sharing TK information with the districts, who, like I said before didn't really believe that this was going to happen. In fact, at one point I think we were just weeks away from opening classrooms where we were kind of struggling. Is this going to happen? Is this not going to happen? So it put us into the position to

really put a unified message out about TK and what that means for districts, what it means for families and the choices they have to make.

The confounding nature of whether the new policy would happen or not contributed to further befuddlement as this policy reached the site level. This school district leader described the misunderstandings of the site administrators:

I think initially those administrators weren't quite sure how it fit, 'We've got preschool and we've got kindergarten, what is this thing called TK? What is it? Where does it fit?' and what we saw at that point was they really weren't sure where it fit...sure, we'll check the box and we'll mix TK and K together and we'll only take those children in that first round [of the phase-in], we won't open to all the kids to open a full classroom of just TK, we'll just do what we have to do.

Another school district leader described the brainstorming approach taken by her organization to untangle this legislation:

We as a district started to brainstorm. Did we want to jump right in knowing that we are only going to get one or two kids in every classroom? So once we heard about it we did a little bit of research and we wanted to see how many students fell in that (TK) category. And, if we went the one month (of the phase-in), how many would that be, if we went back two months, October, how many would that be, if we took the whole gamut from September to December, how many students would that be?...We did a combination TK/K, which made it harder for the teachers because then you had to modify your

curriculum just for the two or three students or maybe four or five students, it really depended on the school... We grew from the first year, two or three, the second year we brought in the October babies and so then it grew a little bit more and now that we're at the September entry date, we have probably two schools that have full classrooms and the rest of the are a combination TK/K.

She also described efforts by her district to observe other programs prior to starting TK in her district. As she said,

We also did some observations, we went to a classroom and we looked at what they [the other district] offered and how they ran the program and the differences between a TK and a K. So we did that prior to starting our TK classroom.

Here this district leader shared the confusion she faced explaining transitional kindergarten to befuddled parents:

I think parents are just confused because they don't clearly understand when they come in to register, they just say, 'I want preschool.' They don't know the difference between state preschool, Head Start, and TK. They just say, my child's four I want him to go to school, they are not five yet, so they are not ready for kindergarten, they are four, I want my child to go to school. And, so when they come in we have to explain, you have options. When is your child's birthday? Then we will tell them what their options are. 'Oh, your child is old enough, your child gets to go to TK.' 'Well, what is that?' So, I think there are a lot of unknowns out there, parents are not clear what it is.

Another area of confusion was the curriculum for TK. As one school district leader stated:

If school districts are implementing it (TK) as it was written meaning that there is a different curriculum, they are focusing more on the California Preschool Learning Foundations as the goals for children in TK as opposed to the Kindergarten Common Core Standards, then it's appropriate and that's all a good thing. I just don't know if that is being implemented because honestly I don't even know if some TK teachers have even heard of the California Preschool Learning Foundations.

Here we see a progression of confusion related to phase-in and implementation. Whereas in the creator section there was confusion among the legislators concerning the meaning of the policy and the ramifications it would have on their constituency, here the school district leaders, as implementers, experienced confusion with implementation from the state level, county office level, district level, site level, and, finally, the parent level. For example, site level administrators were not sure what this meant for their schools; curriculum questions arose; parents were not sure what program was right for their children; and districts were brainstorming to solve all of these issues. Because the legislative effort provided for phase-in to develop this program, it appears unthinkable that this type of confusion ensued. The 3-year phase-in was established by the legislation to ease the change process and allow for planning. However, this phase-in apparently led to puzzlement among the

implementers. Looking at the microhistory of transitional kindergarten from the lens of the implementers revealed confusion on many fronts.

Misunderstanding of Early Childhood Education and Priority Conflicts

The district and county leader implementers suggested that a misunderstanding of early childhood education revealed itself as tacit resistance by site-level administrators on two fronts. One area of unspoken resistance was the lack of understanding of developmentally appropriate practice for 4-year-olds. The second area of unspoken resistance was the priority of responsibilities of site administrators and the conflicting attention to implementing the Common Core Standards and transitional kindergarten at the same time. The following quote by one school district leader captures both of these areas of tacit resistance:

Our janitors don't like it. That's a true story. They [the site administrator] made the teacher take the sand and water table out because it was too messy for the janitors. So I shared that story with administrators, I just want you to know because I was mortified that that happened. I think if we could do this whole professional development piece over again, not that I wouldn't want to spend that much time on the TK teachers but I would want to spend equal amount of time on administrators in helping them to really understand what TK is. I know that now for better or worse, Common Core was coming out about the same time that TK was coming out, so administrators' focus [was on Common Core], and I understand why, really not TK, it was everything else that they have to make happen and bringing that larger part of their work and

their staff up to speed with Common Core. So, that piece was tricky for administrators so I understand that piece.

This demonstrates the challenges site administrators faced implementing a program for 4-year-olds while simultaneously implementing the Common Core state standards. The school leader continued to express the lack of understanding of early childhood education in the elementary school setting by site administrators:

As a system I think it's, in some respect, it's been a challenge because our system doesn't necessarily understand young children, 4-year-olds, even though we've been dealing with them in kinder, we still have, now we have a whole class of them. And, so, some of the behavior issues that have risen to my awareness have been pretty horrendous.

The removal of the water and sand tables, which are appropriate materials for 4-year-old development, along with conflating behavior issues with social emotional development shows an overall lack of understanding of early childhood education by site administrators. Additionally, it appears that implementation of transitional kindergarten was overshadowed by the concurrent implementation of the Common Core State Standards in all grade levels.

Summary of Implementers

All participants that held a role in the implementation of TK shared the concern that the early start age had been a political issue in California for many years. Confusion regarding the policy, the roll out, and whether the policy would actually be enacted were expressed. This was followed by concerns about what this policy meant

for both administrators and parents. This led to parent confusion regarding what program was appropriate for their child and teacher confusion regarding what curriculum was appropriate for 4-year-olds in TK. Furthermore, the effort to change the kindergarten start age led to confusion related to developmentally appropriate early childhood education as well as priority conflicts in the midst of Common Core standards implementation for all grade levels.

These results show how these policymakers and political stakeholders view transitional kindergarten for the communities they serve. The perceptions by these two groups—creators and implementers—show how their views compare and contrast regarding transitional kindergarten as a policy initiative through the descriptive themes that emerged in this historical narrative.

CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Two sections comprise this chapter. First, I will draw from Critical Race Theory's principle of interest convergence to provide a lens of analysis regarding transitional kindergarten as a policy initiative. Second, I will discuss implications and recommendations for research in the future.

Analysis

Interest Convergence Framework

Critical Race Theory (CRT) questions assumptions regarding the social construction of power and race. Ladson-Billings (1998) states, "CRT becomes an important intellectual and social tool for deconstruction, reconstruction of human agency, and construction of equitable and socially just relations of power (p.9)." Its doctrine advances the idea that policies work to maintain the status quo through the subordination of certain groups of people. Horsford (2010) states, "CRT examines the impact and implications of race-conscious policies and practices (e.g., desegregation, school assignment plans, affirmative action in college admissions) and seemingly race-neutral ones (e.g., ability tracking, special education placements, proficiency exams) (p.292)." The tenet that CRT examines "race neutral" policies is relevant to this research in that transitional kindergarten has been viewed as a race neutral policy,

in that neither race nor income are determinants for participation in transitional kindergarten. The only qualifier is age.

Another tenet within CRT includes an argument historically laid out by Derrick A. Bell, Jr. (1980) regarding the 1954 *Brown v. Board of Education* decision whereby the U.S. Supreme Court purportedly ended racial segregation in public schools. Bell contends that the drive to end segregation in schools was not only motivated to desegregate schools but,

...cannot be understood without some consideration of the decision's value to Whites, not simply those concerned about the immorality of racial inequality, but also those Whites in policymaking positions able to see the economic and political advances at home and abroad that would follow abandonment of segregation (1980).

Bell gives examples of two arenas of interest convergence regarding the passing of *Brown v. the Board of Education* in 1954. The first example was related to international perception or world view during this time period. Segregation in the United States and the lack of adherence to the principle that all men are created equal was being exploited by communist countries. This was highlighted by the fact that returning Black veterans who had fought against oppression in World War II were coming home to hatred and violence in the South. Communist countries used this unflattering portrayal of the United States to recruit the support of third-world countries. As Delgado (2006) states, this was a decision made for “international

appearances and not a moral breakthrough.” The second example by Bell described the realization by whites that the continuation of the “plantation” society, which relied on segregation, would hinder the ability to industrialize the South and subsequently stifle a viable economic resource. These two pragmatic reasons: the need to change global perspective regarding the treatment of Black WWII veterans as an example of the US not adhering to the American belief system of all men being created equal within the Cold War context and the domestic need to develop the South economically, provided the motivation to address school segregation. Therefore, desegregating schools and addressing the needs of Black students only came about when the global and domestic needs of the U.S. intersected with the needs of Black students to create a scenario Bell refers to as “interest convergence.” As Bell states, “The interest of Blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when it converges with the interest of Whites (1980).” Taking this a step further, in other words, interest convergence happens when marginalized groups’ interests converge with dominant groups’ interests in ways that maintain favor for the dominant group.

Interest Convergence as an Analytic Tool to Frame Transitional Kindergarten

The following paragraphs will describe how transitional kindergarten as a “race neutral” policy includes the CRT principle of interest convergence. Based on the results and microhistories established by the policymakers’ (creators) and political stakeholders’ (implementers) interviews, the principle of interest convergence appears to emerge. The multiple realities of the participants revealed the cross-section

of interests that converged to establish the transitional kindergarten program in elementary schools today in the state of California.

This research was conducted in California. The policy to change the kindergarten start age and establish transitional kindergarten appears to be a race neutral policy because age is the only qualifier to attend transitional kindergarten in contrast with a low-income level qualifier, which would certainly intersect with race, to attend state preschool or Head Start programs. The idea that this policy is race neutral brings in consideration of bell hooks' (1992) term "racial erasure (p.12)" which she defines as, "the sentimental idea...that racism would cease to exist if everyone would just forget about race and just see each other as human beings who are the same." Because of the demographics of California, the question arises as to whether transitional kindergarten is race based or not. As stated in Chapter III, the demographics of the district targeted for this group study contain the following breakdown: 70.5% Hispanic or Latino, 17.4% White or Caucasian, 6.1% Asian and 3.1% Black or African American (California Department of Education, 2015). This would appear to show that in the Central Valley of California the primary recipients of transitional kindergarten programs are Hispanic or Latino children.

What began as an initial interest by two Palo Alto teachers to change the kindergarten start age grew into legislation that accomplished that goal and established transitional kindergarten for those students who missed the new start age cutoff date. This change in start age is one area of interest convergence as the teachers' concerns related to the attention needed for remediation of students in

schools appear to be addressed with the later start age for kindergarten students. These young children are now removed from their previous grade level to start school 1 year older. It seems as if the younger students' removal will aid schools in meeting their accountability measures and alleviate the need for remediation of young struggling students.

The removal of these young students caught the interest of the California Teachers Association because the removal of one fourth of the kindergarten start population meant that credentialed teachers would lose jobs as fewer kindergarten teachers would be necessary. Here is another place of interest convergence as transitional kindergarten is a program that is taught by credentialed California teachers. Removal of these children also caught the interest of Early Edge California because 4-year-old students would need a place to go now that kindergarten would not take them and this initially seemed an opportunity for preschool expansion. Again, we see a place of interest convergence as transitional kindergarten was created to capture the 4-year-old children that would no longer be admitted to kindergarten.

Additionally, the state legislature's interest was the fiscal opportunity to alleviate the budget pressures the state of California was facing. The "one-off" savings of cutting a cohort of students by one-fourth over a 13-year period provided an opportunity for relief to a strapped state budget. Here is yet another place of interest convergence.

It appears that the teachers' interests in accountability, the California Teachers' Associations interests in maintaining jobs, Early Edge's interest in

expanded preschool, and the state legislators' interests in fiscal savings all converged with interest to serve young children's educational needs to create the formation of transitional kindergarten. These were places where interest convergence emerged. It seems as if age is being used as a descriptor to identify California's neediest young children in a race neutral way; however, the majority of the young children in California are Hispanic and Latino. The interests of these young students would not have been served had this policy not also served the interests of the mainstream community.

Implications and Recommendations

Practitioners

Since the inception of kindergarten in California, young 4-year-old children have been a part of the educational landscape. These young children continued through their 13 years of public school education as the youngest students at each grade level until graduation. As educators we continue to always want to close the "achievement gap." This begs the question of whether that achievement gap was in any way related to having a group of younger students in a grade level that they were not developmentally ready for. Have we been labeling these children as "failures" as "struggling learners" or using other deficit terms to describe them all these years? In reality we may have put them in a socially constructed expectation of grade level standards that these children were never developmentally ready to meet. This expectation extended throughout their entire formal schooling experience. For many of these children that meant experiencing failure year after year.

As with any policy there are intended and unintended consequences.

Policymakers and school leaders will need to reflect on this and consider what this means for them as they implement policies within their district and school sites. This research shows one example of the power of policy on the lives of children.

Transitional kindergarten gives us a scenario that highlights the ramifications of educational policy, for example, having 4-year-olds in kindergarten. This demonstrates how children are perceived within the school system, even as inadvertently as the impact of a child's age. Administrators make decisions daily that affect the lives of children and families. This study provides a real-time example of how an administrator's approach to implementing policy affects how students are perceived and perceive themselves as learners.

The establishment of transitional kindergarten as a new grade level for students who fall in a designated birthday cohort continues to change. One current change allows school districts the option to open TK to students outside of the age range designation. However, the district will not receive ADA (average daily attendance) funds for a child out of the age range until the child turns 5 years old. For example, a district may offer TK to students whose birthdays fall in December or January, but the district will not receive ADA funding until the child turns 5 years old, meaning that if the child is attending TK prior to that date, the district is choosing to take on that expense and will not receive compensation from the state for that child until the child turns 5. As this is an option for districts it is unknown at this time how many districts are opening their doors to other 4-year-old students to participate in

TK. Additionally, this seems to raise an equity issue as some districts will choose to offer TK to other 4-year-olds and some districts will not. Of the districts that choose to offer TK to those other 4-year-olds, the question arises as to what other birthday months they will accept in their program. Also, consideration must be given to those children who have summer birthdays and will never generate ADA funds for participation in the TK program. The question remains if those summer birthday students will be able to participate in transitional kindergarten.

Another change on the horizon is that the governor of California is proposing the elimination of transitional kindergarten to fold those services into the preschool block grant. Under the current proposal Governor Brown wants to eliminate transitional kindergarten altogether and combine the funding into a block grant serving preschool and transitional kindergarten as a service for low-income families only. He is leaving the decision of what to do with transitional kindergarten with districts. They can decide if they want to maintain the program as is but charge parents if they do not meet the low-income requirements. It remains to be seen what will happen with the governor's new proposal.

Curriculum issues appear to remain now that TK is in full implementation. New consideration must be given to how this is changing kindergarten classroom as these TK students become kindergartners. Many of these TK students will come into kindergarten far ahead of their new kindergarten classmates. Additionally, the level of kindergarten rigor may be impacted.

As we see transitional kindergarten in full implementation, continuing professional development for administrators will be necessary. While teachers have received opportunities for training provided by SB837, administrators have not. A recommendation would be to have multilevel professional development for TK that includes administrators. The needs of young learners in this age group require different classroom environments, different instructional strategies, and different behavior management techniques. Traditional practices of student discipline will need to be modified to meet the needs of students in this age group. Including administrators in professional development with teachers will allow for this conversation to take place.

Policymakers

With critical policy analysis I addressed the roots and development of the Kindergarten Readiness Act establishing transitional kindergarten. Over time it was evident that changes in the KRA had taken place. With the current proposal by the governor, it appears that early childhood education in the state of California will continue to be influenced by the state budget. Advocacy groups will also continue to exert their influence upon the budget process.

The change in the kindergarten start age began because two teachers were concerned about the struggles of the young 4-year-old children starting kindergarten. A legislator listened to their concern and through the journey and transformation of the KRA the new program of transitional kindergarten emerged. This is a powerful example of a policymaker listening to the needs of his constituents. Throughout my

preparation for this research I observed legislative processes in action. In my observation and my experience gathering the data for this study it was evident that the combination of voices heard and financial pressures will continue to merge as part of the legislative process.

It is apparent that the change in kindergarten start age had been a policy issue for the past 25 years. This study provides a current example of a policy problem ignored for 25 years. Legislators can make sure that student needs are addressed in a timely manner and to not let other policy problems wait for 25 years before a solution is found. Districts are tasked with the mission to have students career and college ready for the twenty-first century. Legislators can take this opportunity to change antiquated legislation to meet current research and best practice for the present and the future.

To have students career and college ready begins with California's youngest learners. One recommendation would be to stay the course with transitional kindergarten and include all 4-year-old children with ADA funding available. Students benefit from early learning in a quality program. The strides taken by school districts for transitional kindergarten and the growing pains of implementation are beginning to show success and continued focus will ensure a strong program for all young children. Other states, for example, Oklahoma, have had universal pre-K for several years now. It is time for California to catch up and to take the lead in providing outstanding early learning opportunities for all children. Transitional kindergarten is that opportunity. A new grade level has been established for

California, TK-12. Maintaining and expanding this program will benefit all children in the state of California.

Future Research

With the change in the kindergarten start age it appears that students will be starting school at the “right age.” However, establishing the “right age” has yet to be defined. We know that we are starting children a few months older than when they have previously started school. Further research into what constitutes the “right age” will be necessary to establish if the change in the kindergarten start age will make a difference in student achievement. Questions arise regarding what criteria are used to establish the appropriate time for a child to start school. Priorities should be made based on social-emotional development and the environment whereby trained professionals are able to differentiate curriculum to meet each child’s needs.

Additionally, further longitudinal research will be necessary to establish if transitional kindergarten is meeting the needs of 4-year-old children and if this program proves to be effective in raising student achievement. Will these transitional kindergarten children move on to be high achievers in their consecutive grade levels? Will the gains made in transitional kindergarten level out over the consecutive grade levels? These children were once the disadvantaged group due to their birthdate; are they now the advantaged group? And, have we now created a new disadvantaged group with the students who have summer birthdays who will now be the youngest students in their grade level? It is possible that no change will be seen and that the shift in start age only designates a new group of struggling youngsters.

Another consideration is that during the phase-in of transitional kindergarten a larger and more dominant change was also taking place in education in California. The decision to change the start age for kindergarten was based on concerns about 4-year-olds being able to meet the kindergarten standards of the 1995 California State Standards. Since then, California has adopted the Common Core State Standards. The adoption of Common Core State Standards coincided with the implementation and phase-in of transitional kindergarten. The change in standards and the ability for kindergarten students to meet these new standards has yet to be determined. New state assessments are now being implemented and the nature of all state accountability data has changed. Continued research will be necessary to see how California students are meeting the new Common Core State Standards and if transitional kindergarten is a means of supporting student achievement in this endeavor.

Conclusion

This study used critical policy analysis to view transitional kindergarten as a policy initiative. The researcher gathered perceptions of policymakers and political stakeholders to establish a microhistory of the Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2010 establishing transitional kindergarten. Themes were identified that narrated the roots and development of this policy. In the analysis of these themes it became apparent that interest convergence, a principle of critical race theory, was a factor in the changes over time that influenced this policy and subsequently created the transitional kindergarten program. The Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2010 initially began as an

effort to only change the kindergarten start age. As interests converged from the influences outlined in this study, transitional kindergarten was established as a new grade level within the California public school system.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A
INFORMED CONSENT

Dear Participant:

You are being asked to participate in a research project. We hope to learn your perceptions regarding SB 1381 The Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2010 also known as Transitional Kindergarten (TK). If you decide to volunteer, you will be asked to participate in a one hour long interview and a possible follow up interview of an hour or less. There will be approximately 24 participants in this study. The study will be conducted over several months in 2015.

There are no known risks to you for your participation in this research study and no cost to you beyond the time and effort required for the interviews. It is possible that you will not benefit directly by participating in this study. The direct benefit from your participation is further understanding of TK policy enactment.

Moreover, the information collected will be protected from all inappropriate disclosure under the law. Likewise, all data will be kept in a secure location.

If you agree to participate, please indicate this decision by signing below. If you have any questions about this research project please contact me, Dr. Kathryn Bell McKenzie, at 209-664-6543. If you have any questions regarding your rights and participation as a research subject, please contact the UIRB Administrator by phone at 209-667-3784 or email IRBAdmin@csustan.edu.

Sincerely,

Kathryn Bell McKenzie, Ph.D.
Professor and Director
Doctoral Program in Educational Leadership
California State University, Stanislaus

Participant Signature _____

Date _____

APPENDIX B

SEMISTRUCTURED INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. How long have you lived in the Central Valley/California?
2. What brought you to this area?
3. What is your role/position?
 - a. How did you choose this career?
 - b. What early experiences influenced your career goals?
 - c. What motivated you to enter this field?
4. What is your area of expertise? On what committees do you serve?
5. What is your educational background?
6. When did you first hear about the Kindergarten Readiness Act of 2010 and TK?
7. What do you know about the TK legislation?
8. What is your role with TK in your position?
9. Have any groups expressed resistance or support with TK?
10. What do you think about TK and the policy in general?

11. Why do you think TK came about?
12. What do you think about how this policy is unfolding? Was there anything that surprised you?
13. What do you like or dislike about TK?
14. Is there anything you would change about TK?
15. What do you see that is valuable about TK?
16. Is there anything else you would like to add?