

Transition into Kindergarten: A Collaboration of Family and Educational Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

In recent years, research has focused on children's transitions from preschool into kindergarten. Parents, teachers, and schools recognize the importance of the transition from preschool into kindergarten and its possible influence on children's adjustment and long term school success. However, as the philosophies and policies of kindergarten have emerged and evolved, so have the views of parents and teachers regarding children entering kindergarten. Research shows parents and teachers have conflicting views regarding the expectations for children in kindergarten. While the quality of a child's transition to kindergarten is an individual experience, there are some universal factors of influence in any transition. These factors include communication among teachers and parents and establishment of relationships among the three protagonists – child, parent, and teacher.

Throughout this thesis, I present data that examines the expectations and concerns for the children entering kindergarten from a parent and educational perspective. I also provide transition activities practiced in the home and school environment. The most important aspect of the transition process involves focusing on the relationships between child and teacher, parents and teacher, child and peers, and child and parent. I include parent and educational perspectives of these relationships and relate how these relationships enhance children's transition into kindergarten.

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CHAPTER 1

Getting Started: Why Kindergarten Transitions?

“Be patient towards all that is unsolved in your heart, and learn to love the questions themselves” (Rainer Maria Rilke).

During my first semester of graduate school, a guest speaker in one of my classes said something that I will never forget – whatever you decide to write your thesis or dissertation on, be passionate about the topic, for you will spend so much time working with it. Armed with these words, I began observing the children in my classroom at the Virginia Tech Child Development Lab School. The children ranged from 3-to-5-years-old. As the year progressed, the parents of the 4-and-5-year-olds began approaching me anxiously, asking if I thought their children were ready for school. When I asked them to clarify their concerns, they asked me whether their children knew the colors, numbers, alphabet, shapes, and how to write their name. I responded to them that the children are confident in their learning abilities and that each child learns and develops at his/her own speed. I could tell this response was not satisfactory for the parents, but I didn't know how to respond, nor did I understand what they wanted to hear. Reflecting on these conversations, I remember thinking, aren't these areas the children would work on while in kindergarten, rather than to excel before entering kindergarten?

I began researching the expectations of children when they transition from preschool into kindergarten. That was the beginning of my interest in this topic. I was finding time to look up information about entering kindergarten. I learned about the National Education Goals. I learned about national surveys dedicated to the topic,

focusing on transition to kindergarten and what is deemed a successful transition. I learned what teachers and parents consider to be important factors in the movement from preschool into kindergarten. I learned about the tests required of these kindergarteners and began understanding some of the questions from the parents. I realized I wanted to know more. I wanted to talk to teachers and parents to learn about their expectations of children entering kindergarten from a firsthand experience. Recalling the need to be passionate in the topic I would choose to study, I decided to dedicate my thesis to the topic of children transitioning to kindergarten.

When I began to research deeper into the topic, I was working in the 3-year-old classroom at a daycare center. When a parent learned of my background and thesis interest, she spoke of her sleepless nights, wondering whether her child would be ready for kindergarten. I was astonished! The child was only 3-years-old and had another year of preschool before going to kindergarten. My passion for studying kindergarten expectations grew even stronger.

As I was dedicating myself to this study, I realized that I needed to know more than just the expectations and concerns of teachers and parents. I also needed to know how these issues would contribute to building an essential, nurturing relationship between teachers and parents. I believe the findings of this study need to be communicated to teachers and parents, so they can find better ways to build relationships that would support children's transition into kindergarten. With eagerness, I began a review of the literature on children entering kindergarten and developed my research ideas and questions.

Justification of the Study

“Kindergarten, the first step on the academic ladder, represents an almost universal challenge for American children. It is a time of shifting demands for social, cognitive, and emotional behavior” (Pianta & Cox, 1999, p. 281).

According to the child development and kindergarten transition literature, the family-school relationship influences how well the child adjusts to school and how much the child benefits from school. Research has shown that teachers and parents have conflicting views regarding adequate preparation for a child entering kindergarten. One of the strongest arguments is the debate of whether kindergarten is viewed as a place to learn academic skills or a place to acquire social skills. The child is the central figure in the transition to kindergarten, but the adjustment to kindergarten is influenced by the teachers’ and parents’ perceptions of what skills children need for early school success. The most important aspect of the transition process should focus on the relationships between child and teacher, parents and teacher, child and peers, and child and parent

The purpose of this study is to explore teacher and parent expectations and concerns for children entering kindergarten. This study is designed to gain understanding of different perspectives and expectations and to discover ways that can enhance children’s transition experience. This study is also to discover ways to establish and maintain parent-teacher relationships.

Research Question

This study is guided by one main question - How are relationships between parents and teachers established and maintained to enhance and support children's transition into kindergarten? Other questions might arise in the process of this study, which could result in the addition of more questions.

Benefits of the Study

The benefits of the study are to gain understanding of multiple ways to enhance and strengthen the school-family relationship. I believe this study can provide teachers, parents, and schools with additional information regarding the experiences of children entering kindergarten. Additionally, the study examines how this process can enhance school-family relationships through developing a shared understanding of concerns and expectations for other children entering formal schooling. The study can inform the teachers and parents of ways to increase effective communication between them. It can offer ways to enhance support of the children's transition into kindergarten.

CHAPTER 2

Review of Literature

“School is a big mystery because of the transition from daycare to school. Parents in daycare situations would see what was going on all the time, but in school, it’s a big mystery” (Ms. Laura – teacher from interviews)

Transition is a lifelong process, transitions are inevitable, transition is a continuous process, early transitions are significant, transitions involve change, and transitions are usually stressful (Pianta & Cox, 1999). The transition to school is a major life change for young children and their families. In its simplest form, school transition is a change in place – a move from home or preschool into a formal school. Leaving preschool for kindergarten is one of the many separations that children meet with a combination of delight and anxiety (Ziegler, 1985). However, transition is much more complicated than simply changing buildings. It requires adjusting to a new peer group, a new role, a new teacher, and new expectations (Maxwell & Eller, 1994). Transition is also defined as the activities initiated by schools to bridge the gap between the preschool and kindergarten experience (Love, Logue, Trudeau, & Thayer, 1992; Haines, Fowler, Schwartz, Kottwitz, & Rosenkoetter, 1989). The transition to school can set the tone for children’s future school experiences (Vermont State Department of Education, 2000; Zigler, Finn-Stevenson, & Hall, 2002; National PTA & National Head Start Association, 1999; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003; Pianta & Cox, 1999). During transitions, children must cope with many new demands: they must meet new academic challenges, learn new school and teacher expectations, and gain acceptance into a new peer group. It is also the

time when parents' beliefs about their children's abilities are shaped (Pianta & Cox, 1999).

Transitions are difficult. The transition from early childhood settings to the more formal elementary schools is a potential source of difficulty for young children (Cryer & Clifford, 2003). Conquering these challenges can give a child and family confidence to meet future transitions. Transitions are also characterized by elevated demands and expectations and the need to negotiate these challenges in a novel setting among unfamiliar people (U.S. Department of Education, 1995; Ladd & Price, 1987).

Kindergarten provides children the opportunities to draw their own conclusions regarding school and their abilities as learners. Kindergarten provides children the opportunity to experience social situations to further their development. These social situations will allow children to learn about communication, cooperation, responsibility, sharing, self-control, taking turns, respect for self, the teachers, and others in the group, courtesy, following group rules, and establishing interest in a group setting (Wills & Lindberg, 1967). Children who experience early school success continue to demonstrate success in social competence and academic achievement. However, children who have a difficult transition and adjustment to school usually have trouble catching up with their peers (La Paro, Kraft-Sayre, & Pianta, 2003). There is a concern that the transition for young children may be abrupt and children may go from a situation that is appropriate for their age and development levels to one that is not. According to Love, Logue, Trudeau, & Thayer (1992), the children select their own learning activities that build on their own abilities and interests in developmentally appropriate preschool environments. In the

kindergarten setting, teachers directly instruct the children and encourage them to master isolated facts and skills.

Each year, children enter kindergarten with a range of prior knowledge and experiences. There are a number of factors that have an influence on a child's developmental status at kindergarten entry. These include children's skills and prior school-related experiences (including social skills, play behavior, and communication skills) children's home lives (i.e. parental influences) and early childhood programs and kindergarten classroom environment (Maxwell & Eller, 1994; Pianta & Cox, 1999; Love, Logue, Trudeau, & Thayer 1992; Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, & Cox, 2000). Readiness for kindergarten cannot be forced, but some useful skills, such as participating in a large group, playing or working independently and with peers and asking for help, can be taught to ease the transition (U.S. Department of Education, 1995). Social competence and emotional adjustment are seen as important as academic competence (Spitzer, Cupp, & Parke, 1995; Gredler, 1992).

According to the National Transition Study, the academic demands of kindergarten create the greatest difficulty for the highest percentage of children. Other factors that have an influence on the child's adjustment include meeting the behavioral expectations of kindergarten, adjusting to the length of the school day, interactions with other children, accepting the school's rules and discipline techniques, and adjusting to the size of the kindergarten class (Love, Logue, Trudeau, & Thayer, 1992).

The History of Kindergarten

The word kindergarten is defined as “children’s garden”. Children are considered to be young plants growing in a garden (Wills & Lindberg, 1967). Friedrich Froebel developed the first kindergarten in Germany in 1837. His philosophy was to educate the body, mind, and soul through play, outdoor experiences, music, movement, spontaneity, creativity, and independence. Children’s development was enhanced through play and individual activity. Margaret Schurz organized the first U.S. kindergarten in 1856 in Wisconsin. Elizabeth Peabody opened the first English speaking kindergarten in Boston, in 1859. Peabody is recognized for publicizing the kindergarten movement and organizing the first teacher training center for kindergarten teachers in the U.S. The first 30 years of kindergarten provided children’s first group experience outside the home (Wills & Lindberg, 1967; Connell, 1987; Graue, 1992; Bryant & Clifford, 1992; Seefeldt & Wasik, 2002).

Between 1920 and 1950, children’s kindergarten education was child-centered. After the 1950’s, curriculum reflected reading, writing, and math abilities, with an emphasis on reading, writing upper and lower case letters, beginning phonics, forming and reading numerals, and number tasks. During the 1960’s and 1970’s, publicly funded kindergarten programs were implemented for the first time (Elicker & Mathur, 1997). Over the past 20 years, there have been significant changes in the kindergarten systems. Kindergarten curriculum was based upon the right of the child to learn healthy habits of food, rest, sleep, open air play and work, emotional well-being, and social pose (Hill, 1987). Curriculum has become more academic, kindergarten teachers are experiencing pressure to have children learn more of the basic skills, especially from parents

demanding more of reading and math abilities, and the entering children are older than in the past (Love, Logue, Trudeau, & Thayer, 1992).

Kindergarten programs are designed to clarify, expand, and extend children's knowledge and understanding of their world. They are designed to give children the opportunity to develop and practice their thinking, language, problem-solving, emotional, social, and other skills (Seefeldt & Wasik, 2002).

Theories of Transitions

Theories related to kindergarten transitions are found in child development. Jean Piaget states children entering kindergarten are in the preoperational period. Characteristics of a child in this period are egocentrism, rigidity of thought, semi logical reasoning, and limited social cognition (Miller, 2002). Children aged 5-7 recognize an intuitive approach to life and the beginning stages of logical thought are emerging to solve problems (Thomas, 2001). Piaget followed the concept that children see the world differently than adults. The successful environment for children is child initiated because individual children construct knowledge from their environment. Piaget also stressed that instruction and development are separate. Development occurs at an individual pace, but appropriate instruction can assist in the development (Pianta & Cox, 1999). The child is considered a whole and strives to maintain equilibrium within himself and with the environment through assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation is the process of fitting reality into one's current cognitive organization and accommodation is adjustments in cognitive organization that result from the demands of reality (Miller, 2002).

Another theorist to consider during the transitional period to kindergarten is Lev Vygotsky. The sociocultural approach to development is based on the idea that culture defines what knowledge and skills children need to acquire and gives them tools for functioning in that culture. Children learn through social interactions in their environments and culture and through the zone of proximal development. Zone of proximal development is the distance between a child's actual developmental level and the higher level of potential development (Miller, 2002). Like Piaget, Vygotsky recognized the importance of learning and development, but stressed the difference that instruction leads development through processes of change (Pianta & Cox, 1999). For children in kindergarten, they are learning through their home and school cultures and from each other.

John Dewey followed the philosophy of experimentalism, that all learning takes place through experiences. Learning cannot be separated from other areas of growth and development. It is a social activity. Children need to be part of their world by solving problems and asking them to make their own choices, to think for themselves (Seefeldt & Wasik, 2002).

According to Pianta & Cox (1999), there are four theories to determine the readiness of children and consequently, their transition experiences. The idealist/nativist theory follows the basic belief that children are ready to learn when they are ready. Children have an innate function to determine if they have reached a level of maturity that enables them to concentrate in school, relate appropriately to adults and peers. Arnold Gesell developed Gesell School Readiness Test to determine this level of maturity.

The empiricist/environmental theory focuses on the external evidence of learning, in particular, knowing colors, shapes, one's address, and how to spell one's name, counting to ten, letters of the alphabet, and behaving in an appropriate manner. Children learn these skills through the teaching environment. The empiricist theorists also use readiness tests. The most popular tests are the Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills, California Achievement Test, and the Stanford Early School Achievement Test.

The social constructivist theory includes the child and the community in which the child is influenced by contextual factors, rather than individual characteristics of the child. The belief is to understand a child, considering both positive and negative aspects of the child's context.

The interactionist theory focuses on children's learning and on the schools' capacities to meet the individual needs of the students. This is determined by the relationship between child and school community through the child's teacher. It requires teacher-child interactions, and the use of performance assessments to determine readiness. However, time within the relationship must be taken into consideration to determine child's abilities.

Examples of Transition Studies

The National Center of Early Development and Learning (1996) developed the Transition Practices Survey to describe specific practices teachers use in facilitating transition to kindergarten and the barriers that developed. The Transition Practices Survey reported that while 52% of children have a successful entry into kindergarten, 48% have moderate or serious problems. Teachers are most concerned about children's

skills in following directions and academics. When asked how important various pupil characteristics are for a child to be ready for kindergarten, most kindergarten teachers put more of an emphasis on physical well-being, self-expression, social development, and curiosity (Pianta & Cox, 1999). The majority of transition practices are implemented after school begins and with minimal contact with individual children and families. The most common activities are group-oriented practices occurring after the beginning of the school year. The most common barriers include class lists are generated too late, the practices involve summer work not supported by salary, and a lack of a transition plan in the school district (Early, Pianta, Taylor, & Cox, 2001). Other factors that affect the implementation of transition activities and the parents' involvement in these activities are structural influence (location of schools), curriculum, the school's attitude toward children and parents, and the level of poverty in the community (Love, Logue, Trudeau, & Thayer, 1992).

An extension of the National Center for Early Learning and Development's Transition Practices Survey was a project offering surveys and questionnaires to parents and teachers. These questions focused on transition activities and participation of both parents and teachers, and the barriers experienced by teachers and parents regarding transition activities. The results of the study indicate most families visit the kindergarten classroom. The least frequent activity is attending an orientation into kindergarten. When parents participate in the transition activities offered, 99% found these activities to be helpful. Other transition activities offered by the school that the families found helpful are meeting with the elementary school principal and a tour of the school. The greatest

barrier parents reported is that their work schedule interferes with participation in transition activities.

The study also included transition activities that families do to prepare children for kindergarten. The majority of families practice the daily routine of getting ready for school and teaching their child to tie their shoes. Parents also talk with family members or friends with school-aged children to develop expectations about kindergarten. Parents discuss behavior expectation with their children, meeting new classmates, what will happen on the first day of school, the nature of school work, and meeting the child's new teacher.

The transition activities most used by teachers involve having children and families visit the classrooms. The most frequently reported barrier for teachers is that transition activities require work during the summer that is not supported by their salaries. Other barriers are that the class lists were generated too late to implement transition activities. The findings from this study indicate a need to investigate the structure of elementary schools in relation to transition activities and a need for greater collaboration between prekindergarten programs and schools. (La Paro, Kraft-Sayre, & Pianta, 2003).

In 1995, the Regional Educational Laboratories' Early Childhood Collaboration Network developed eight elements to consider when improving transitions from preschool to kindergarten: to consider families as partners; to establish a sense of shared leadership; to provide comprehensive and responsive services; to be familiar with the home culture and language; to establish communication among those involved in the child's transition; to be familiar with the child's knowledge and skill development; to

offer appropriate care and education; and to conduct an evaluation of effective partnerships (Cryer & Clifford, 2003).

The Transition Models

According to La Paro, Kraft-Sayre, & Pianta (2003), there are four models to consider when addressing children's transition to kindergarten. These approaches to transition to kindergarten expand from a focus on children's "readiness" skills as a successful transition to an emphasis on relationships within and across contexts and the stability of these relationships in the child's life

The first model is the skills only model. This model focuses only on the skills and abilities the child brings with them on the first day of school. While a child's skills and abilities have an influence on their school ability, they do not account for school adjustment.

The second model is the environmental input model. This model describes the influences of the teacher, family, peers, and community on the child. The negative aspects of this model are it is not clear how the different settings are connected to one another and the interactions of these experiences over time.

The third model is the linked environments model. This model recognizes the influences of the key people in a child's life – the teacher, family, peers, and the community. This model also recognizes the influences that these factors have on each other, in addition to the child.

The fourth model is the developmental model. It considers all the previous contexts and relationships that interact with each other and the child as the child

transitions from preschool into kindergarten, but with the addition of how the relationships the child has with family, teachers, peers, and community develop over time and influences how the child will adjust in school. There is also a support system developed between teachers, between peers, and between family and school to serve as connectors for the child during the transition period. These connections support the child's competencies that assist school success (Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003).

What is a Successful Transition?

A variety of authors have developed their lists of characteristics that are required and recommended for a successful transition. A child's transition is affected by skills and prior school-related experience, home experiences, the influences of preschool and kindergarten classroom characteristics, and familiarity with peers in the class (Maxwell & Eller, 1994). Successful transitions occur when children are well prepared about what to expect and are excited about learning and parents are active participants in the education process at home and school (National PTA & National Head Start Association, 1999). Successful transitions include activities and events that are designed to overcome the discontinuities that may disrupt children's learning and development, collaboration, partnering, and building relationships (Love, Logue, Trudeau, & Thayer, 1992; Meier & Schafran, 1999; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003). The optimal transitions for children are best supported by practices that are individualized and engage the child, family, and preschool setting prior to the first day of school. However, these activities are the most time-consuming and the least likely to be used (Early, Pianta, Taylor, & Cox, 2001).

In 1986, the Administration for Children, Youth, and Families (ACYF) conducted the National Initiative on Transition from Preschool to Elementary School. Four guidelines were established as critical to successful transitions: 1. providing program continuity through developmentally appropriate curricula, 2. maintaining ongoing communication and cooperation between preschool and kindergarten staff, 3. preparing children for the transition, and 4. involving parents in the transition. Ramey and Ramey (1995) identified a successful transition to include multiple features, including children's positive attitudes toward learning, school, teachers, and peers, children's maintenance of prior skills and acquisition of new academic and social skills, parents' positive attitudes toward and active involvement with their children's school and learning, teachers' provisions of developmentally appropriate experiences for individual children and creation of a classroom environment that positively values individual differences and cultural diversity, and a community that provides the supports for positive transition experiences (Pianta & Cox, 1999).

Chandler developed a list of transition skills related to successful transition from preschool to kindergarten. These skills are categorized by social behavior and classroom conduct, communication behaviors, task-related behavior, and self-help behavior that Chandler continued by designating transition activities into positive and negative categories. Positive transitions features include positive psychological characteristics, ongoing relationship with school, preschool experience, effective communication by the school, transition planning and activities, and curriculum quality. Negative features of kindergarten transitions are a primary focus on behavior and emotional concerns, family

adjustment difficulties, unrealistic expectations by the school and communication problems (Chandler, 1993).

While it is important to mention expectations to consider during transitions, the most important aspect of the transition process to focus on is the relationships between child and teacher, parents and teacher, child and peers, and child and parent (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 1999; Pianta & Cox, 1999). I think it is important to note that there is no single way to implement transition activities that will be appropriate for all schools (Love, Logue, Trudeau, & Thayer, 1992).

The Role of Parents in the Transition into Kindergarten

Parents play a crucial role in their children's transition into kindergarten. Most importantly, their role in successful transitions is seen in the social, emotional, and academic support they offer to their children at home and in school (National PTA & National Head Start Association, 1999). Parents teach their children basic words, numbers, concepts, and skills. To prepare their children for school, parents are involved in activities including parent-child conversations about everyday events, encouraging leisure reading, interest in children's academic and personal growth (Pianta & Cox, 1999). Parents also have their own idea about what it means for their children to transition into kindergarten. They have their own expectations and concerns for their children in a new environment. Parents are experiencing a change in their roles and expectations when their children transition from preschool to kindergarten (Love, Logue, Trudeau, & Thayer, 1992; U.S. Department of Education, 1995).

The majority of parents at all education levels rate children's ability to share and take turns, communicate his/her needs, wants, and thoughts verbally, and approach new activities with enthusiasm and curiosity as very important. Earlier research has found that parents place a greater emphasis on the social and emotional maturity than on school-related academic skills. However, recent research has parents placing greater importance on academic skills (National Data Resource Center, 1995; Maxwell & Eller, 1994).

The Role of Children in the Transition into Kindergarten

The child is the central feature in the transition to kindergarten, but the adjustment to kindergarten is influenced by the teachers' and parents' perceptions of what skills children need for early school success (Maxwell & Eller, 1994). Children who enter kindergarten eager to learn and expecting to be successful are more likely to be successful in school and to accomplish their goals in life (Vermont State Department of Education, 2000). There are five areas of development that are important to a child's preparation for school: physical well-being and motor development, social and emotional development, approaches to learning, language usage, and cognition and general knowledge. Children are ready for school when they have been exposed to consistent, stable adults who are emotionally invested in them, a physical environment that is safe and predictable, regular routines and rhythms of activity, competent peers, and materials that stimulate their explorations (National Center for Early Development and Learning, 1998). Kindergarten adjustment is defined by each child's ability to cope with the specific cognitive and social demands of the school environment, in particular the extent to which the children relate to other students and the teacher. However, if there is a

mismatch between previously learned skills and what is expected of the children in their new environment, there will be a higher risk of failure to adapt to kindergarten (Gelfer & McCarthy, 1994). Responsibility has fallen onto the school environment to help children overcome these differences and adjust to the classroom.

Children who have developed positive feelings about school are more likely to be engaged and enthusiastic about classroom activities. These feelings are in their academic performance, relationship with teachers, and the classroom structure (Valeski & Stipek, 2001).

The Role of Teachers in the Transition into Kindergarten

Teachers are the most familiar with the transition into kindergarten. Teachers are responsible for children's learning through several domains of development - physical, emotional, social, and intellectual (Damon, 1995). Teachers relate children's success into kindergarten to the ability to cooperate with other children, curiosity, eagerness to learn, the ability to cooperate and get along with other children, pay attention reasonably in class and persist in completing tasks, have basic reading and math skills, social skills, and are physically and emotionally healthy. They mention that children must have basic use of language to understand teachers' instructions, express their ideas, ask questions, and engage in conversations with peers (Pianta & Cox, 1999; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003; Hadley, Wilcox, & Rice, 1994; U.S. Department of Education, 2001; Maxwell & Eller, 1994).

Teachers have identified social skills as more important than academic skills. Why? Children with poor transitional and social skills tend to require more amounts of

time as teachers provide extra assistance, attention, and instruction related to transition skill deficits (Chandler, 1993; Stipek & Byler, 1997). Most kindergarten teachers feel that knowing letters and numbers is not critical for school readiness because they can and do teach children these skills in kindergarten, but to encourage parents to focus more on the ability to sit still, pay attention in class, and the ability to communicate needs and wants to others as crucial for school success (U.S. Department of Education, 2001).

American kindergarten teachers report that nearly one half of all students entering school are not ready to learn. These children reportedly have trouble listening and following directions, taking turns, paying attention, demonstrating confidence, working independently, cooperating with others in the group, communicating with teachers and peers, lack an eagerness to learn, curiosity and well-developed social and emotional skills, or don't have a home life that promotes learning (Zigler, Finn-Stevenson, & Hall, 2002; Gredler, 1992; Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center, 1999). However, the literature does highlight the importance of viewing children as individuals with distinctive sets of preschool experiences, cultural views, and skills rather than on a one-dimensional scale of "readiness" (Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, & Cox, 2000).

Conflicting Views of Parents and Teachers

During this developmental period, the composition of children's social networks begins to change from networks in which children primarily interact with adults to networks in which children primarily interact with other children. The new demands of kindergarten are more focused on academics and social and emotional competencies. This competence may not be the only measurable outcome of a successful transition. The

quality of the parents' relationships with teacher and school staff and the ideas of child's schooling may be an equally valid indicator of transition outcomes (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). The family-school relationship influences how well the child adjusts to school and how much the child benefits from school (Pianta & Cox, 1999).

Parents and teachers experience conflicting viewpoints. One of the strongest arguments is the debate whether kindergarten is viewed as a place to learn academic skills or a place to acquire social skills (Maxwell & Eller, 1994). Would transition activities help in understanding the perceptions and expectations of both teachers and parents? The majority of teachers and parents rate children's ability to sit still and pay attention in class as essential or very important for school readiness. Most parents think that children should enter kindergarten being able to count to twenty or more, know the alphabet, and be able to use pencils and paint brushes. In reality, all 4-and-5-year-olds enter school ready to learn and schools should respond to each individual child's level of readiness rather than making children responsible for meeting school requirements (Seefeldt & Wasik, 2002).

The Family-School Relationship

“The foundation for good parent-teacher relationships is frequent and open communication, mutual respect, and a clear understanding of what is best for each individual child” (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1999)

The most important aspects of the transition process are the relationships between the child and teacher, the parents and teacher, child and peers, and child and parent

(Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003). Building family-school partnerships is seen as the essential way to support positive transition outcomes. In numerous studies, the family-school partnership enhances children's educational experience (Gelfer, 1991; Konzal, 2000; Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 1999; Vickers & Minke, 1995). The families and schools are sharing responsibility for the child's development and are considered equal partners in the child's education. National Education Goal Eight states every school will promote partnerships that increase parent participation in facilitating the social, emotional, and academic growth of children. This indicates the recognition that families and schools are needed to promote development and educational outcomes for children (Pianta & Cox, 1999). When parents, caregivers, and schools work together to share a common understanding about transition, together they can plan for an effective and positive experience for the children entering school (Vermont State Department of Education, 2000; U.S. Department of Education, 1995).

Communication is the key component in parent-teacher relationships. It is the foundation for building confidence and trust between families and schools. The family and teachers learn the goals and expectations of each other and the children. They serve as a source of support for each other. Parents will have the knowledge of what their children are learning in school and how they can continue their children's learning at home. Teachers will have access to the children's needs, interest, and capabilities and they want to know how the children are learning (Gelfer, 1991; Maxwell & Eller, 1994). The communication is enhanced when parents and teachers are aware of their values, their views of one another, their perceptions of the children and the values they attach to education (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003; Swick & Broadway, 1997). Schools, families, and

communities all share responsibility for children's development. They contribute to the policies of children's education by identifying goals, problems, and solutions to create more successful partnerships to benefit more children. Parents and teachers need to communicate the differences in goals and expectations they have for kindergarten children to help them successfully enter into kindergarten (Booth & Dunn, 1996; National Data Resource Center, 1995).

However, conflict is a natural dimension of communication. Without resolving conflict, there will be a breakdown in communication, which will lead to a lack of empathy, disrespect for the other's roles and perspective, and an imbalance of knowledge, authority, and power (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003).

Theories of the Family-School Relationship

The relationship between family and school consists of overlapping spheres that have an influence on children. Joyce Epstein (1995) categorized six types of family involvement. Parenting – the schools assist families with child-rearing skills; Communicating – families and schools communicate about school programs; Volunteering – families volunteer in their child's school; Learning at home – schools involve families in academic activities at home; Decision making – families are members of the school in regards to school decisions and advocacy; and Collaborating with community – coordinating the work and resources of the community to advance school programs (Pianta & Cox, 1999, Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 1999).

The developmental model used for successful kindergarten transitions focuses on the relationships among the child, teacher, family, peers, and community, all of which

have an influence on a child's development. This perspective emphasizes children developing in a variety of contexts containing multiple relationships, including a system of the family and school. In particular for relationships, this system focuses on the interaction between families and schools and its influence on the child. The results of this interaction emphasize the importance of relationships among key persons and contexts, the importance of continuity over time, and the idea that interactions have to be based upon mutual respect and support for the child. Parents and teachers creating academic and social goals together enhance the continuity between home and school and ease the child's transition from home to school (Booth & Dunn, 1996; Pianta, 1999; Pianta, Kraft-Sayre, Rimm-Kaufman, Gercke, & Higgins, 2001; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003; Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000; Vickers & Minke, 1995).

Approaches to Family-School Connections

The traditional approach is the most commonly used, emphasizing parent involvement in ways that help the school. Examples are volunteering and fundraising. 90% of family involvement in America's schools is characterized by the traditional approach. There is also the partnership approach, emphasizing a belief in shared responsibility for educating children and families. This approach focuses on developing a relationship based on collaboration and learning is produced by students with the help of parents, educators, peers, and community members (Pianta & Cox, 1999).

Collaboration

The partnership between parents and teachers involves full cooperation and collaboration. Collaboration with schools and families require flexibility and sensitivity to unique perspectives and constraints of the participants, and recognizing the importance of relationships, support, mutual respect and a shared vision. This includes collaboration during the time of transitions (Pianta et al, 2001). Schools, families, and communities are connected in positive and mutually supportive relationships to enhance children's well-being and education (Pianta, Cox, Taylor, & Early, 1999). According to Booth & Dunn (1996), there are two requirements for successful collaboration – mutual respect and multilingualism (the ability to understand each other).

The Role of Parents in the Family-School Relationship

Parents are considered their children's first teacher. Parent involvement in education is seen as the activities parents conduct at home to directly or indirectly support their children's learning. A parent's involvement depends on the school climate - how welcome and comfortable they feel in the school (Kreider, 2002). Families feel more comfortable about starting kindergarten when they can make a connection with the classroom teacher.

Parents can introduce themselves to the teacher, be involved in classroom and school activities at whatever level they are comfortable with, and initiate regular contact with the teacher and school (Katz, Aidman, Reese, & Clark, 1996). Parents taking an active role in their child's education and working together with the school is the best way to help children succeed in school. Parent involvement is vital to creating a learning

environment at home that complements what goes on at school (Carrasquillo & London, 1993; National Education Association of the United States, 1996). If the families develop a sense of discontinuity when their children enter kindergarten, the family-school contact becomes less frequent and increasingly negative.

The Role of Schools in the Family-School Relationship

School communities also support parental involvement. The schools have an opportunity to understand a parent's thinking, listening to parents allows schools to develop approaches to teaching and learning that can be supported, and parents help the teachers understand the children and their individual knowledge and skills they have when they enter kindergarten (Konzal, 2000). Families who receive frequent and positive messages from teachers typically become more involved in their children's education. To encourage parent involvement, schools can include parents in school activities, give parents a voice in key decisions, and encourage communication (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1999). Teachers can let parents know available contact times, encourage parents to express their concerns and interests in the classroom, and practice an "open-door, open-mind" policy (Katz et al, 1996). Schools must reach out to families and encourage their involvement and acknowledge that there is a shared responsibility (Booth & Dunn, 1996).

Schools and teachers need to recognize the variety of needs, expectations, and diversity of the families. Teachers need to recognize the possible complexity of communicating with parents and anticipate confusions. They have to put the children at the center of their parent relationship. Schools must recognize the culture of the students,

parents, staff, and community to establish relationships and build family improvement programs to encourage family involvement supporting the child's education (Carrasquillo & London, 1993). It is important for schools to recognize barriers to parent involvement. These include meeting basic survival needs (food, shelter, clothing), recognizing that school is not always a positive experience for parents, not recognizing diversity of families, not considering cultural and linguistic backgrounds, and lack of transportation and child care for parents who want to be involved in their child's educational center (National Education Association of the United States, 1996).

Philosophy and Policy

The early kindergarten environments were a way of providing early educational experiences and social services for children and families in need. According to Seefeldt & Wasik (2002), today's kindergarten places emphasis on the natural instincts of children and emphasizes developmentally appropriate programs for children. This may be their concept and philosophy of kindergarten, but it is not followed in most kindergartens. Kindergartens have become academically oriented, skill centered programs due to an increase in pressure from the standards of learning (SOL), first grade teachers, and parents. Children leaving kindergarten are expected to be able to sit still, pay attention, recognize and write numbers, and recognize and write letters. However, there is some pressure that children have these abilities even before entering kindergarten (Walsh, 1989).

The kindergarten policies that emerged from the 1980's and early 1990's focused on school entry age and readiness, the use of screening tests to determine readiness, the

rapidly rising rate of kindergarten failure, and the growing use of kindergarten curricula that seemed to focus more on academic skills than on developmentally appropriate activities (Goffin & Stegelin, 1992; Elicker & Mathur, 1997). What are the kindergarten policies today? Current policies tend to focus on children's skills.

It is difficult to use skills and abilities to measure transition because they are limited predictors of early school success and the transition period involves not only how children adjust, but how families and schools interact and cooperate (National Center for Early Development and Learning, 2002). Today's transition policies in early education can facilitate transition and reduce some of the effects of other factors in children's lives.

As a result of the National Transition Study (1996), there are transition policy changes that need to occur. The policies call to strengthen bonds between preschool and kindergarten, strengthen bonds between family and schools, require transition planning teams to facilitate the transition process, and to provide high quality kindergarten classroom experiences. The attitudes and reputations established at the onset of grade school may follow children through many years of formal schooling. Transition policies and practices must be examined regarding discontinuities experienced by children, families, schools, and communities as children leave one education system and enter another (Ladd & Price, 1987; Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, & Cox, 2000).

Policy analyses related to kindergarten transitions express the importance of families in schools, priorities for child development, the role of communities in relation to schools, and how the social structure is reflected in schools. Transition policies should create opportunities for a child to view transition as a warm and exciting adventure, the

parents to be reassured, and the teachers are allowed to teach important knowledge and skills (Pianta & Cox, 1999).

The role of communities and families in the transition leads directly to specific recommendations for future research. Policy analysis and policy making are complicated by familial, cultural, and economic forces that shape the transition process and transition outcomes, but policies cannot guarantee success (Pianta and Cox, 1999).

Future Research

Historically, the period of transition to school has largely been ignored by researchers in education (Pianta & Cox, 1999). However, there are several reasons why the transition to kindergarten and the early grades of school is important. The transitions are important in establishing competencies critical to children's school success and achievement, recognizing that early childhood learning environments are different from traditional elementary schools, and large amounts of public funds are being used with the intent of boosting children's chances of educational success. Ramey and Ramey (1997) identified five reasons for the increase of interest in school transitions: the increase of diversity of children and families presents new challenges for teachers and schools, schools now serve all children, including those with disabilities, advancement in theories that emphasize that child development should be studied in context to include the family, school, peer neighborhood, and community systems and their interrelationships, an increase in measurement procedures and analytical techniques to model the transition to school, and interventions that have taken place to explore the transitions for children and families at risk (Pianta & Cox, 1999).

Research has concluded that preschool to kindergarten transition activities are not a high priority of our nation's schools. The nation has a long way to go to ensure that all children come to school ready to learn and that schools make the necessary provisions to reach out to families. In addition to the individual child's readiness and the kindergarten teacher's role, the family, the education system preschool programs, and the community are all responsible for successful transitions (National Center for Early Development and Learning, 1998). The results of the National Center for Early Development and Learning Transition Practice Survey indicate that if the national goal of ensuring that all children enter school ready to learn, then there is considerable work to be done, focusing on smooth transitions between home and school and continuity between child care and school experience (National Center for Early Development and Learning, 1999).

Children's social skills, physical development, intellectual abilities and emotional adjustment are all equally important areas of development and all contribute to the adaptation to school life. Many kindergarten programs focus on skill acquisition in the absence of meaningful context but the expectations that are placed on children are not often age-appropriate (National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1995). The question often asked is "are young children ready for school?" Equal importance should be placed on the question "are schools ready for young children?" (Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center, 1999). Research indicates that families not involved in the coordinated transition activities are unlikely to establish a positive transition on their own. An attempt has been made to understand what contributes to more successful transitions and how the obstacles that hinder successful transitions can be minimized (Pianta & Cox, 1999).

Research has focused on child predictors of school success, kindergarten practices, and school policies for future school success, but there is a lack of research in the individual differences in children's early school adjustment (Pianta, Cox, Taylor, & Early, 1999). Future research includes studying the impact of transition on children, consideration of other factors, such as the children's experiences and the context in which the transition occurs, improving teacher training, earlier class lists, and smaller classes. Studies should include localities that provide high quality transition practices to measure how kindergarten classroom environments contribute to the quality of transitions, and to survey kindergarten teachers and teachers in training (Love, Logue, Trudeau, & Thayer, 1992; Ladd & Price, 1987; Early, Pianta, Taylor, & Cox, 2001; National Center for Early Development and Learning, 2002). There is a lack of research involving children who do not attend a preschool environment before entering kindergarten. How might the children, parents, and teachers react differently to this new group environment and experience?

There is little information for children with special needs. From one report, the most frequently reported practice is reading written records and contacting preschool teachers of children with special needs. Any other transition activity is similar to the practices found in the National Transition Study. The overall majority of teachers reported that if they participated in any kindergarten transition activities, they did not include individual practices for children with special needs. Further research calls for particular attention for the children and their families to make the transition as simple as possible (La Paro, Pianta, & Cox, 2000).

There is also little research for children at risk. The National Transition Study stated that less intensive practices are used in more urban schools or with a greater percentage of minority students (i.e., open house after school starts). However, there is an increase in home visits for high poverty or minority students. These practices fall short of building the support and relationships that the children and families need (Pianta, Cox, Taylor, & Early, 1999).

It is also important to focus on the connections among the child, the family, and the school. A constructive, sustained relationship between families and schools depends on creating a common language to discuss the roles of families and schools and shaping the relationship through dialogue about rights, responsibilities, and available resources (Pianta & Cox, 1999). While the school–family relationship is critical at any stage of a child’s education, it is usually established during the transition into kindergarten. The Kindergarten Transition Project at National Center for Early Development and Learning developed a school-based approach to enhance connections among children, families, teachers, and peers during the transition process (National Center for Early Development and Learning, 1999). The suggestions to establish connections and relationships need to be made easily available to communities and include future research to establish relationships with diverse families.

There is literature to explain the importance of the transition to kindergarten and the views of parents and teachers. It is clear that there must be communication and a relationship built among children, teachers, and parents. However, there is little research to determine how to establish these relationships, especially between teachers and parents. Both teachers and parents understand their positions in the children’s transition,

but do they understand each other's positions? How could parents and teachers come to an understanding about their conflicting views and expectations regarding kindergarten?

In the research, teachers express their views of the importance of social development over academic skills, but what about the conflicting view of administrators and national policies that encourage higher academic demands of the students? How often do teachers have to put aside their personal teaching philosophy to accommodate the philosophy of the school?

In Wesley & Buysse (2003), their message to legislators and policy makers is to "spend some real time with real children in real school" (p. 365), indicating future research conducted to include the conflicting views of the teachers and school community. There is also a need for longitudinal studies to understand the developing child within the context of the family, school, and community.

CHAPTER 3

Listening and Making Sense of Multiple Voices

“I like to try to understand the meaning of who people are and what they are saying to me” (Fred Rogers)

This study was guided by one main question - How are relationships between parents and teachers established and maintained to enhance and support children’s transition into kindergarten? In order to explore the research question for this study, I decided to conduct a qualitative study, informed by the theoretical perspectives of social constructivism. This perspective focused on questions of how people constructed reality in particular settings. In this study, home and school were the settings. Specifically, I wanted to explore the following questions based on this perspective: what are parent and teacher reported perceptions, “truths”, explanations, beliefs, and worldview? What are the consequences of their constructions for their behaviors and for those with whom they interact? Another theory that informed this study was grounded theory. This theory followed the central questions of what theory emerges from systematic comparative analysis and is grounded in fieldwork so as to explain what has been and is observed (Patton, 2002). I believed the research emerged in both theories. The participants in the study were teachers and parents. They expressed their interpretations and expectations of transitions that developed through their respective reality.

Quantitative research methods analyzed data obtained from samples of observations in order to study and compare sources of variance of phenomena, to help make decisions to accept or reject hypothesized relations between the phenomena, and to

make reliable inferences from observations. Quantitative research methods involved a variable of interest (independent variable) and manipulating it to observe the impact of manipulation on a second variable (dependent variable), all while controlling for sources of error and precise measurement (Rudestam & Newton 2001).

Qualitative research methods allowed researchers to be more spontaneous and flexible in exploring phenomena in a natural environment. Qualitative data was in the form of words, not numbers. Qualitative data was evaluated subjectively, as opposed to using descriptive and inferential statistics. Qualitative research implied an emphasis on processes and meanings over measures of quantity, intensity, and frequency. It emphasized the socially constructed nature of reality, a closer relationship between the researcher and the object of the study, and the context that influences the inquiry (Rudestam & Newton, 2001).

I felt the voices of the teachers and parents could be lacking behind the numbers of a quantitative study. A qualitative study allowed me to be part of the classroom environment in which these children, parents, and teachers are part of as well. Through the interviews, I was able to experience the concerns, frustrations, and empathy the parents and teachers were experiencing. I believed a qualitative study was the best way to answer my questions of how to strengthen the teacher-parent relationship. In order to answer my research questions, I felt I needed to experience the emotions and responses of the involved parties and the most meaningful way was to interview the participating teachers and parents.

Data Collection

The study I used as a basis for this research was the Transition Practice Survey, completed by the National Center of Early Development and Learning (1996). I contacted Dr. Talbot, principal of Margaret Beeks Elementary School in Blacksburg, Virginia. I explained the purpose of my study. Dr. Talbot agreed to include her school and kindergarten classes for my data collection. As I was forming my research questions, I realized that I needed to develop an understanding of the school's current transition opportunities. In late spring of 2003, I participated in the transition to kindergarten activities at Margaret Beeks for incoming children and parents (Appendix A). I used these opportunities to express the interest of my study to the parents and teachers and mentioned that I would like to possibly include them in the study. I informally talked with parents and teachers for ideas for the study and to establish a focus of inquiry and interview questions.

In September 2003, I was informed that I needed to acquire permission to conduct a study within the school system. I met with Dr. Katherine Rodgers, Assistant Superintendent of Montgomery County Public Schools to discuss the study. I received approval from the Montgomery County Public Schools to conduct the study (Appendix B). Permission to conduct this study was also granted by the Institutional Review Board of Virginia Tech.

As I began my research, I decided to look not only at the expectations of kindergarten and the transition process, but also suggestions of change and aspects of the school-family relationship. My questions focused on the parental and educational

perspectives of kindergarten, thoughts and experiences of the participants on the school-family relationship, and its influence on the child transitioning into kindergarten.

Participants

My intention was to interview kindergarten teachers and incoming kindergarten parents at the Margaret Beeks Elementary School. A letter was sent to the four kindergarten teachers, extending an invitation for them to learn the details about the study (Appendix C). I met with the teachers and explained the details of the study. I asked the teachers if they would agree to be interviewed for the study.

I contacted each kindergarten teacher through email. I learned that one of the teachers had retired since the beginning of the school year. However, she expressed her interest in the study and we agreed on an interview location and time. Two teachers also agreed to be interviewed and interview locations and times were determined. The principal of the school was also interviewed. One teacher decided she did not want to partake in the study, due to the changes in the dynamics in her classroom. Thus, I had four educational perspectives for the study. I assigned a pseudonym for each participant to ensure their confidentiality (Appendix D).

A letter was addressed to the kindergarten parents in November, 2003, extending an invitation to learn the details about the study (Appendix E). After numerous attempts to meet with the parents and explain the study, I was not able to obtain any parents representing the kindergarten class of Margaret Beeks Elementary School. I conferred with my committee and received permission to contact families of the Virginia Tech Child Development Laboratory School with children who had transitioned into

kindergarten. I received a list of names and began contacting the families. I explained to them the details of the study and arranged for an interview if they expressed their interest in the study. I met with each family individually, on a day and time convenient for the families. I had seven family perspectives for the study. I assigned a pseudonym for each participant to ensure their confidentiality (Appendix D).

Interviews

As part of my qualitative study, I conducted individual interviews with open-ended questions. The purpose of interviews was to allow researchers to enter into the other person's perspective. The strength of open-ended questions was that all respondents answer the same questions to increase comparability of responses, and reduce interviewer bias (Patton, 2002). I developed a list of questions to ask the participants to obtain their perspective on children entering kindergarten, while allowing the participant to divulge further information and thoughts in the latter part of the interview. I felt this allowed the participants to take whatever direction and use whatever words they wanted to express themselves in what they had to say. I was interested in learning more about the individual thoughts and ideas of each participant and open-ended interviews were the most informative method to acquire the information. My interview questions were developed based on my initial areas of interest in kindergarten transitions, the literature on transition into kindergarten, and suggestions from my thesis committee members. The interview questions were guided by one main question of the study - How are relationships between parents and teachers established and maintained to enhance and support children's transition into kindergarten?

I began interviewing the teachers and the principal. The first interview session took place during the months of October and November of 2003. For each participant, I presented the interview questions and the Informed Consent Form (Appendix F). After I explained the details of the study and reviewed the questions and consent, each participant filled out, signed, and returned to me the Informed Consent Form at the beginning of our interview. I gave each participant a photocopy of their completed consent form. The interview questions were conducted in a semi-structured environment, with questions regarding their expectations and concerns for children entering kindergarten. (Appendix G). The interview sessions lasted no longer than one hour. I audio taped each individual conversation, labeled the tape, and secured it in an appropriate location to protect the identity of my participants.

The participating parents were interviewed throughout the months of December, January, and February of 2004. At each interview, I presented the interview questions and the Informed Consent Form (Appendix F). The parents filled out, signed, and returned to me the Informed Consent Form if they decided to participate. I gave the parents a photocopy of their completed consent form. The interview questions were conducted in a semi-structured environment at a location, day and time decided by the individual participating parents and myself, with questions and opportunities to address their expectations and concerns for children entering kindergarten. I also asked the parents their perceptions of the school-family relationship (Appendix H). Due to time constraints, I was only able to conduct one interview with the parents and I combined the interview questions into one session. I acquired seven individual interviews (Appendix D). The interview session lasted no longer than one hour. I audio taped each individual

conversation, labeled the tape, and secured it in an appropriate location to protect the identity of my participants.

In February 2004, I contacted the participating teachers and principal from the first interview session for an additional interview. During the second interview sessions, the teachers and the principal were asked to reflect on their perceptions of the children's experiences while entering kindergarten and their perceptions of the school-family relationship (Appendix I). I audio taped each individual conversation, labeled the tape, and secured it in an appropriate location to protect the identity of my participants.

Data Management

“Analysis finally makes clear what would have been most important to study, if only we had known beforehand” (Halcolm)

I decided to use content analysis for managing the data I collected. This method of analysis seemed most appropriate for my study. According to Patton (2002), content analysis is used to refer to any qualitative data reduction and sense-making effort that takes a volume of qualitative material and attempts to identify core consistencies and meanings. In analyzing the data, I kept in mind the process of content analysis, my research question, and the theoretical perspectives of social constructivism.

In reading and rereading the data, I recognized that the parents, in responding to the semi-structured interview questions, were focusing on their individual child. The teachers' focus was on groups of children within the context of their respective classrooms and what were deemed as meaningful experiences for all the children in the classroom. It could be suggested that the teachers were operating more from a social

constructivist viewpoint than the parents since this perspective focuses more on collective viewpoints.

After the conclusion of each interview, I transcribed the interview for future analysis. I read through each transcription, highlighting key phrases related back to the interview questions. I transferred each key phrase and response onto an index card, choosing green for teacher's responses, blue for principal's responses, and red for parent's responses. I assigned each teacher or principal participant a letter and the parent participants a number that corresponded to their pseudonym. After careful reading and re-reading of the data, three themes emerged. I named them The Transition into Kindergarten, The Kindergarten Experience, and The Parent-Teacher Relationship. I further sub-divided each theme into several categories that were compatible with my interview questions. The Transition into Kindergarten included concerns about entering kindergarten, preparation activities at home, preparation activities at the school, and the most useful activity before entering kindergarten. The Kindergarten Experience included characteristics of readiness, expectations of kindergarten, and the kindergarten philosophy. The Parent-Teacher Relationship included aspects of the relationships, recommendations for the parents, recommendations for the schools, and the concept of collaboration.

I divided each index card according to the coding system and prepared for analysis of the interview responses. All transcriptions, codes, and index cards were secured in an appropriate location to protect the identity of my participants. Throughout my data analysis, I used the term "educators" to include both the teachers and the

principal. In this thesis, if I included a response from only the principal, I used the term “principal”.

I have also included examples of triangulation. Triangulation strengthens a study by combining methods. There are four basic types of triangulation defined by Patton (2002). First, data triangulation is the use of a variety of data sources in a study. Second, investigator triangulation is the use of several different researchers or evaluators. Third, theory triangulation is the use of multiple perspectives to interpret a single set of data. Lastly, methodological triangulation is the use of multiple methods to study a single problem or program. I used data triangulation in this study. I participated in a variety of school situations to get a broader perspective of the transition experience. These situations included participation in the Margaret Beeks Elementary School’s transition activities and conducting a focus group at the Virginia Association for Early Childhood Education Annual Conference entitled “A Collaborative Conversation: A Dialogue among Teachers, Parents, and Administrators on Issues Related to Children Transitioning to Kindergarten” in March, 2004.

CHAPTER 4

Voices of Parents and Teachers: Lessons Learned

“... how easily you can belong to everything simply by listening” (David Whyte)

This chapter was organized based on the three main themes that emerged from the data. They were The Transition into Kindergarten, The Kindergarten Experience, and The Parent-Teacher Relationship. The Transition into Kindergarten included concerns about entering kindergarten, preparation activities at home, preparation activities at the school, and the most useful activity before entering kindergarten. The Kindergarten Experience included characteristics of readiness, expectations of kindergarten, and the kindergarten philosophy. The Parent-Teacher Relationship included aspects of the relationships, recommendations for the parents, recommendations for the schools, and the concept of collaboration.

The most important aspects of the transition process are the relationships between the child and teacher, the parents and teacher, child and peers, and child and parent (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003). Before the parent-teacher relationship can be established, parents and teachers have to voice their ideas and concerns of the transition process. In this chapter, parents and teachers shared their experiences of children transitioning into kindergarten. The voices of the participants encouraged the readers to listen to their lessons and consider their recommendations to establish and maintain the relationships between parents and teachers, thus enhancing and supporting children's transition into kindergarten.

The Transition into Kindergarten

This theme explored the concept of children transitioning into kindergarten. Parents and teachers were able to voice their concerns about kindergarten, identify transition activities performed at home and at school, and the most useful activity recommended by parents and teachers to help children transition into kindergarten.

Concerns About Entering Kindergarten

I asked the parents and teachers what concerns they had for children entering kindergarten. The parent responses to this question varied greatly. For example, Tim and Molly replied they do not have any concerns about their children entering kindergarten and expressed the opinion that their children would have no problem adjusting. They believed that the teachers would handle any situation that may come up. Tim and Molly had confidence in their ability to trust both their child and the teacher. On the other end, Lisa expressed concern about how her child would feel about being away from her all day and that she would not know what her child would be doing all day. Lisa seemed unsure of her child's ability to adjust to the new classroom environment and it also addressed her own insecurities about letting go.

Parental concerns also included the experience of riding the school bus. In particular, the concerns focused on the school bus schedule, which bus their child would be riding, what their child's experience would be on the bus, and how conflict would be managed on the bus. In fact, a number of parents said they did not send their child to school on the bus because of the anxiety both the child and the parent felt about the bus. Parents believed the children were too young to ride the bus without parental supervision.

Alli also mentioned that her child said he did not want to go to school if he had to ride the school bus.

Another concern of the parents focused on academics. There was a range of concerns related to academics. Lisa mentioned that she was concerned because her child did not know all of the letters of the alphabet before entering kindergarten. Ashley was concerned that her child did not seem interested in learning. When I asked for further clarification, Ashley told me that she thought her child did not show a lot of interest in reading and other academic areas. She mentioned that it was “like pulling teeth to get him to sit down” and she had “developed all these sticker charts and all kinds of stuff to motivate him and it was a concern” for her. Other parents mentioned concerns regarding learning to read, and how would the child function academically in comparison to other children.

Socialization was a concern for both teachers and parents. Specifically, the concern included making friends, getting along with others, and the ability to sit down and focus on a task.

Teachers Ms. Laura and Ms. Abby were also concerned about knowing the families’ plans for the children after school. These plans included the children knowing how they would get home at the end of the school day and the children knowing who would be taking care of them after school.

Additionally, I included concerns expressed by the principal, Ms. Catherine. Ms. Catherine mentioned concerns that were brought to her by parents. Over the years, she found that parents were concerned about the children’s teachers, especially their teaching style and the classroom environment. The parents wanted teachers to be nurturing to the

children and have more structure in the classroom. Parents were used to the one-on-one contact they experienced in preschool settings and there was just not as much in the public schools, as expressed by Ms. Emily, a teacher, “It’s not a good thing or a bad thing, it’s just a thing”.

Parents and educators had different concerns for children entering kindergarten. Parents seemed more concern for their individual children and educators focused on the group of children. This concept was related to the literature that parents and teachers have conflicting views on the transition into kindergarten.

Preparation Activities at Home

The majority of parents replied that they talked to their children about entering kindergarten. The parents talked about how exciting it would be in kindergarten, how the children would make new friends, how they would have a lot of fun, and learn new things – basically, what kindergarten was going to be like. The parents and children also talked about the length and schedule of the day, riding the school bus, and their children also asked whether they would like kindergarten. The parents tried to remain positive about the experience. For example, Lacey replied “It’s a positive thing that he’s going to be able to learn all these new skills”.

The second most popular activity at home was reading books every day. Engaging the children in “academic activities” included using workbooks on fundamental concepts, coloring in the lines, games with rhyming words, counting, color recognition, shapes, and writing letters.

Other activities at home included working on things the child is interested in. Tim mentioned that his child was interested in exploring scientific concepts and dinosaurs. A number of parents also talked about the importance of the children being able to take care of their personal needs. Lisa mentioned that she told her child “You need to know how to tie your on shoe because I won’t be there to help you”. She was preparing her child for the emotional move into kindergarten.

Ashley said, “We did a lot of showing”. She and her husband took their child to the school, met with the teacher and the principal and were able to introduce their child to the environment, with them present, so their child would have a sense of familiarity.

Preparation Activities at the School

The parents talked about a variety of experiences in the different schools their children were enrolled in. I included the various types of transition opportunities provided by the parents, the teachers, and the schools.

Parent night: two of the schools provided this opportunity in the spring of the previous school year. The parents were notified about the parent night when they registered their children for kindergarten. At this event, the parents were introduced to the administrative staff and were given a description of a general day in the life of a kindergarten. Ms. Abby commented “I think it helped ease the parents”.

Picnic/playgroup: the parents and teachers mentioned a variety of picnics or playgroups provided by all of the schools. These events were held during the spring of the previous year or during the summer. There were mixed reactions from both parents and teachers to the picnics and playgroups. Lacey commented that her child’s school

offered a morning playgroup every day during the summer to help the children become familiar with the classroom and the materials. This school also provided opportunities for incoming kindergarteners during the previous school year to participate in the classroom with the current kindergarten children. Lisa mentioned that her child's school offered similar activities but she felt that it was too informal for the parents, who were still looking for more information and an opportunity to meet with other classroom parents. The principal, Ms. Catherine, also expressed her desire to make the picnic more formal and organized, but recognized and respected her teachers' time and that they needed to work in their classrooms.

Orientation/open house: all the schools offered an orientation or an open house. This activity gave the parents and the children an opportunity to understand what the children would be doing. Tim commented this opportunity was "good for us and good for them too. It gave us an idea about what would be going on". During this visit, the children and parents had the opportunity to meet with and become familiar with their teachers and learn the location of their children's classrooms. Some even learned where their cubby would be and met with the other children who would be in the classroom. Most of the schools offered their open houses a week before school started. Molly told me that her child's school had their open house a week after the school year began.

Visitation day: in addition to an open house, two schools also provided an opportunity for parents and children to spend some time in the school in the spring. The children walked into the kindergarten room and spent time with the current kindergarten children and the teachers, to get a sense of what their day would be like. They also had the opportunity to interact with the other children without the parents being present.

During this time, the parents asked questions and voiced their concerns with the principal and guidance counselor without the children being present. A teacher, Ms. Emily, commented that it was a great opportunity but she would like to see the children visit in smaller groups and for a longer period of time so the teachers could evaluate and observe the children.

Most Useful Activity Before Entering Kindergarten

The majority of parents and educators said the most useful transition activity for them and their children were the school visits, school tours, and orientation. During these events, the parents and children saw the school, the classrooms, and met the teachers and the principals. Tim said the opportunity “gave him a sense of calm in the fall”. Molly said “allowed her to be more comfortable”. Alli said it “was more meaningful”. Lisa said it “was the most useful” and Lacey said her child “was able to get familiar with the room and teacher”. The teachers and the principal also agreed with the positive nature of the visits. Ms. Catherine concluded “It was one of the most positive things that we’ve done”.

Another useful activity mentioned by the parents and educators was reading to the child every day. Not only did reading encourage literacy development with recognizing letters, sounds, and the formation of words, but it also prepared the children for sitting still for an activity and listening to a story.

Teachers in particular also stressed the importance of offering various play situations for the children before entering kindergarten. These play times were especially important without actively participating parents. Ms. Emily emphasized that the most useful experience to have when coming into kindergarten was to be able to get along with

people and have good coping skills. Ms. Abby and Ms. Laura expressed the importance of being around other children before entering kindergarten and to learn group dynamics. Ms. Laura added “Living in a community is one of the hardest things kids have to do and it’s something they have to do through the first day of school”. Teachers stressed the importance of improving relationship skills in children. Ms. Emily said without relationship skills, “you’re not going to learn anything, you’re also not going to have any friends and it won’t be a place that you want to come”. Relationships “might be the only thing they have in common”.

The Kindergarten Experience

This theme explored the kindergarten classroom. Parents and teachers were able to express their ideas of “being ready” for kindergarten, parents explained their expectations of the kindergarten classroom, and the teachers related the kindergarten philosophy to the school philosophy.

Characteristics of Readiness

Children are ready for school when they have been exposed to consistent, stable adults who are emotionally invested in them, a physical environment that is safe and predictable, regular routines and rhythms of activity, competent peers, and materials that stimulate their explorations (National Center for Early Development and Learning, 1998).

I asked parents and educators their opinion of being ready for kindergarten. The responses included three types of readiness. They were social readiness, emotional readiness, and academic readiness.

The majority of both parents and educators mentioned social readiness as a characteristic for being ready to enter kindergarten. For clarification, the parents and educators explained the meaning of social readiness. The responses included the ability to socialize appropriately with other children, make new friends, begin to understand relationships, know how to play with others, and being comfortable around other kids. Parents and teachers also agreed that the children should not be afraid of trying new experiences and should feel comfortable in new environments.

Teachers noted that children should be able to respond to the teachers and respect them. These skills included following directions, initiating conversation, answering questions and having the ability to sit still in a group to listen to a story or engage in cooperative play.

Some participants also mentioned emotional readiness when defining social readiness. Emotional readiness included the children showing a lot of enthusiasm for school and the ability to be separated from parents without being upset. This was particularly important from the teachers' perspective. Ms. Emily responded, "I think it is one of the most important things, more important than academic needs. You can fix the rest of it". Ms. Abby also added, "If they're not emotionally ready, it really interferes a lot with their learning".

Third, both parents and teachers also expressed the importance of being academically ready. However, the focus was different between parents and teachers. Parents were more likely to be focused on specific contents such as to know numbers and the alphabet. The teachers compared academic readiness as being ready for learning experiences, exploring and learning new things, and to have fun while learning.

Both parents and teachers expressed the importance of children being able to take care of their own needs and personal belongings. Alli included her concern that “It’s physical thing, that you’re not so tired that you can’t stand up and function”. She mentioned that her child had preschool three days a week in the morning and the afternoons were very relaxed and she “hoped that he’d make it all day and not feel stressed out.” I wondered how many other parents might have been concerned about their children adapting to an all-day classroom environment. This topic could be considered in future research.

Expectations of Kindergarten

The majority of parents expected their children to be excited about going to kindergarten. Everyone was looking forward to going to the “big kid” school. The children were excited about meeting new friends, learning new things, and the parents had the same views. Tim said he “knew it was going to be good”. Maria believed that the teachers would be able to handle the situations that may arise.

The parents expressed the importance of an orientation experience. It helped to calm the nerves of both parents and children. By seeing and spending time in the classroom and meeting the kindergarten teacher before the school year began, the children and parents had a better understanding of the kindergarten experience, and they were comfortable with the atmosphere.

The parents expected the child to be able to go outside every day, to have experiences outside the kindergarten classroom (physical education, art, music, and library exploration), read stories, writing, desk time, and circle time. Parents also had

individual concerns for their children. Alli expressed her fear that her child would have a difficult time adjusting to an all day program. Ashley expected her child to be resistant to learning and that it would take awhile for her child to make some good friends. Lacey thought there would have been more emphasis on academics and that her expectations were not completely accurate. She found that the teachers at her child's school focused more on the structure of the public school. Lacey said her child came home the first day of school saying "hips and lips" because the children were supposed to keep their hand on their hip and a finger on their lip as a reminder to remain quiet and keep their hands to themselves when walking down the hall.

Kindergarten Philosophy

I asked the teachers for their opinion of the philosophy practiced in their classrooms and how this philosophy benefited the children. All the teachers believed that the philosophy focused on the children. In particular, the children had the opportunity to have fun, to feel safe, to be happy, and to learn something.

The overall kindergarten philosophy was similar to Margaret Beeks Elementary School's mission statement – child-centered, literacy focused, and individual student achievement.

The Parent-Teacher Relationship

A transition into kindergarten was deemed successful by the parents and the teachers of the children entering kindergarten. The parent-teacher relationship was essential to a successful transition. This theme recognized the important aspects of the

parent-teacher relationship, offered recommendations for future parents and the schools, and defined the concept of collaboration. Collaboration was the key component to a successful parent-teacher relationship and the transition into kindergarten.

Aspects of the Relationships

Parent perspective: All the parents expressed the importance that the parent-teacher relationship was based on trust and communication between parents and schools. They also mentioned that the value of volunteering in the classroom resulted in being familiar with the school, teacher, and the child's classroom abilities. Parents needed to share as much information as possible with educators to support each other and to establish consistency between home and school, common expectations of the children, and trust. Overall, parents mentioned the importance of taking an active interest in the child's education and its components. Lisa added, "They have my child eight hours of the day. They're raising him right beside me".

Educator perspective: The educators also emphasized that communication and trust was the main aspect of the parent-teacher relationship. Ms. Catherine said, "When parents feel good about what's happening at the school and the adults at the school, then that carries over to the children's feelings about the school". They also mentioned the value of building a risk-free relationship that builds community. Elements that build relationships included being warm, honest, mutually respectful, friendly, open, caring, and finding ways to speak the truth about concerns. The teachers mentioned that in building relationships, one needs to suspend judgment, get outside your personal comfort zone, and to meet people where you and they are. Ms. Emily said, "As a team, you can

meet the child's needs and educate the child to his/her fullest potential". Ms. Laura clarified the importance of the relationship between the parents and the teachers when she said, "The parents have been the teacher for five years. We're the second teacher and the first formal teacher and I think we need that to work together".

Recommendations for Future Parents

The following suggestions were given by parents and teachers for future kindergarten parents to consider.

Parent perspective: The parents mentioned the need to take care of the teachers, and have realistic expectations of the teachers. Parents encouraged other parents to maintain a link between school and home by getting involved in the classroom and schools, taking responsibility for their children, and volunteering.

Teacher perspective: The teachers encouraged parents to make more playgroups available to their children, talk to their children enthusiastically about kindergarten, and about what is going on during the school day. Ms. Laura added that she would like parents to "make sure that the children can zip and button their clothes and handle their personal needs". Most importantly, the teachers encouraged the parents to read to their children, be positive, make sure their child feels good about themselves, love them a lot, and just have fun with their children.

Recommendations for the Schools

The following suggestions were given by the parents and teachers for the schools to consider.

Parent perspective: The parents suggested more organized activities for the children and parents to meet in an informal setting. Parents suggested opportunities to meet with the actual teacher and classmates before school starts, or even spend a half-day in the kindergarten classroom. In the words of Molly, “that would be perfect”.

Parents recommended making their child’s schedule available before school starts. Parents suggested schools ask for parent support and help parents get involved, communicate, and work on making the school a welcoming and friendly place. Parents would like the schools to be aware of the amount of information they are presenting to families at a single event. Lacey said during her child’s orientation, she was only concerned about her child’s needs and found it difficult to pay attention to all the information being presented by the school. Parents also expressed appreciation for the schools’ efforts. Lisa commented, “They’re really doing the best job they can”.

Parents also expressed a number of issues that caused anxiety for them regarding the beginning of kindergarten. Maria commented “I just think that I might have gone a little bit too far with some of the things I did, I was just worried”. One of these issues surrounded the school bus. Parents were concerned about the bus system and suggested having the opportunity to ride the bus before school starts. Alli added the possibility of riding the child’s actual bus route to school to enable the parents and child to understand the length of the trip.

Parents would like to know more about the teacher, how she ran her class, what were her expectations, have more available one-on-one time with the teacher, and more information about what kindergarten was going to be like. Lacey said “It was talked

about, but too much info at that time”. Overall, parents expressed an appreciation for more information.

Teacher perspective: Teachers recommended that schools be respectful of their personal time and family obligations. They suggested schools consider a variety of options to fit the needs of the families, communicate with families, provide time for the teachers to work with families, respect families, and give parents opportunities for questions.

The teachers suggested the school require that the parents make appointments for open houses and schedule visitations at various times so that fewer children were present at one time. Ms. Laura and Ms. Abby said, “The visits are opportunities for the teachers to make observations”. The teachers and the principal agreed with the parents that there was too much information presented at the visitation days. Ms. Catherine said, “It was overwhelming”. Ms. Emily also expressed her opinion to meet the children as a group so they could meet their classmates and begin to establish relationships. Ms. Catherine mentioned making the transition more meaningful for parents. When I asked her to clarify how to make the transition more meaningful, she responded that she wanted the parents to feel that they had their questions answered about kindergarten and feels comfortable with the new school environment.

The Concept of Collaboration

The definition of collaboration is “to work together” (Webster’s New World Dictionary, 1990). I asked parents and teachers their opinions of collaboration and its role in the parent-teacher relationship. Parents and teachers agreed on the importance of

collaborating with each other for the benefit of the children. They agreed that collaboration was to work together for a common goal and purpose. Working together took place at a level of comfort for everyone. A factor of working together as a team included an aspect of “give and take” and establishing a community and climate together while valuing and respecting each other.

Other Sources of Data

I used triangulation throughout my research. Triangulation is used to strengthen a study by combining different methods (Patton, 2002). I used data triangulation in this study. I participated in other situations to get a broader perspective of the transition experience. These situations included participation in a parent-teacher conference at Virginia Tech Child Development Laboratory School and participation in the Margaret Beeks Elementary School’s transition activities. I was able to get a first hand view of the experience of the parents and children throughout the transition process. I also conducted a focus group at the Virginia Association for Early Childhood Education Annual Conference entitled “A Collaborative Conversation: A Dialogue among Teachers, Parents, and Administrators on Issues Related to Children Transitioning to Kindergarten” in March, 2004.

When I first developed an interest in a child’s transition into kindergarten, I simply took notes during a parent-teacher conference at Virginia Tech Child Development Laboratory School. The parent was Lacey. I focused on her concerns. She and her husband emphasized their child’s social skills and reading abilities. They expressed concern for how their child might fit in with the other children in the

classroom. More importantly, they wanted to know about the expectations the kindergarten teachers had for the incoming class of kindergarten children.

Target School Transition Activities

On April 29, 2003, I attended the first transition activity offered at Margaret Beeks Elementary School (Appendix A). This activity was referred to as the Kindergarten Parent Orientation. I attended the activity, but I remained in the back of the room and did not interact with any of the new parents. The parents listened to an introduction the school made by the kindergarten teachers and the educational specialists. The parents heard about the academic programs for their children, including math, literacy, music, physical education, art, English as a Second Language, and library opportunities. They also learned about issues related to the school, such as the school bus and health/safety information from the school nurse. Parents asked questions regarding bus concerns, parent involvement opportunities, the class size, the length of the school day, and teacher aides. They examined methods of parent-teacher communication. This parent orientation lasted one hour.

The week of May 5-8, 2003 was set aside for the kindergarten visitation. Parents and children were able to choose the day they would attend the half-day visitation. They arrived at the school and met Ms. Catherine in the multi-purpose room. I noticed varied levels of anxiety and excitement on the faces of both the parents and the children. I was introduced to the group of parents and children as graduate student at Virginia Tech working on a thesis about a child's transition to kindergarten. I decided I would spend

one day following the parents and one day following the children into the kindergarten building.

I stayed with the parents on the first day. The children lined up and followed the guidance counselor into the kindergarten while the parents listened to information presented by the school staff. The parents asked questions and voiced their concerns without the children present. The discussion focused on trust and respect for both teacher and parent, the kindergarten report card for academic expectations, ways to help children build responsibility and respect, teacher expectations for children and parents in the classrooms, and the importance of the parent-teacher relationship. The questions from the parents were about academic concerns and their child's ability as compared with other children in kindergarten. At the end of the session, the parents went to the playground to meet their children. The parents and children took a short ride on the school bus and had lunch in the school cafeteria.

I followed the children during the second day of the visitation. The kindergarten classroom is one large room that is divided into four sections, representing the four kindergarten classrooms. The teachers divided the children into the four classrooms. If a child knew a current kindergarten student, the teachers assigned the child to the student's room. The children had an opportunity to see the current kindergarten children in action and get a sense of the types of activities they would be participating in next year. Overall, the children became comfortable in the classroom, with a few who were more reluctant to join the groups. After visiting the classroom, the children were happy to see their parents again on the playground. They were very excited about riding the school bus. Some of the children asked their parents if they could sit alone on the bus without their parents.

On August 13, 2003, an informal playground party was offered for the parents and children. During this event, the parents and children played on the playground and had lunch with the other families. While I attended this event, I overheard children commenting excitedly, “I can’t wait to start!” and parents commenting emotionally, “I can’t believe my child is old enough to go to kindergarten”.

August 18, 2003 was Meet the Teacher Night or Open House. The families met individually with their children’s kindergarten teachers to ask questions, find the child’s cubby, and explore the room together. I had a chance to talk to some of the teachers and the families about this experience. Ms. Abby mentioned it was a very exciting time and parents feel better when they know the teachers and have a sense of the classrooms. Ms. Laura invited a child to sit closer to her than the parents as she asked the child questions to help the child feel comfortable talking to her. Ms. Emily made art materials available for the children to help them feel comfortable in the classroom, believing that if the child is comfortable, the parents will also feel comfortable with the teacher. Parents commented on how they enjoyed the experience, enjoyed the individual attention for themselves and their children, but “there is no bigger stress than being the parent of a kindergartener”.

All these transition activities gave the parents, teachers, and children opportunities to meet each other and begin forming successful relationships with each other. The teacher could perform brief evaluations of the children and provide important information for the parents. The parents could listen to information about the teacher, school expectations, and ask questions that address their concerns. These situations seemed to ease some of the anxiety they were experiencing. The children were able to see their

classrooms, meet future classmates and teachers, and spend some separate time in the school without the parents. I was able to talk to teachers and parents about their expectations for a successful kindergarten transition. I heard parents and children discuss what would happen when they go to school and how to help each other overcome their feelings of excitement and anxiety. By attending these transition activities and informal conversations with parents and teachers, I was able to develop my research questions and an outline for my interview questions.

Virginia Association for Early Childhood Education Annual Conference

I was invited to present at the Annual Conference of the Virginia Association for Early Childhood Education (VAECE). My presentation was entitled *A Collaborative Conversation: A Dialogue among Teachers, Parents, and Administrators on Issues Related to Children Transitioning to Kindergarten*. The presentation was conducted as a focus group of teachers and administrations to share their insights on the expectations and concerns for children entering kindergarten. The participants responded to the focus group questions and we discussed the responses in a collaborative conversation (Appendix J). Due to time constraints, we were only able to discuss a small number of the questions. The majority of participants mentioned the importance of social skills when transitioning into kindergarten. These responses were similar to the responses given by the teachers I interviewed for my study. When asked what parents can do to help their children transition into kindergarten, the participants responded that parents should read to their children, talk about the expectations of kindergarten, be positive when discussing the transition because the children will react to the parent's reactions, and to get the

children involved in playgroups. I asked the participants what the schools could provide to the families to assist in the transition process. The participants unanimously responded that the schools should provide visitation opportunities and make information available for the families about the kindergarten classroom and teacher expectations. The last question the group was able to discuss addressed the parent-teacher relationship. The participants agreed that communication to build a trusting and honest relationship was the ultimate ingredient necessary for a successful parent-teacher relationship.

This “collaborative conversation” was an opportunity to present my research and interview questions to another group of teachers that were not associated with my target school system. The teachers came from a variety of child care centers and instructed various age levels. When I asked each participant which grade level they worked with, there were not any kindergarten teachers. However, the participants responded in similar ways to the participants in my interview sessions. I felt the focus group conversation at the VAECE conference validated my findings from the educational perspective of children transitioning into kindergarten.

CHAPTER 5

Reflections and the Next Step

“It’s what you learn after you know it all that counts” (John Wooden)

The purpose of this study was to gain understanding of different perspectives and expectations and to discover ways that could enhance children’s transition experience. This study was also to discover ways to establish and maintain parent-teacher relationships.

I compared my collected data with the literature reviewed. The main focus of the literature and the interview questions concentrated on children’s transition into kindergarten. The Transition Practice Survey (1996) reported that while 52% of children have a successful entry into kindergarten, 48% were not adequately prepared to enter kindergarten. The teachers represented in the Transition Practices Survey emphasized physical well-being, self-expression, social development, and curiosity for a successful entry into kindergarten (Pianta & Cox, 1999).

It was not my intention to argue the findings of the Transition Practice Survey, completed by the National Center of Early Development and Learning (1996) with the results of my local data. I simply wanted to talk with parents and educators to get an idea of their feelings and thoughts about children transitioning into kindergarten. I wanted to hear the voices of the parents, teachers, and a principal in order to possibly improve the transition experience and answer questions about this experience. Throughout my literature research and conversations, I recognized the need to include the parent-teacher relationship in the interviews. It was stated many times by the parents, teachers, and the

principal that a successful transition is influenced by successful relationships. I wanted the findings of this study to be available to the parents, teachers, and administrators of kindergarten children who are trying to improve their school's transitional activities.

From the beginning of organizing and presenting the data, I focused on themes that emerged from the data collected on transitional activities. In one study in the literature, the transitional activities used mostly by the parents and the teachers involve visits to the classrooms (La Paro, Kraft-Sayre, & Pianta, 2003). When I compared these activities with those found in the parent and teacher responses, they were similar. Parents and teachers felt that the most helpful activity involved meeting the teachers and visiting the classroom and school prior to the start of the school year.

In the literature review, I included points that make a successful transition. A child's transition is affected by child's skills and prior school – related experience, home experiences, the influences of preschool and kindergarten classroom characteristics, and familiarity with peers in the class (Maxwell & Eller, 1994). Successful transitions occurred when children were well prepared about what to expect and were excited about learning and parents were active participants in the education process at home and school (National PTA & National Head Start Association, 1999). I compared the literature on successful transitions with ideas of parents and educators about being ready for kindergarten. I felt that being ready for kindergarten could be viewed as a prerequisite for a successful transition.

In the second theme, I focused on the views of what makes a child ready for the kindergarten classroom. In the literature, teachers and parents had different opinions of kindergarten. Overall, teachers were concerned with a child's social readiness and parents

were more concerned with a child's academic readiness. However, as stated in the National Transition Study (1992), the academic demands of kindergarten created the greatest difficulty for the highest percentage of children. I recognized the conflicting views and presented both views for a through literature review and for readers to understand that there were different opinions regarding children's readiness to enter kindergarten.

From my study, both parents and teachers were concerned about the children's social abilities in the classroom. However, parents also mentioned their child's academic skills as an aspect and a concern for being ready for kindergarten. Teachers mentioned the importance of reading to the children, but stressed the importance of the social skills. As Ms. Emily said, "I think it is one of the most important things, more important than academic needs. You can fix the rest of it. That's the big stepping block, if you can't do that, you can't do anything".

I also included some educational perspectives of the philosophy of the kindergarten. At Margaret Beeks Elementary School, the philosophy followed in the kindergarten classrooms was the same as the philosophy followed throughout the school. It could be beneficial to make the philosophy and mission statements of the schools more prevalent to the families during their transition time and possibly help communicate these ideas to the children. I believed the parents would have a more accurate expectation of the kindergarten curriculum if they were familiar with the philosophy practiced at their child's school.

The third section of the data focused on the parent-teacher relationship. The literature and the participants all agreed on the importance of the parent-teacher

relationship and its significance on children's transition into kindergarten. To reemphasize, suggestions were made by both parents and educators to help strengthen the bonds between schools and families. They were similar to those suggestions found in the literature. These suggestions included communication and collaboration as a team for children. The concerns and expectations of the parents could possibly be minimized through improved means of communication. The importance of communication was mentioned throughout all the interviews and simply knowing the expectations of their children's teacher could have reduced much parental anxiety.

From the interviews, there were a number of suggestions provided by the parents and the teachers. I believed it was important for schools and parents to recognize these suggestions during a transition time. Furthermore, there were also changes and considerations that could benefit school experience for the children in future years.

Recommendations

This chapter includes recommendations for parents and teachers based on the literature reviewed and the data collected during this study. These recommendations offer assistance to future transition procedures and to enhance the transition experience through strengthening relationships among schools and families.

For parents: Parents are coming into the kindergarten experience with a variety of hopes and dreams for their children. Some are very familiar with kindergarten and the public school system but for others, this is a brand new experience. Parents need to take an active role in their children's education and be as involved as possible in the classrooms. Parents can provide opportunities for their children to have as many

experiences as possible in their community. These opportunities will help the children be aware of the diversity they may encounter in the school system. Parents can also provide learning opportunities at home, through reading and discussions for future explorations. Parents are encouraged to simply be positive about the changes their children are experiencing. Most importantly, parents need to love and support their children.

For schools: Principals and teachers are familiar with the variety of children and familial situations that have entered their rooms and schools over the years. The suggestions for the teachers are to recognize the needs of their families and make efforts to relate individually to each family. Ms. Catherine mentions respecting and valuing the time and needs of her teachers. The time and needs of the parents also need to be considered by the schools in their efforts to establish a home-school relationship. Teachers can also help parents take initiative in their child's education by communicating their expectations for their classrooms.

The school system encourages these transition activities to take place. It is an opportunity to prepare not only the children and parents for entering kindergarten, but to prepare the teachers for the children's skills and competencies. The school administration has the difficult task of listening to the parent and teacher concerns and suggestions. With these sometimes opposing views, the administrations have to try to support and respect the parents and the teachers. Each school also maintains each philosophy and school mission, as well as required academic standards.

With the findings I have compiled from literature research and my own data collection, it is obvious that communication is very important to the kindergarten transition. The ideas and suggestions offered to the parents and schools are simply to

share thoughts that may make the transition process easier for all those involved. As Lacey suggests, it would have been great to know what the teacher's goals are for the year and to have more information about the classroom expectations. Parents and teachers simply want to know more information from each other about the children. This information includes expectations from each other and how parents and teachers can support each other for children's educational success.

Both parents and teachers mention the importance of recognizing each other in the child's education. It seems obvious that through this mutual respect, parents and teachers would have a successful relationship. However, it is not always the case. In many instances, parents do not feel comfortable in the school environment for a variety of reasons. Teachers and principals need to step outside their comfort zone to include all families and diverse situations. It is emphasized in the interviews to not pass judgment on these families, as it may very well push them away from school even more.

The benefits of a strong relationship, based on communication and collaboration, can provide opportunities and information for both parents and teachers during the kindergarten transition and throughout the educational experience.

Future Research Possibilities

“Your future depends on many things, but mostly on you” (Frank Tyger)

I would like to continue my research with a different population. This study was conducted on a small scale, using one elementary school in a rural, southwestern Virginia community. How might the ideas and suggestions be different in a larger, more urban

school system? How would the transition activities be presented in an environment of working parents who could not attend? How can the transition events take place at schools located in what is considered unsafe neighborhoods? More importantly, what would be characteristics of the family-school relationship in a different setting?

I would like to include the thoughts of the children in a future study. I would like to know what the children might have been experiencing on that first day of “big kid” school. I would like to include the child’s various preschool environments and backgrounds to develop an idea of where children are developmentally before they enter kindergarten. This information would also be beneficial to teachers and schools, to understand the diversity of the environment.

I would also like to include research for children with special needs. How does the transition experience differ for children and families that may need extra assistance?

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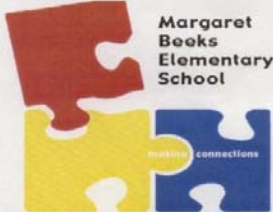
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APPENDIX

Appendix A
Transition activities at Margaret Beeks Elementary School

KINDERGARTEN ORIENTATION 2003

SPECIAL EVENTS FOR NEW KINDERGARTNERS AND THEIR PARENTS!



Margaret Beeks Elementary School
connections

April 7-11 REGISTRATION - Come to the lobby at Beeks between 8:30 and 4:30 on any of these days to register. Bring your child's birth certificate, social security number and documentation of residency. (If you already have a current Virginia physical, bring that, too!)


April 29th 7:00 - 8:00 p.m. Parent Orientation with Beeks Teachers in the KG building at Beeks
(Adults only this time! THANKS!)

May 5 - 8th School visitation and orientation for Kindergartners and their parents. Meet in Room 2 at Beeks at 9:15 a.m. Parents will meet with the principal and school counselor while children visit classrooms THEN parents will rejoin their children for a tour of the school and lunch. Please sign up NOW if you wish to purchase a school lunch on your visitation day.
\$2.25 for adults \$1.50 for children
(Note: YOU signed up to visit on _____, May ____)

August 13 Playground Party at noon (bring a bag lunch and meet and play with other kindergartners and their parents; Parents must attend for children to participate. THANKS!)

August 18 Meet the Teacher Night 4-6:30 p.m. (Open house for ALL Beeks students. Come to find out who YOUR teacher will be! New parent orientation meeting with the Principal 3:30 or 6:30 p.m.)

August 20 School Begins!



For Information Contact
Patti Talbot, Principal
951-5700 or
ptalbot@mail.mcps.org

Appendix B
Approval from Montgomery County Public Schools

Jennifer McCubbins

From: "Kitty Rodgers" <krodgers@mail.mcps.org>
To: "Jennifer McCubbins" <jemccubb@vt.edu>
Cc: <ptalbot@vt.edu>; <dunderwood@mail.mcps.org>
Sent: Tuesday, September 02, 2003 11:46 AM
Subject: Re: copies of letters, etc.

Jennifer:

Thank you for your prompt response to the requested edits to your research plans. By copy of this memo, I am informing Dr. Talbot that we have approved your research study. Additional requirements may be imposed by Dr. Talbot that relate to scheduling interviews or meetings. I enjoyed talking with you last week.

Best of luck,
Kitty Rodgers

Jennifer McCubbins wrote:

> Dr. Rodgers,

>

> Thank you for meeting with me last Friday. I have made the corrections and I
 > am sending the letters to teachers and parents, interview questions to
 > teachers and parents, and the consent form.

>

> Please let me know if you need any other information,

>

> Jen McCubbins

>

>

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9/4/2003

Appendix C
Informational letter to teachers

Dear teachers,

My name is Jen McCubbins. I am a second year masters student at Virginia Tech in child development. I am working on my thesis. The purpose of my study is to explore teacher and parent expectations and concerns for children entering kindergarten. This study will help me and others in the teaching profession gain a better understanding how parents prepare their children for kindergarten and especially, how teachers and parents work together to assist children who are entering kindergarten. Dr. Patti Talbot has mentioned this study to you. She is one of my committee members and has shared interest in this topic.

I would like to conduct this study at Margaret Beeks Elementary School. I wish to invite you to attend an upcoming meeting so I can share the details of the study. If you are interested in participating in the study after attending the meeting, I will interview you in order to gain insight into the expectations and concerns of teachers regarding children entering kindergarten.

The benefits of the study will be to gain understanding of multiple ways to enhance the school-family relationship. I believe this study will provide teachers, parents, and schools additional information regarding the experiences of children entering kindergarten and I anticipate the findings will have a positive influence on these experiences.

Participation in this study is voluntary. I will be audio taping the conversation in order to record complete and accurate responses to interview questions. Audiotapes will be destroyed after data is recorded. I will maintain strict complete confidentiality throughout the study. Consent forms will be signed to ensure confidentiality

For any questions regarding the study, please contact me at 231-6148 or jemccubb@vt.edu. My advisor, Dr. Vickie Fu, is also available for questions at 231-4796 or vfu@vt.edu.

Thank you for your consideration in participating in this study,

Sincerely,

Jennifer McCubbins

Appendix D
Pseudonyms of participants

Teachers

- A. Ms. Emily
- B. Ms. Laura
- C. Ms. Abby

Principal

- D. Ms. Catherine

Parents

- 1. Lisa
- 2. Alli
- 3. Lacey
- 4. Ashley
- 5. Maria
- 6. Tim
- 7. Molly

Appendix E
Letter to parents at Margaret Beeks Elementary School

Dear Parents of the Kindergarten Classrooms,

My name is Jen McCubbins. I am a second year masters student at Virginia Tech in child development. I am working on my thesis. The purpose of my study is to explore teachers' and parents' expectations and concerns for children entering kindergarten. This study will help me and others in the teaching profession gain a better understanding of how parents prepare their children for kindergarten and especially, how teachers and parents work together to assist children who are entering kindergarten.

I would like to conduct this study at Margaret Beeks Elementary School. I wish to invite you to attend an informational meeting so I can share the details of the study. If you are interested in participating in the study after attending the meeting, I will interview you in order to gain insight into the expectations and concerns of parents regarding children entering kindergarten.

The meeting will be held Wednesday, November 12, 2003 at 7pm. We will meet at Room 2 at Margaret Beeks Elementary School.

Participation in this study is voluntary. I will be audio taping the conversation in order to record complete and accurate responses to interview questions. Audiotapes will be destroyed after data is recorded. I will maintain strict complete confidentiality throughout the study. Consent forms will be signed to ensure confidentiality.

The benefits of the study will be to gain understanding of multiple ways to enhance the school-family relationship. I believe the study will provide teachers, parents, and schools additional information regarding the experiences of children entering kindergarten and I anticipate the findings will have an influence on these experiences.

For any questions regarding the study, please contact me at 231-6148 or jemccubb@vt.edu. My advisor, Dr. Vickie Fu, is also available at 231-4796 or vfu@vt.edu.

Thank you for your consideration in participating in this study,

Sincerely,

Jennifer McCubbins

Appendix F
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Informed Consent for Participants in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects

Title: “The Transition to Kindergarten for Parents and Teachers”

Co-Investigators: Jennifer McCubbins, Victoria R. Fu, Ph.D.

I. PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH

The purpose of the proposed qualitative study is to explore teacher and parent expectations and concerns for children entering kindergarten. The study is designed to enhance the child’s transition experience by exploring how parents and teachers prepare children for kindergarten and how teachers and parents can work together to assist children who are entering kindergarten. According to the child development and kindergarten transition literature, the family-school relationship influences how well the child adjusts to school and how much the child benefits from school. Research has shown that teachers and parents have conflicting views regarding adequate preparation for a child entering kindergarten. One of the strongest arguments is the debate of whether kindergarten is viewed as a place to learn academic skills or a place to acquire social skills. The child is the central figure in the transition to kindergarten, but the adjustment to kindergarten is influenced by the teachers’ and parents’ perceptions of what skills children need for early school success. The most important aspect of the transition process to focus on is the relationships between child and teacher, parents and teacher, child and peers, and child and parent

II. PROCEDURES

The study participants will be the participating parents and teachers of the kindergarten classes at Montgomery County Public Schools.

Teachers: A letter will be addressed to the teachers, extending an invitation to learn the details about the study. After explaining the details of the study, I will ask those that are interested in participating in the study for their consent to participate in the study. The teachers will receive a copy of the interview questions. The teachers will receive a copy of the Informed Consent Form to fill out, sign, and return to me if they decide to participate in the study. I will give the teachers a photocopy of their completed consent form. The participating teachers will be interviewed at the beginning of the school year. The interview questions will be conducted in a semi-structured environment, with questions regarding their expectations and concerns for children entering kindergarten. The interviews will last no longer than one hour, on a day and time decided by the investigator and the participant.

Parents: I will contact parents who expressed interest in the study. After explaining the details of the study, I will ask those that are interested in participating in the study for their consent to participate in the study. The parents will receive a copy of the interview questions. The parents will receive a copy of the Informed Consent Form to fill out, sign, and return to me if they decide to participate in the study. I will give the parents a photocopy of their completed consent form. The participating parents will be interviewed

individually. The interview questions will be conducted in a semi-structured environment, with questions and opportunities to address their expectations and concerns for children entering kindergarten. The interviews will last no longer than one hour, on a day and time decided by the investigator and the participant.

I will be audio taping the interview sessions in order to record complete and accurate responses to interview questions. Audiotapes will be destroyed after data is recorded. I will use pseudonyms to replace the actual names of teacher and parent participants.

III. RISKS

Minimal risk exists for all participants.

IV. BENEFITS TO THIS PROJECT

The benefits of the study will be to gain understanding of multiple ways to enhance and strengthen the school-family relationship. I believe this study will provide teachers, parents, and schools with additional information regarding the experiences of children entering kindergarten. The study is designed to enhance the school-family relationship and come to an understanding and agreement for child expectations and concerns for future schooling. The study is to increase communication between the teachers and parents, especially communicating the expectations from both parents and teachers to enhance the kindergarten transition.

V. EXTENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONIMITY

The names of the school, teachers, and parents will be kept confidential. Any information reported in the final written report will use pseudonyms rather than the names of specific participants. Pseudonyms will be used for teachers and parents. Only the investigators (McCubbins and Fu) will have access to the actual original data. The interview tapes will be stored in a locked cabinet under my supervision. All interview tapes will be destroyed one year after the completion of the study.

VI. COMPENSATION

There is no compensation for participation in the study. The findings of the study will be to improve communication between parents and teachers in future classrooms. A copy of the final results will be available for the participants.

VII. FREEDOM TO WITHDRAW

Participation in this study is strictly voluntary and participants may withdraw at any time and refuse to answer any question without penalty.

VIII. APPROVAL OF RESEARCH

This research project has been approved, as required, by the Institutional Review Board for Research Involving Human Subjects at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, by the Department of Human Development and Montgomery County School System.

IX. SUBJECT'S RESPONSIBILITIES

Upon signing this form below, I agree to participate in this study.

X. SUBJECT'S PERMISSION

I have read and understand my responsibilities according to the informed consent form. All of my questions thus far have been answered. I know I will receive a copy of this form. I understand that conversations may be audio taped and that the tapes will be destroyed. I agree to participate in this project and understand that I may decline to answer any questions or to be audio taped at any time. I am also aware that I may withdraw my participation in the study at any time without penalty.

 Subject Signature

 Date

Should I have any questions about the research or the conduct of the research, I may contact the following persons at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University:

Jennifer McCubbins, Investigator

Phone: (540) 231-6148
 Email: jemccubb@vt.edu

Victoria Fu, Ph.D., Faculty Advisor

Phone: (540) 231-4796
 Email: vfu@vt.edu

Joyce Arditti, Ph.D., Departmental Reviewer

Phone: (540) 231-5758
 Email: arditti@vt.edu

David M. Moore, Ph.D., Chair, Virginia Tech
 Institutional Review Board for the Protection
 of Human Subjects
 Office of Research Compliance – CVM Phase II (0442)
 Research Division

Phone: (540) 231-4991
 Email: moored@vt.edu

Appendix G
Interview questions for educational participants – First session

How do you know that a child is ready for kindergarten?

What are common concerns regarding children entering kindergarten?

Do you assist in the planning of the preparation activities?

Did you participate in any type of preparation activities? Describe the activities.

What was the most useful experience for the children before entering kindergarten?
Why?

What was the least useful experience for the children before entering kindergarten? Why?

What was the most useful experience the school provided for the children before entering kindergarten? Why?

What was the least useful experience the school provided for the children before entering kindergarten? Why?

What do you think the parents should be doing to help the children entering kindergarten?

What is the kindergarten philosophy at Margaret Beeks Elementary School?

What is your individual philosophy for teaching kindergarten?

Appendix H
Interview questions for parent participants

At home:

What does it mean to be ready for kindergarten?

What concerns did you have regarding your child entering kindergarten?

What were your expectations for your child for kindergarten?

Did you talk to your child about going to kindergarten? If so, what topics did you discuss with your child about entering kindergarten?

Did you do any type of activity to help your child prepare for kindergarten? Describe the activities.

How did you think these activities helped prepare your child for kindergarten? Most useful? Least useful?

Child's school:

Did your child's school have any sort of transition activities available for the families, what were some of those activities?

If school provided activities - What was the most useful experience the school provided for your child before entering kindergarten? Why?

What was the least useful experience the school provided for your child before entering kindergarten? Why?

Would you change any of the experiences or your level of participation?

What did you think teachers at your child's elementary school could have done to help your child transition to kindergarten?

Were there any other activities you would have liked to have seen offered by the school to families to prepare children for kindergarten?

Do you think the school-family relationship is important? Why?

What makes a successful parent-teacher relationship?

How do you establish a parent-teacher relationship?

What is your personal definition of collaboration among the school and families?

Do you have any suggestions on how the school and families can work together?

Appendix I
Interview questions for educational participants – Second session

Are there other activities you would like to see offered (by the school) to families to prepare children for kindergarten?

Looking back to the activities the school provided for the children entering kindergarten, do you feel the activities reflected your own teaching philosophy? How?

Do you feel parent/teacher relationships are important? Why?

In your opinion, what makes a successful parent-teacher relationship?

How do you establish a parent-teacher relationship?

What do you do to encourage the parent/teacher relationship?

When children transition to kindergarten – do you feel the parent-teacher relationship is enhanced in any way? How?

What is your personal definition of collaboration among schools and families?

Do you have any suggestions for how the school can assist the teachers when working together with families?

Appendix J
VAECE Focus Group Questions

In your opinion, what does it mean to be ready for kindergarten?

What are some of your concerns for children entering kindergarten?

What can parents do to help children enter kindergarten? (i.e. activities at home, etc.)

What can the schools provide for the families before entering kindergarten?

In your opinion, what makes a successful parent-teacher relationship?

How do you establish a parent-teacher relationship?

What do you do to encourage the parent/teacher relationship?

What is your personal definition of collaboration among schools and families?

Do you have any suggestions on how the school and families can work together?

My Personal Reflections

“The biggest reward for a person’s toil is not what they get for it, but what they become by it” (John Rushkin)

I selected this area of research because I wanted to understand the anxiety expressed to me by parents, asking me if I thought their children were ready for kindergarten. I wanted to be able to offer suggestions to parents when they asked me about their child transitioning into kindergarten. I wanted to know what “being ready” means to the parents and I wanted to have an understanding of what teachers were expecting from the entering children. I wanted to look deeper into the communication between schools and families and develop a sense of its role in their relationship. I wanted to make these opinions, suggestions, and information available to interested parties, including parents, teachers, and administrators. I believe through my research and data collection, I have provided a source for those interested in the transition into kindergarten experience. I have valued this experience, designing my own ideas based on an area of passion for myself, an area that is meaningful to me.

As I conclude this experience, I think back to my opening remarks about having passion for an area. Many months later, I find myself still writing my thoughts on children transitioning into kindergarten as a new class of children are beginning the experience, and with those children are their families that will venture on this journey with them, filled with their own experiences, expectations, concerns, and ideas. Waiting for these children and their families are the teachers at various schools, offering different expectations, outlooks, activities, and teaching styles. While each participant on this

journey is an individual, they all strive for a successful transition into kindergarten and encourage communication as the key component for success.

In my own experience in the classroom setting, I have found somewhat of a resistance to these findings. The parents I have shared information with still find it difficult to believe that teachers consider social skills as being more of readiness characteristics for kindergarten. They still express their anxiety over their children being academically ready and how they will be compared to other children. From the interviews, Ms. Catherine comments that “the children will be learning appropriate academic skills through kindergarten, but most children are coming into kindergarten being prepared for first grade academic expectations”. The teachers are spending the first few months of kindergarten helping the children learn appropriate social behaviors for the school and classroom environment.

This research has given me an opportunity to study my own efforts at relationships. I can easily understand the importance of trust and respect when building and developing a relationship between a parent and a teacher and its influence on future discussions and situations. I do not question the value of supportive parents in a school and the parent-teacher relationship. Schools also need to support the views and values of the teachers and the parents, so neither will feel resentful and undervalued in their environments.

As I begin my final paragraph of this thesis, I think back to the beginning stages of this process and the parents who knew they could ask their questions. They knew they could ask me my opinion because they respected who I was as their child’s teacher and felt comfortable that I would be able to help them through the next step of their child’s

development. Throughout this experience, it is clear the relationship between a child's teacher and a child's parent is seen as the key to a child's successful transition. This relationship is thick with communication and respect for the position the other has in the child's life. However, I have learned that relationships take time to foster and respect has to be earned. I ask the readers of this thesis to remember this if they begin implementing these ideas into their own homes, classrooms, schools, and experiences. I leave the reader with a final thought of this experience – “one of the essentials of a successful life is to be able to walk away from an experience, shut the gate behind you, and go on to something else” (Allen & Biggs, 1989, p. 9). Thank you.

Jennifer McCubbins
 902 South Main Street, Apt. A
 Blacksburg, VA 24060
 jlmccubbins@yahoo.com

Education:

May 2004 – M.S. in Human Development, concentration in Child Development, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Blacksburg, Virginia.

- Master thesis - *Transition into Kindergarten: A Collaboration of Family and Educational Perspectives*

May 2001 - B.A. in Psychology, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

1997-1999 – University of North Carolina at Wilmington

Professional Experiences:

August 2002 – May 2004:

Graduate Teaching Assistant and head teacher of preschool class at Virginia Tech Child Development Laboratory School, Blacksburg, Virginia. Responsibilities included:

- teaching a classroom of 16 children aged 3-5 years old
- designing and implementing a negotiated, inquiry-based curriculum based on social constructivist theory
- supervising 7-9 student teachers

May 2003 – July 2003:

Child care provider at Children's Friends Learning Center, High Point, North Carolina.

Responsibilities included:

- leading a classroom of 10 children aged 3-4 years old
- following curriculum designed by lead teacher

December 2001- June 2002:

Assistant teacher with behavioral and emotionally delayed students in the Guilford County School System, Greensboro, North Carolina. Responsibilities included:

- assisting students with class work
- answering questions and offering explanations as necessary

June – August 2001 and 2002:

Full time childcare provider for family in Durham, North Carolina.

- Complete daily responsibilities for two girls, aged 9 and 11
- arranging activities and transportation for the girls
- became an active, positive mentor for the girls

June 2000 – December 2000:

Habilitation Technician - Keston Care, Inc. Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Responsibilities included:

- working with developmentally disabled children and adolescents, especially those with autism
- assisted children with life skill goal sheets
- assisted in preparation for adolescent transition into group homes

January 2000 – May 2000:

Teacher's aid/volunteer in the Children's Psychiatric Institute at John Umstead State Hospital, Butner, North Carolina.

- worked on a one-on-one basis with institutionalized children ages 6 - 12

Volunteer - John Umstead State Hospital Alcohol and Drug Abuse Treatment Center.

- worked in group sessions and on a one-on-one basis with women to assist them in building their self-esteem through the 12-Step Program and follow-up discussions

Professional Conferences:

March 2004:

Presenter at Virginia Association for Early Childhood Education Annual Conference, Roanoke, VA

- presentation titled *A Collaborative Conversation: A Dialogue among Teachers, Parents, and Administrators on Issues Related to Children Transitioning to Kindergarten*, an focus group discussing expectations for children entering kindergarten

November 2003:

Attended National Association for the Education of Young Children Annual Conference, Chicago, IL

March 2003:

Co-presenter at Virginia Association for Early Childhood Education Annual Conference, Richmond, VA

- presentation titled *Documentation Tools to Enhance and Extend Curriculum* demonstrating methods used to reflect upon, enhance, and extend curriculum in classrooms

Membership in Professional Organizations:

National Association for the Education of Young Children

Kappa Omicron Nu