

## **Chapter One: Introduction**

### **Statement of the Problem**

In the growing body of research in early childhood education, studies suggest one of the keys to the emotional, social, and intellectual development of a child is a positive relationship between home and school (Adams, 1997). For this reason, implementing an effective home-school partnership is often underscored in the literature (Fine, 1990). However, the literature mainly includes information about the barriers of communication between parents and teachers and the formal methods for moving around these blockages. Specifically, there is a lack of detail about how communication between parents and teachers during transition times at school can help both parties develop and strengthen their relationship (e.g., Adams, 1997; Pugh, 1985). Although some literature discusses these transition time conversations, there is a need to further study the nature and content of this type of communication.

Both parents and teachers agree that all types of communication are important to building a relationship that provides the best support for the child (Endsley & Minish, 1991). The formal types of communication are usually well established in the preschool environment through strategies such as newsletters, parent conferences, curriculum events, portfolios, and home visits. However, parents and teachers also communicate informally to exchange information about children's activities, health, and needs. It is during these informal transition time conversations, such as when the child arrives or departs, that the parent and teacher have a chance to share pertinent news and develop a relationship.

There are several reasons to use communication as a key to form partnerships between parents and teachers. According to both parents and teachers in one study, the best development of the child can be provided for with frequent conversations between home and school (Gareau & Sawatzky, 1995). Research shows when parents and teachers talk, the child more easily gains continuity between the two discontinuous environments of home and school (Powell, 1989). It is also through transition time conversations that parents and teachers can overcome the barriers that they may have felt and develop an emotional openness capable of building a partnership that works for the child.

### **Purpose of Study**

The purpose of the study was to explore what happens in parent-teacher conversations during transition time in preschool. Research was needed in this area since, although literature discusses formal communication between parents and teachers, little practical information exists regarding how informal communication impacts the home-school relationship. This study investigated the ways in which such informal conversations can lead to important exchanges of information between parents and me. It also explored the ways in which communication tools enhanced these parent-teacher interactions. Finally, I examined how transition time conversations

influence the development of relationships and formation of emotional bonds between parents and me.

### Theoretical Framework Guiding the Study

The framework that guides this study is based on concepts found in Bronfenbrenner's ecological approach (1979), Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978), and Developmentally Appropriate Practice from the National Association of the Education of Young Children (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). These constructs provide insight on why the formation of relationships between parents and teachers benefits the child's development.

The ecological approach recognizes that each individual's experiences are embedded within a set of systems. These systems include the microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, and macrosystems. They are likened to that of wooden Russian dolls, where each doll fits into another doll, and that doll fits into yet another doll. The two systems that most influence this study are the microsystem and mesosystem. Microsystems, the most immediate environments that a child participates in on a daily basis, are connected to one another by mesosystems. For example, since home and school are two microsystems in which a child participates, the relationship between these two systems is called a home-school mesosystem. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory states that connections and knowledge between the groups in a mesosystem create opportunities for a child's healthy development.

According to Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978), an individual develops through interactions in environments, such as the home and school. They also grow through relationships in these environments when they support and guide one another's understanding. A parent and teacher may have such a partnership. This theory assumes that the development of this relationship with others in society produces greater cognitive development and understanding than an individual who works alone (Rogoff, 1990). It can be assumed from Vygotsky's (1978) theory that teachers and parents who share thoughts and ideas in a mutually respectful partnership, they learn from each other about issues that affect the child's development.

Developmentally Appropriate Practice (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997), Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Approach (1979) and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978) value the idea that collaboration between parents and teachers positively impacts the overall development of the child. National guidelines of Developmentally Appropriate Practice (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) provide information teachers can use in planning and teaching that contribute favorably to the development of the child. These guidelines, based on knowledge of child development, cultural diversity, and best practice, assist teachers to better understand behaviors and developmental expectations appropriate to a child of a certain age. In addition, the guidelines recognize that a child's education is enhanced when teachers work effectively with the parents. Schools, operating on the principles of Developmentally Appropriate Practice, such as those found in Reggio Emilia,

Italy, consider parents as integral components to young children's education. These schools advocate collaboration between parents and teachers in order to facilitate the child's best development.

#### Definitions of Concepts Guiding this Study

For this study, I investigated the nature and content of transition time communication between parents and teachers. A brief definition of each term follows.

Communication is when parents and teachers informally or formally share information about a child.

Transition time communication is informal conversations between parents and teachers during arrival and departure of the child.

#### Research Questions

After reviewing the relevant literature, I formulated two research questions:

1. What communication occurs between parents and teachers during transition times?
2. What is the nature and content of these conversations between parents and teachers?

#### Overview and Limitations of Study

An ethnographic study was the method employed for this research. As the teacher of the three-year old class at the Virginia Tech Child Development Lab School, I was a participant observer of the transition time conversations that occurred between parents and me in this preschool setting. My interactions with the parents were recorded through the use of observations, reflections, and interpretations about this type of communication in the Virginia Tech Child Development Lab School. The field notes, which were kept strictly confidential, were coded into common themes for analysis. The findings and reflections chapter was written regarding these themes found in the field notes.

Two limitations surfaced during the course of this study. Only the parents (father and mother) of the three-year old class at the Virginia Tech Child Development Lab School were included in the study. It was also limited to exploring nature and content of transition time communication between me and the parents over a semester.

## **Chapter Two: Literature Review**

### Overview

Optimal child development requires positive home-school relations. These relations provide security, comfort, and growth for the child in the school environment. Research emphasizes the importance of close, ongoing contact between parents and teachers, but little practical advice is given on how to ensure effective communication during transition times in preschool (e.g., Adams, 1997; Pugh, 1985). Furthermore, the literature rarely includes specific details regarding what occurs during these conversations between parents and teachers. For these reasons, it seems important to focus on this area and explore ways to build parent-teacher relationships during transition time.

This chapter discusses concepts from Bronfenbrenner's ecological approach (1979), Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978), and Developmentally Appropriate Practice (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) that support this study. It also includes information in the literature that pertains to exploring communication between parents and teachers in preschool. Finally, chapter two provides reasons a case study was chosen for this research.

### Theoretical Frameworks Guiding the Study

Bronfenbrenner's ecological approach (1979), Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978), and Developmentally Appropriate Practice from the National Association of the Education of Young Children (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) are the frameworks that guide this study. A brief discussion of these three theoretical models follows.

The ecological approach focuses on the individual surrounded in a system of environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The microsystems, the most immediate environments in which a child participates, are connected to one another by mesosystems. Home and school, two microsystems, have a relationship called a mesosystem. A positive connection between adults within this mesosystem can yield benefits for the child. The sociocultural theory also focuses on the individual in relation to the social systems in which she participates. Vygotsky (1978) states individuals develop through interactions in society. Thus, a child develops through her interactions and other people's interactions in both the home and school environments. Developmentally Appropriate Practice provides national guidelines of the behaviors and developmental expectations appropriate of a child of a certain age. These guidelines assist teachers to implement programs that contribute to the favorable development of the child by including the family in decisions and curriculum (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). In conclusion, these three constructs assert the idea that positive home-school relationships contribute favorably to the overall development of the child. They also indicate that home-school connections provide a supportive environment for the child to develop socially, emotionally, physiologically, and physically.

### Critique of Research Related to the Theoretical Framework

## The Ecological Approach

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological approach focuses on ways the active forces of social experience in an individual's environment shapes his development. Some examples of such forces are the immediate family, home, school, and government. The ecological model includes the individual, microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, and macrosystems. The individual, who is the center of the ecological system, brings into the environment characteristics such as temperament, age, abilities, and physical attributes (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Microsystems, the primary environments that surround an individual in the ecological system, are environments a child participates in every day (Peters & Kontos, 1987). For example, a child participates daily in the two environments of home and school. Microsystems have relationships with each other called mesosystems. The exosystems surrounds the mesosystems, microsystems, and individual. The exosystem includes environments that have an effect on the child even though she is not directly involved in the environments (Garbarino & Abramowitz, 1992). For example, a mother who works in a controlled environment may expect the child to conform at home. The largest system, the macrosystems, surround all the other systems. The macrosystems include the institutional patterns and ideologies of a particular culture (Garbarino & Abramowitz, 1992). For example, a federal government decision to cut funding to each state's education budget would affect the child who lives in the ecological system. Overall, each system affects the child since all systems surround her as she develops in society.

Although all systems in the ecological model affect a child's development, this study focuses on the home microsystem, school microsystem, and the home-school mesosystem. Mesosystems involve the relationship between two or more of the microsystems in which an individual interacts (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). This relationship exists because interactions in one environment affect interactions in another environment. For example, if a child did not have enough food to eat for breakfast and is hungry, performance at school and interactions with teachers and peers can be affected. Such an interaction occurs within the home-school mesosystem. For the home microsystem and school microsystem to function effectively together as a mesosystem, it requires joint participation and communication, from one setting to the other setting (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Quality mesosystems maintain connectedness between the two or more microsystems involved. In order for mesosystems to provide a nurturing environment for a child's development, connectedness between home and school microsystems must occur. Multisetting participation and intersetting knowledge are two forms of connectedness. The first of these, multisetting participation, is the most basic form of engagement that occurs when a person participates in activities at two unconnected places (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). However, if the only link for a child between home and school is that he participates in both, the quality of the relationship may be

considered poor (Garbarino & Abramowitz, 1992). A poor relationship can impair a child's development; whereas, the development of intersetting knowledge may enhance the child's growth.

The second form of connectedness, what Bronfenbrenner (1979) terms intersetting knowledge, occurs when experiences in one setting can be related to experiences in the other. Because home and school are the two most influential microsystems for a child (Fine, 1990), educators and parents need to establish linkage between the two through intersetting knowledge. One way parents and teachers can aid children to develop intersetting knowledge is through transitional objects. For example, the beanie baby brought from home comforts a child throughout the school day. School artwork displayed on the refrigerator at home also develops a connection between the two environments.

Optimum child development encourages linkages between parents and teachers with two-way communication since both of them contribute to the exchange of important information. Supportive communication develops when a parent notifies me about the care a child's recovering surgical procedure needs at school. Supportive communication also occurs when I inform the parent what activities the child has been participating in throughout the school day.

Despite different beliefs and attitudes, communication between parents and teachers cultivates the intersetting knowledge needed for a child's best development. A child needs the different environments of both home and school in order to grow and change in society within the larger ecological system (Peters & Kontos, 1987). If home and school always completely agreed, it would project the image of an authoritarian unchanging society in which children must conform to all preset rules (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1978). An authoritarian society allows a child little influence and control in the environment in which she lives. Instead, children develop from the models of both parents and teachers who work together to exert change in a social situation. For example, a child observes a parent who provides information to the teacher about a certain object he needs in order to sleep at nap time. Then, a child learns respectful communication between members of different microsystems promotes positive experiences for him.

### Sociocultural theory

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978) complements the ecological approach since it advocates that development of an individual in society involves participation in different environments. The individual can not be understood in isolation since development occurs through the context of social interaction (Rogoff, 1990). Social interaction between a novice and expert, called an apprenticeship, leads both parties to discover new skills and understanding (Rogoff, 1990). Vygotsky's (1978) notion of an apprenticeship involves scaffolding through which a more competent member of society guides a novice to understanding. Since the novice and expert are peers, they can easily switch roles depending on which partner knows more about the subject.

Therefore, parents and teachers solve problems together as individuals who support and challenge one another to the greatest cognitive understanding. This relationship produces optimal results when mutual respect and guided participation with one another occurs (Rogoff, 1990).

The novice and expert respect and learn from one another through intersubjectivity in an equal partnership. Intersubjectivity demands shared thinking and understanding to joint problem solve (Rogoff, 1990). Shared thinking, the involvement with another's thought, allows for the discussion of different opinions, ideas, and perspectives (Stremmel & Fu, 1993). This type of thinking, which produces joint problem solving, achieves higher comprehension and productivity than a person could individually (Rogoff, 1990). Therefore, collaboration for the best interests of the child is more productive than either parents or teachers working alone. As a result, the parents and teachers, as peers, construct meaning together (Jaramillo, 1996).

The construction of meaning through shared thinking occurs more readily if each person's ideas are valued equally (Rogoff, 1990). Parents and teachers may find it easiest to work together when they honor each other's views as important contributions towards developing a partnership. In order to achieve higher productivity and comprehension in this partnership, individuals must use the tools provided in society to construct cognitive development and change (Vygotsky, 1978). A tool, such as language, is essential for the functioning of an individual in society. Language serves as a bridge to understand and solve problems cooperatively (Rogoff, 1990). Therefore, communication is the key to forming connections between parents and teachers in order to provide developmentally appropriate experiences for children.

#### Developmentally Appropriate Practice

Bronfenbrenner's ecological approach (1979) and Vygotsky's sociocultural theory (1978) are two constructs that guide Developmentally Appropriate Practice. Developmentally Appropriate Practice assumes that teachers and parents who work together provide connectedness and continuity for the child in the home-school mesosystem. These guidelines suggest that when microsystems work together, they are capable of higher productivity than if they work alone (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). It also states that quality services for the best interest of the children requires working effectively with parents. A positive relationship between parents and teachers better meets a child's developmental and educational needs (Powell, 1993).

The National Association for Early Childhood Education states that the implementation of a family centered approach benefits children and families in the following ways (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). First, family focused early childhood education nurtures a child's emotional, intellectual, and physical development. Second, a child obtains security and a healthy self-esteem when both parents and teachers communicate about the educational and emotional needs of the child. In response, a child with healthy self-esteem exhibits appropriate behaviors and develops friendships at school. Finally, the home and school can develop a favorable relationship when

communication occurs in a mutually respectful manner (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). This respectful communication between parents and teachers allows for the negotiation of educational decisions and goals for each child.

Developmentally Appropriate Practice means that teachers must know each child well in order to provide the best education for him (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Each child is unique and understood through recognizing the role of family, culture, and society in his life. In order to fully understand each child, who develops in the family and community at large, a teacher must learn about the activities of a child outside of the classroom in other microsystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1978; Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). A parent can communicate a child's experiences outside of school that affect development. For example, a parent may inform me her child is sad because he has not seen his father in several days. In turn, I can communicate to the parent at the end of the day about an activity, such as drawing a picture for his father, that helped the child overcome the sadness.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model, Vygotsky's (1978) theory, and Developmentally Appropriate Practice (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) agree that the developmental potential of a child is enhanced through positive interactions between parents and teachers. The maintenance of close ties between home and school benefits a child's cognitive and social-emotional growth (Garbarino & Abramowitz, 1992). For this reason, parents and teachers must communicate in order to make joint decisions in the best interest of the child.

#### Critique of Selected Literature

##### Home-School Relationships

This section explores the literature found regarding home-school relationships. It discusses home-school continuity and discontinuity, barriers to forming partnerships between parents and teachers, and parent-teacher communication. In the area on communication, I specifically look at the limited studies available on transition time conversations. All of the above topics provide information that support this research.

The home and school environments impact all areas of a child's development. Parents, the most influential people on a child's developing self-esteem, help a child develop basic attitudes, values, morals and concepts of identity (Sutherland, 1991). Schools also influence a child's growth by promoting the development of responsibility and self-regulation. They provide the social arena in which children participate and learn to become competent members of society (Comer & Haynes, 1991). A child learns to work cooperatively with peers and adults in the school environment, which fosters learning and enhances the child's development. In addition, Lawrence-Light (1978) states a child's growth in society is enriched when parents and teachers communicate and form a mutually respectful home-school relationship. Such a relationship allows for both the parents and school to work together for common goals and decisions made in the



child's best interest (Gareau & Sawatzky, 1995). In order to be partners, both teachers and parents have equal responsibility for maintaining a good relationship by communicating on a consistent basis and respecting each other's views (Coleman, 1997). Thus, communication is one of the keys to forming a positive partnership that enhances a child's experiences at home and school to foster continued development and learning.

#### Home and School Continuity and Discontinuity

Discontinuity occurs when characteristics of one environment change in the next environment (Silvern, 1988). Discontinuities exist between home and school because of different ways to regulate behavior, show affection, and discuss concerns in each place. Home and school may appear discontinuous as two different worlds for the child (Gareau & Sawatzky, 1995; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1978). A child, who is three or four years of age, sees only one perspective and can experience difficulty with the separation of behaviors and routines at home and school (Silvern, 1988). The adaptation to a new set of behaviors and expectations in a new environment requires sensitivity and patience from both teachers and parents. However, the child develops as she adapts to both the continuous and discontinuous experiences in a setting.

Continuities and discontinuities are not a dichotomy of either good or bad. Instead, parents and teachers can evaluate the experience in relation to the particular environment in which the continuity or discontinuity exists (Silvern, 1988). A child may reap developmental benefits from discontinuities as long as the opportunities outweigh the risks (Peters & Kontos, 1987). For example, circle time, or a large group meeting, is a part of the daily activities at preschool. During this circle, the children and teacher may dance, sing, read a book, and discuss current classroom projects. Through this experience, the children develop friendships, listening skills, language skills, and knowledge of class activities. Such a school experience, whether continuous or discontinuous with home, offers opportunities for children to grow and change with developmentally appropriate activities.

In some situations, discontinuities between home and school cause stress for children. In order to reduce the stress, parents and teachers can communicate to minimize the differences between the home microsystem and the school microsystem (Powell, 1989). For example, one child, whose culture expects complete privacy in the bathroom, was alarmed when she saw the preschool with six toilets and one large open door. This situation could have created a discontinuity for her that produced stress. However, communication between the parents and me assisted us in designing an alternate arrangement agreeable to each of us. The child was able to use the teacher's bathroom. As shown in the example above, communication can connect the two worlds for the child and may reduce stress from discontinuities. Research by Gareau & Sawatzky (1995) also noted this same idea. Interviewed teachers and parents agreed communication was essential to the connection between the two worlds of home and school for the child.

Imaginary or real boundaries of parents and teachers exist to separate the two environments of home and school (Coleman & Churchill, 1997). In order to form a continuous environment for children, adults must communicate with one another to negotiate the boundaries. This communication between parents and teachers can resolve the conflicts that arise for children because of different opinions and expectations from different settings. Communication also aids a child's adaptation to a continually changing, non-authoritarian society (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1978). In conclusion, the communication between parents and teachers used to reduce discontinuities enables children to discover about themselves and the world around them. \_

#### Barriers to Developing Home-School Partnerships

A home-school partnership requires effort from both parents and teachers (Greenburg, 1989). A lack of experience for both teachers and parents causes difficulty in collaboration (Edwards, Gandini, & Forman, 1993). In addition, parents and schools may have different perceptions and attitudes that interfere with the development of a home-school collaboration.

Schools can inhibit the collaboration in several ways. For example, some teachers have little interest in each child's cultural history and background (Fine, 1990). School officials may seem unapproachable for various reasons. Educators may believe that parent involvement is intrusive or that parents and teachers are unable to work together collaboratively (Fine, 1990). Furthermore, teachers may be unsure how to best implement a home-school partnership.

If teachers have not had training in home-school relations, they may not know how to work with families (Pugh, 1985). Teacher education programs at colleges and universities do not always provide students with information and skills to work with parents of various personalities (Greenburg, 1989). Teachers, who were surveyed, revealed that they wanted training sessions to assist them in the establishment of good parent-teacher relations (Laloumi-Vidali, 1997). This willingness to participate in training indicates these teachers understand the importance of positive relationships with parents. These training sessions would be beneficial since teachers who are confident of their ability to communicate with parents foster good home-school relationships more easily than teachers who lack confidence (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1978).

Parents may perceive barriers to home-school partnerships in the following ways. Some families may feel unwelcome to participate in school activities because parents and teachers did not work together when they were the child in school (Lawrence-Lightfoot, 1978). Parents may value the home and school as separate and have no interest in becoming involved with the school (Fine, 1990). Some parents are not mentally or emotionally ready to become involved in the issues of the school because of time and energy constraints (Fine, 1990). Russell (1991) surveyed parents who also stated lack of time and commitment to other activities decreased their involvement in the school environment. Thus, full-time working parents may not feel they have the time to devote to the home-school relationship.

Both parents and teachers may be unsure of their roles in the school environment. Sharpe's (1991) research found that miscommunication occurs when there was a conflict in roles. Such a conflict occurred when parents were anxious that the children be adequately prepared for elementary school. The teachers, who believed they adequately prepared the children, did not want parental input on this matter (Sharpe, 1991). These conflicts led parents and teachers to agree they needed a home program, better communication, and an organized involvement policy.

Since the barriers discussed in the previous paragraphs may exist when home and school work together, the following provides information to assist parents and teachers to conquer them. Developmentally Appropriate Practice advocates that teachers purposely focus on making parents feel welcome in the school in ways that accommodate their needs and individual schedules (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). In response, parents have to devote some time and energy into the establishment of a partnership. Positive home-school relations will require both parents and teachers to respect one another's opinions. Furthermore, effective communication between home and school is the key to forming respect for one another and overcoming barriers. Thus, respectful communication can assist parents and teachers to discuss educational goals and decisions for the child's best development.

#### Parent-Teacher Communication

Communication is an essential tool for the development of positive home-school relationships. Developmentally Appropriate Practice emphasizes the notion that partnerships requires the maintenance of regular two-way communication between parents and teachers (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Accordingly, many teachers revealed on an open-ended survey that the communication process with parents is more of an equal partnership instead of a one-way street (Bruneau, et al., 1995). In addition, research indicates that teachers and parents must be honest and sincere when communicating with one another (e.g. Gelfer, 1991). Since communicating with parents is not a responsibility separate from young children's education (Pugh, 1985), the extra energy teachers utilize to communicate effectively is used towards the improvement of the children's education.

Children learn best when home and school environments share information (Bruneau, et al., 1995). However, individual's different perceptions of communication make it difficult to convey ideas. (Pugh, 1985). Endsley, Minish, & Zhou's (1993) study revealed parents and teachers experienced different perceptions of communication. Still, families and schools may have different perceptions of the use of language (Silvern, 1988). Since, families have certain ways to communicate emotions and needs with one another, it may take time for teachers and parents to become comfortable understanding each other's use of language. Overall, when teachers and parents accept that each person may have various perceptions of how to share information, quality communication develops.

Parents and teachers can exchange information formally or informally. Pryor & Church (1995) grouped this communication into two categories: (1) general information about school policy, curriculum, or events and (2) information about a specific child. Teachers can talk about these topics using formal communication. Home visits, parent meetings, and conferences help a teacher to express care and concern for each individual child to the parents. In addition, newsletters, panel boards, daily logs of activities, and a child's portfolio, are formal written documentation used as a means through which parents and teachers may communicate and plan for a child.

Reggio Emilia schools, in Italy, are an example of the successful implementation of formal communication between parents and teachers. These schools put the parent-teacher relationship at the center of the curriculum. Parents are invited to participate in school activities in ways that best suit them (Gandini, 1997). For example, parents may serve on the advisory committee, planning and making decisions about the curriculum. In Reggio Emilia schools, parents and teachers attend meetings during which they address important issues such as schedules, special events, and general concerns. These schools also advocate how important it is for teachers to display visual written documentation such as panel boards (New, 1997). Written documentation provides parents with information about the children's learning experiences at school as well as encourages parents to have input on these experiences. This formal documentation provides a basis for conversations with the parents about the curriculum. Such conversations can occur at informal transition times.

Informal communication occurs at transition times such as arrival and departure of the child (Leavitt, 1995). This type of communication usually consists of short conversations between the parent and teacher. Since knowledge shared between parents and teachers facilitates a child's growth, development, and learning (Gelfer, 1991), teachers can use these informal transition time conversations to help meet a child's needs at home and school.

There have been several studies on transition time communication. One such study revealed that over two-thirds of the parents held a conversation with a teacher (Endsley & Minish, 1991). However, the conversations generally lasted from only ten to thirty seconds and included routine details, greetings, and small talk. Yet, another study found that, on average, teachers talked to 6.61 parents for 50 seconds each during transition time (Smith & Hubbard, 1988). Fifty seconds is sometimes too short to address issues that concern both a parent and me during arrival and departure time. Since this type of communication provides information needed for effective care of the child, parents and teachers may need to place an emphasis on developing relationships through meaningful discussions at transition times.

Some research exists that concerns the content of transition time conversations between parents and teachers. Smith & Hubbard's (1988) study discovered that parents and teachers only

rarely discussed substantive issues concerning family or center matters. However, little discrepancy was found in the statements of both parents and teachers regarding the topics of their transition time conversations. This research suggests that both parties remember the general idea of what they discussed. The interviews and questionnaires uncovered that these conversations were most likely to include the child's activities, problems, or center policy, and were least likely to include adult problems. Still, Powell's (1978) research found that increases in parent-teacher interaction increases the diversity of transition time discussions. Therefore, research in the future may want to explore the best ways to extend interactions in order to enhance the content of parent-teacher conversations.

Several studies grouped the content of transition time conversations into categories. Winkelstein's (1981) three categories of conversation are: social communication-verbal greetings, informational communication, and decision-making communication. Decision-making conversations involved teachers and parents determining what was appropriate or desired goals for the children at the center. Smith and Hubbard (1988) grouped conversations into three categories, although, two of them were similar to those in the previous study. These categories are: greetings/farewells, information, and casual conversation. The category that was different from the first study, casual conversation, included weather, clothes, and television programs. Overall, both studies found the most prevalent type of conversation during transition times was greetings.

Both Winkelstein's (1981) and Smith & Hubbard's (1988) studies provoke some thought regarding whether short greetings/farewells help form positive communication patterns between parents and teachers. In Winkelstein's (1981) research, teachers stated it was imperative to greet parents each day to establish warm open lines of conversation. They believed this helped parents feel that the center valued their opinions when important decision making communication was needed. These warm greetings may also help parents and teachers feel comfortable and open to establishing a respectful relationship. Overall, both studies believed caring transition time communication was crucial to continuing comfortable social contact between parents and teachers.

Powell (1978) found attitudinal and teacher role variables were significantly related to the frequency and diversity of communication with parents during transition times. This study suggested that teachers may need to take the first step in initiating conversations in order to increase the frequency and diversity of interactions between parents and themselves. Additionally, the more often parents and teachers talked, the more these conversations included revealing family information (Powell, 1978). This validates the importance of establishing regular parent-teacher communication.

Parent and teacher beliefs about appropriate conversation content may be a large factor that influences communication frequency and diversity. For example, in one study, parents did not wish to discuss child rearing concerns with teachers who did not have children of their own (Smith

& Hubbard, 1988). This finding shows a parental perception that conversations about child rearing are inappropriate to discuss with a childless teacher. Furthermore, future research needs to explore more in-depth factors and perceptions that influence parent-teacher communication behavior (Powell, 1978). Overall, parents in this study stated that good relations between parents and teacher have a positive effect on the child. Thus, information must be discussed without tension. Since these conversations should be a positive experience that assists parents to understand the child's interactions at school (Gelfer, 1991), additional research may further knowledge about what is discussed during transition time.

#### Importance of the Method as an Ethnography

The curriculum at the Virginia Tech Child Development Child Development Lab School is inspired by the Reggio Emilia approach to teaching young children. This Lab School is the site chosen for this research. The proposed study, an ethnography, is a detailed examination of a particular setting where observations of conversations and events are recorded.

Since there are limited details regarding parent-teacher communication during transition time, there is a need to further study what occurs then (Dorr-Bremme, 1985). Frequently, research on parent-teacher communication uses questionnaires or interviews as a means to collect data (e.g., Cone, Delawyer, & Wolfe, 1985). These types of methodology permit little exploration of individuals' natural experiences in an environment. For example, an interview places a person outside of the social context of the investigation (Dorr-Bremme, 1985). The research environment is no longer a natural setting. However, an ethnographic approach assumes that the understanding of people in a certain environment can be obtained through observing their ordinary conversations and activities (Sankar & Gubrium, 1994).

An ethnography, an in-depth examination of people and events in a particular setting, attempts to understand what it feels like to be the other person in their particular situation. The participants are the center of the research because each individual attaches meaning to life events and interactions (Lyman, 1994). For example, group members interacting in a setting are showing their individual meanings about reality (Dorr-Bremme, 1985). This study proposes to explore these meanings and constructions about communication. For this reason, an ethnographic field study provides understanding of normal social activity, such as that which occurs in a preschool environment.

The ethnographic approach is facilitated by an observer who collects information in a naturalistic way. An observer, who is also a participant, can collect richer data in the field site since he or she interacts naturally with others in the setting (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). As a teacher, already inside the program, I previously established rapport and trust with the parents in the setting.

A participant observer's main source of data collection during an ethnographic study is field notes. These notes seek to understand participants' experiences through natural observations. Field notes includes two types of records: (1) descriptive notes, such as portraits, quotes, diagrams, accounts of events, and the observer's behavior, and (2) reflective notes, such as personal insights and emotions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). These notes include information about what the observer sees, hears, experiences and feels. Although some researchers state feelings should not be considered, my emotions can be used to understand the feelings and reactions of others (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992). For this reason, reflective notes are an important component to field notes.

When I, as a participant observer, seek to realize individuals' perspectives in a natural setting, my personal biases may surface. However, it is through interactions with others in a natural setting that rich data can be collected. Instead, these biases can provide new knowledge (Kleinman & Copp, 1993). If I recognize these prejudices, they can be used to understand people's feelings and prompt questions about my own beliefs. Thus, the ethnographic method allowed me to examine my own experiences regarding parent-teacher conversations. I used these experiences to assist me in understanding parental experiences of transition time conversations.

The actual data recorded by the participant observer reflects his or her personal beliefs about what is imperative to document (Dorr-Bremme, 1985). I believe transition time conversations in a preschool setting are important to gaining knowledge about parent-teacher communication. Thus, the data collected contains what occurs during transition time between parents and me. Overall, an ethnography has the potential to collect rich detailed information about routines and behaviors inside an institution, such as in a preschool. For these reasons, an ethnographic field study was chosen as the most naturalistic way to research parent-teacher communication.

## **Chapter Three: Methodology**

### Overview and Justification of the Research Design

Information shared by parents and teachers about home and school experiences fosters a child's development. Communication between parents and teachers may be the best way to exchange such knowledge. Bronfenbrenner (1986) noted that educators need process-oriented field studies that explore the characteristics of this intersetting knowledge. Currently, limited research exists about the characteristics of transition time conversations that may promote better understanding between parents and teachers of these home and school settings (e.g., Adams, 1997). Also lacking is information about what occurs during transition time between parents and teachers and what is the nature and content of this type of communication. Thus, a field study of these informal conversations may provide valuable insight for the development of positive relationships and intersetting knowledge between parents and teachers.

Communication is identified as an integral component to the development of mutually respectful parent-teacher relationships. Conversations between parents and teachers of occurrences at home and school may help the teacher better know the children and plan curriculum that meets their needs. These conversations also provide parents with information of classroom events and invite parents to become involved in the children's activities. This study, conducted at the Virginia Tech Child Development Lab School, investigated transition time communication between parents and myself, the teacher. The intent of this study was to obtain additional information about how communication influences parent-teacher relationships.

An ethnographic study was used by me for the purposes of exploring communication between parents and teachers. This type of study is a detailed examination of subjects and events in a particular setting (Bogdan & Bicklen, 1992). Ethnographic studies permit for the gathering of more in-depth information about people since they are in a naturalistic setting instead of in a laboratory or research controlled site. They may involve participant observation as the main data collection technique (Bogdan & Bicklen, 1992). This technique assumes that rich data can be obtained when the participant observer notices and records, in detail, conversations and interactions of the individuals in an already established setting. I was in such a position to collect richer data since I already had an understanding of the activities, routines, and individuals who were in the field site, the three year old classroom at the Virginia Tech Child Development Lab School. In this study, such conversations and interactions between the parents and me provided information regarding the nature and content of our communication.

### Description of Participants

The participants in this study were the parents (father and mother) of 15 enrolled children in the three-year old classroom at the Virginia Tech Child Development Lab School. One mother did not wish to participate since she stated that she could not speak English very well. Despite



assuring her that I understood her English quite well on two separate occasions, she did not participate in the study. Her husband and two other fathers chose not to be included in this study since they had no responsibility for transporting their children to and from school. Since I was the teacher in this classroom, I was also a subject. My role was that of a participant observer. In summary, 29 people, including me, who participated in this study, ranged in age from 23-45. Informal conversations during transition time occurred on a regular basis between the parents and me as I greeted them and told them about their children's daily activities. Frequently, the parents provided me with information about their children's happenings at home. They also asked me about school activities. Such communication was partially facilitated through the use of "communication tools" which included daily records of children's activities, newsletters, phone calls, field trips, sharing circle, and portfolios.

#### Description of Method

For this study, I explored informal communication that happened during transition time between me and the parents of the three-year old classroom at the Virginia Tech Child Development Lab School. I also examined how such conversations were promoted with the use of various tools. The parents of the three-year old children at the Virginia Tech Child Development Lab School were notified of this study and invited to participate with a letter. I personally handed this letter to them when they arrived with their children (see Appendix A). The informed consent form was attached to the letter (see Appendix B). Those who agreed to participate in this study signed the informed consent form and returned it to me. All but one of the parents responded to the letter of request for participants. After one week, I verbally invited the one parent who did not return the consent form. However, she still refused to participate because of her perception of a language barrier.

In order to collect data on informal conversations between parents and me, I wrote field notes that included what I witnessed, heard, said, experienced, and thought during transition times in the Lab school setting. These personal, reflective notes in an ethnographic study helped me collect rich data (Kleinman & Copp, 1993). To obtain such data, I made a conscious effort to talk to one or both parents of each child, at least twice a week. Parents were invited to comment and ask questions about the children's activities at the school. I used a diagram of the classroom to mark where parents and I conversed each day and made notes that assisted my recall of these interactions (see Appendix C). In order to allow the most natural of interactions to occur, the field notes were written as soon as possible after the conversations with the parents. To ensure confidentiality in record keeping and coding process, the parents and children were assigned numbers. After the data was recorded, parents and children were assigned assumed names in order to provide clarity in writing and reading the results of the study (see Appendix D). Finally, the written field notes were coded and analyzed for common themes.

In the following section, I will describe my definitions of transition time communication and the conversation tools: Daily Record of Activities “Look What We Did Today,” newsletters, phone calls, field trips, sharing circles, and portfolios. These tools were used by me to provide additional communication with parents in order to help build relationships which could benefit the children’s experiences at school.

### Transition Time Conversations

Informal communication during transition times, a child’s arrival and departure, permitted the parents and me to briefly exchange information. The content of these conversations usually concerned the child’s activities, experiences, needs, and concerns at home and school.

#### Tools of Conversation

Daily Record of Children’s Activities, “Look What We Did Today.” I observed and recorded the children’s activities on the “Look what we did today” daily record of children's activities (see Appendix E). It was a sheet of paper listing each child’s name and each developmental section of the classroom, such as block area, in a chart format. I observed each child’s daily behavior and participation in the classroom and recorded it on this sheet. I used this tool at the end of the day to initiate conversations with the parents about their children’s activities at school.

Newsletters. I wrote a newsletter for parents approximately once or twice a month. These newsletters furnished information about curriculum events, field trips, and sharing circle. The letters often requested parents to participate in school activities and contribute materials for a class project.

Phone Calls. Parents and I communicated by telephone when necessary. The telephone was used by the parents and me to share information about the child such as illness, absenteeism, family changes, or other concerns.

Field Trips. Field trips were arranged in response to the children’s interests. Parents often shared ideas of places they believed the children would enjoy visiting. The parents were invited to join us on field trips with the children. Together during these trips, parents, children, and I shared insights and watched the children explore.

Sharing Circle. Last fall, I replaced the traditional “show and share” with the “sharing circle.” The sharing circle was a welcoming way to invite parents to participate in the classroom. It is based on the assumption that every family has something valuable to contribute to the preschool curriculum (Spangler, 1997). A topic of sharing circle, such as family traditions, was chosen by me for each month. This topic was written in a newsletter that also listed each family’s sharing day. The parents were invited to attend the circle with their children and have an activity about the topic of the month.

Portfolios. Throughout the school year, I recorded the development and learning process of each child in a portfolio. This documentation, which was compiled in a folder, included photographs, anecdotal records, work samples, and reflections by me about a child's interactions in daily activities. Such information regarding the child's activities was placed in the folder under the heading of development to which it corresponded. Art, gross motor, fine motor, science, math, social, and cognitive skills were the developmental areas listed in the portfolio. This portfolio recorded learning in these areas of development through observation of a child's natural interactions in the school setting (MacDonald, 1996). It did not involve unnatural testing, but instead focused on a child's strengths in daily activities. The portfolio assisted me in planning for each child's particular needs. Overall, it created communication between parents and me, parental involvement, my professional development, and archive of the children's experiences (Gandini, 1997).

#### Coding Procedure

I used a coding procedure informed by Strauss & Corbin (1990) to analyze the data on informal transition time communication. The descriptive and reflective field notes I wrote concerning my conversations with parents were coded into themes. This process is explained below. First, I thoroughly read my notes 5 times. While I was reading, I wrote down comments about repeating themes appearing in these notes. After my fifth reading of the field notes, I had identified the 9 most popular themes. These themes were: (1) nonverbal expressions, (2) health and safety, (3) activities/behaviors at home and school, (4) attempting continuity between home and school, (5) learning from one another, (6) addressing parental concerns, (7) involved conversations, (8) influence of tools, (9) conversation constraints. When I read the data for the sixth time, I wrote the theme name next to each area of the notes in which the theme appeared. After the data was coded in this manner, I cut the notes into strips and placed them in folders which were labeled with one of the 9 themes. Then, each folder was analyzed separately. After reading each folder several times, new common threads emerged in each theme. These new themes were labeled as sub-themes. I reflected on each of these 9 themes and the sub-themes to write the data in the findings and reflections section of this paper.

When I reread my findings section, I noticed some similarities emerge throughout each of the 9 themes. I felt it was necessary to regroup these 9 themes. After reading my findings section several times, I identified only 4 themes occurring throughout the field notes (see Appendix F). I used the cut and place in folder method explained in the previous paragraph to reanalyze the data. I believe reorganizing the 9 themes into just 4 themes helped to clarify what I discovered about parent-teacher transition time communication. Finally, I rewrote the findings and reflections section of this paper according to the 4 main themes found in the field notes.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND REFLECTIONS

The findings of this study are based on my transition time conversations with 28 parents over four months. The following excerpts described in this chapter are taken from my field notes written after such communication. These notes provide insight into how parents and I interact during transition time and what we feel comfortable talking about in the school environment.

In this chapter, the findings are reported according to common themes. I identified these themes by repeatedly reading the conversations and interactions recorded in my field notes. The process through which I coded my data is provided in chapter three. The four major themes of conversation found were (1) Opening Communication, (2) Communication Focused on the Child, (3) Problem-Solving Communication and (4) Factors that Enhance and Hinder Communication. In each of these four themes, more specific sub-themes are reported (See Appendix E).

### Opening Communication

Opening communication between parents and me occurs frequently during transition time. These are friendly gestures that establish communication patterns between the parents and me. These interactions reflect an easy and pleasant way to show good will and respect between us. It builds a foundation for future conversations between parents and me regarding concerns about the child. Many times, opening communication includes topics of weather, comfortable subjects, and looking for a child's misplaced toys or clothing.

The topic of weather seems to be a relaxing conversation topic from my point of view. Comments about the weather do not always lead to longer interactions. It could be just an easy topic to address when adults have little else to say. I generally enjoy discussing the unpredictability of the weather. Additionally, during opening conversations, parents often requested assistance from me in finding a child's misplaced possession and I joined in the search for it. These types of conversations are usually short and focused. Yet, opening communication develops a level of comfort for the parents and me early in the school year.

Nonverbal Expressions. Nonverbal expressions are friendly gestures, such as smiles and laughter, between parents and me without the use of words. Smiles are a way of acknowledging one another and was the most common exchange. Some examples are:

In the morning, several mothers and fathers came in and out of the classroom and we exchanged smiles. Sometimes there is not much to say early in the morning so a smile is sufficient.

Rick was the parent usually involved in transporting Ronnie to and from school. His wife, Rita, spoke little English. Sometimes, she would bring Ronnie to school. On one such occasion, I told Rita we were going to make a cake to remember Ronnie's fourth birthday that occurred over vacation. She smiled at me. At another time, I told her about Ronnie's accidental fall into the duck pond. She smiled and nodded. Rita's limited command of the English language could have contributed to the use of mainly nonverbal exchanges between us.

As revealed in the second example, smiles can assist communication between myself and adults who speak little English. This was important in building trust and rapport with this parent. In this way, we continue to respect and acknowledge each other when a long conversation is not possible. Smiles also reflect my happiness to be working with the children and their parents. Since friendly gestures make me comfortable, I believe they also make the classroom atmosphere more relaxing and conducive to conversation.

Laughter is another form of friendly expression that conveys good will without the use of words. Many times in my field notes, I reflected on the importance of this type of communication. Some examples are:

I asked Diana, "How is that aerobics going?" She laughed out loud and said, "I am so sore Jill. I just rolled out of bed." She said this with laughter in her voice. I laughed heartily with her because the way she said it was so funny. I find laughter to be very contagious. I also felt happy to be able to make her laugh so early in the morning.

When I opened the door for the parents to come in, Gary went into the hallway all by himself. As he turned around, he tripped over my shoe and fell down. Mary said, "All right Jill, stop beating up the children," and laughed. I laughed with her and Kelly who was also in the hallway. This laughter revealed the parents' unspoken level of confidence they had in the belief that I purposely did the child no harm and could adequately take care of their children.

The last caption regarding laughter seems to reveal a confident and respectful attitude between me and the parents. Although, I accidentally tripped a child, we were able to laugh about the situation. This shows a developing relationship between these parents and me. I enjoy my interactions with parents most when I can laugh with them.

Longer Conversations. The smiles and short greetings shared between the parents and I helped us establish a relationship capable of longer conversations. The field notes in this following section show conversations which allowed me to learn what parents worry and rejoice about. These conversations also build empathy and understanding between us as seen in the conversations below:

Throughout the semester, Irene expressed her feelings of stress in response to her new job and her husband who was finishing his doctorate degree. One Wednesday, Irene said Ida would be absent this Friday. However, on Thursday, Irene told me about her change of plans. Ida would be absent on Monday also since they were going out of town. We then discussed her upcoming vacation. Irene said, "My brother said he is going out of town so I am going to my mother's house." She smiled and said, "I really just need a short vacation away." I said, "We all need that sometimes, just to get away."

Lisa had been notifying me over the past several months of her husband's progress in finishing his degree and looking for a job. She mentioned this was a stressful time for her family. This was also why Leroy rarely participated in the transporting of Larry to and from school. One day, when I asked Lisa how things were going for her family, she told me that Leroy got a job in Minnesota and they would be moving. She smiled and said, "His family is there and it is nice to know people there. We found out last Thursday. It is

good to know where we are going with the little ones since we will move in the summer.” Throughout our conversation I said several times how happy I was for them.

Rick sat in a chair in the parent lounge with me and another parent. We were looking at the quilt made from squares contributed by each child’s family as a school project for community building. He said his wife took up cross stitching to relax the temper since they can not show strong emotions in the Thai culture.

Nancy was walking out the door with Ned and his little sister and I said, “Look how big she is getting!” Nancy smiled and said excitedly, “I know. She’s sitting up now and has five teeth.” Then she asked, “How was Ned today?” I said, “Real good, he didn’t seem very tired.” She said, “Oh good,” gave the thumbs up sign and left. I have discovered whenever I ask or comment about the baby girl Nancy always replies excitedly.

These conversations gave me opportunities to express empathy to parents such as to the mother who needed a vacation. It also allowed me to share my excitement over good news such as Leroy’s job offer. The captions above demonstrate to me that parents and I can establish connections about how we feel and what is important to us and our families. For example, Rick shared openly with me about his culture, thus revealing part of his family’s beliefs. Through these transition time conversations, I understand the significance that these parents placed on a vacation away for stress relief, a job offer, a Thai custom, and a baby daughter. Overall, I have learned how important it is to listen to parents and respond to their concerns. I also learned that in order to build communication between parents and me, I also need to share with them some of the aspects of myself. This may develop a sense of mutual trust and respect between us.

#### Communication Focused on the Child

Very often during arrival time, parents initiate conversations with me about their children’s health and safety. They may make special requests if the children are sick or have specific injuries. Parents and I also share information about the child’s activities and behaviors both at home and school. Exchanging this information helps me to provide the best possible care for the development of the child.

Health and Safety. The captions about health and safety, written below, occurred at arrival time. Since parents may have a concern or inquiry about the children that warrants immediate attention, they let me know when they arrive at school.

Heather arrived late. She told me about the difficulty she had getting Hetty to school that morning. Hetty had refused to dress herself or eat breakfast. She whined whenever Heather suggested they need to hurry and get to school. Hetty had been sick for several days. I commented that it may be more of a struggle to get Hetty ready for school in the morning since she was ill. Heather then asked whether or not she should take Hetty to the doctor. I assured her I would watch Hetty throughout the day to observe her symptoms. When Heather picked her up at the end of the day, I suggested, “It may be a good idea to take her to a physician.” She said she would take Hetty to the doctor the next morning.

When Tonya brought Ted to school after he had been absent for two days, I remarked, “Good morning, Ted. I missed you.” She explained that Ted had a fever and was feeling

a little tired. “He just wasn’t feeling well, and I am the only one in the house not on antibiotics. I have already given him his medicine for this morning so you don’t need to worry.” I said, “The cold must be going around. Fortunately, not too many kids have it in this class.”

Diana informed me that Danny slammed his finger in the door at his father’s workshop. The child’s nail was almost completely peeled off his finger and a bandage was placed on it. She also told me that she had recently separated from her husband, but they are still friends. Even though Danny lived with Diana, she said he went to his father’s house three nights a week. I expressed my sympathy regarding their separation. I said that I was glad they could remain friends and that Danny could spend time with them both.

Conversations about health and safety show me the importance for parents to know that appropriate care is given to their children. Many times, when a child needs special treatment, the parent will not hesitate to ask me for it. I have learned that parents value my care and evaluation of each child such as in the case of Hetty when Heather asked my opinion about seeing a physician. Another example of this relationship was shown when Nancy felt comfortable enough to share personal information with me that would affect her child’s experiences at school. I appreciate the parents for sharing this type of information presented above. It seems that parents believe it is essential for me to have certain facts so I can to provide adequate care and nurturing for their children. They felt the information did not warrant a special appointment, but needed to be relayed to me in the morning. I further realized how important it is to make myself available and ready to respond to such needs.

It was also through communication that was focused on the child that I was able to receive other detailed information from parents. For example, after Diana told me about her son’s injured nail, she shared personal family information about her separation with me. Diana felt comfortable knowing I would keep this information confidential and use it only to further her child’s development at school. In this way, I could be aware of possible changes in Danny’s behavior because of his parents’ separation. This topic of health and safety was the portal through which Diana chose to disclose information that was difficult to discuss.

#### Activities/Behaviors at Home and School.

A major theme that continually appeared throughout the field notes was conversations about the children’s activities and behaviors. This is also a topic that I address regularly to keep parents informed about their children. Parents and I frequently discussed children’s activities at school. This may be because parents want to learn what their children have done throughout the day when they were not with them. Other topics of conversation between parents and me included sharing information about behaviors at home, school, and family activities.

I talked with Bert about Barbara’s weekend. I also told him that she had learned to pump on the swings last week. He said, “Yes, you never realize how hard of a skill that is.” I agreed pumping requires both gross motor skills and coordination.

When Rick came to pick up Ronnie, I greeted him and discussed Ronnie's activities from the previous day. I showed him the diagram Ronnie had followed to make a model out of Mobilo toys. Ronnie had replicated the diagram. Rick seemed pleased and said, "He likes to build things."

One morning Sally invited her son, Shawn, to participate in the art activity. She seemed to interest him when she told him he did not have to wear a smock. Shawn picked up a brush and began to apply paint to colored paper. Sally then explained that Shawn told her the other evening that he does not do art at school because he has to wear a smock. She informed me that from now on I could allow him to participate without wearing a smock. I said, "Okay, that is good for me to know."

When I asked Janice what they did over break, she turned to Jenny and asked, "What did we do?" When Jenny just smiled and did not respond, Janice said, "We watched all her favorite shows she usually never gets to see."

The above conversations were forums through which I could relay developmental feats such as a child learning to swing or a child assembling a difficult model. In addition, as exemplified by the captions with Sally and Janice, the parents and I can discuss rules at home and school. Since most of the previous conversations were relatively short, activities of children at school may be a matter of fact topic that does not allow for the extension of other topics between parents and me. It may not casually lead into another type of conversation. If the parent or I would like the conversation to develop further, we must be prepared to address another topic or comment that is on our mind at the moment. If this does not occur, the conversation frequently ends such as in the example above with Sally and the smock situation.

On an interesting note, both activities and behaviors at home were discussed during arrival time. Perhaps this occurred because parents needed to inform me about the child's disposition in the morning and address plans or needs for the rest of the day. This type of conversation better prepares me to understand a child's preferences in activities and behaviors for the day. The examples below show what parents share about these activities and behavior at home:

One morning Mary told me that Melanie does not take naps anymore otherwise she will not sleep at night. She added that Melanie just decided one day to use the toilet. She said with a sigh, "I felt embarrassed because people would say 'she's still in diapers?'" I remarked, "Well when she was ready to use the toilet, she just did. She's never had an accident at school." Mary said, "Yes. She hasn't had one at home either."

When Sally brought Shawn to school she said, "He is quiet because I was tired of him not being ready and said to him this morning 'If you are not ready, I'm leaving without you.'" Then she added somberly, "I didn't mean for it to come out that way." I responded, "I am sure you didn't. Sometimes I feel frustrated, too, and it happens." She nodded in agreement with me. She stayed a little longer that morning to make sure Shawn had adjusted to school.

Diana arrived at school late with Danny. She looked a little flustered and explained her events of the morning, "We got a flat tire on the way to school and Danny helped me change it. That's why his overalls are muddy." Danny just smiled and looked a little



worn. I said, "It must be nice to have him around." She said, "He is a good little helper." I replied, "I know. He is around here, too."

Conversations about behaviors at home help me to understand why a child may act in a certain way. I appreciate when parents relay this information to me so I can better assist the child that day. It was through such conversations that I was able to prepare for situations in which Shawn or Danny may be unusually quiet or tired. When a parent shares a story about their concerns such as toilet training or morning interactions with a child, I feel as if they respect me. Perhaps, they are comfortable knowing I am not going to judge their different parenting styles but provide a good environment and education for their child.

I have discovered I am uncomfortable informing a parent about the transgressions a child makes during the day. Such transgressions hinder the relationship he or she has with other children and me, thus, they are considered inappropriate preschool behavior. However, I enjoy telling parents about positive behaviors such as sharing or working out a problem with a friend. Frequently, I related to parents a child's positive interactions throughout the day before I addressed the transgressions.

I informed Patty that Peter had been engaging more frequently in activities with other children over the past few weeks. However, I also told her that Peter was jumping on several children when we were outside that day. She replied, "We have this problem at home. Peter and his brother wrestle and I don't like it. Someone always ends up crying." She then thanked me for letting her know and assured me she would talk to him at home about the situation.

I hesitated to tell Tonya that Ted moved his bowels in his pull-ups yet again. However, she only laughed and told me they had about given up. She added that he also does this at other places such as church. Then I told her Ted knows where the song animal action is on the record and listens to it several times each day. She seemed pleased that he could put the needle on the record by himself.

When I notified Gina that the parent conference time sign up sheet was in the front of the classroom, he replied, "Good. How is Gary doing?" We had previously discussed how to encourage his social development. I told her he was sharing and playing more with other friends. I named some of them and said, "Gary was just putting a puzzle together with a friend." She smiled and said, "I'm glad."

Generally, parents are appreciative of positive information about their child as the samples above indicate. Surprisingly, when I approach parents about a child's transgressions, they do not usually accuse me or the school of providing a bad environment. Instead, they too, seem concerned that their child learns to be a socially acceptable child in preschool. Because of this concern, parents and I can form a camaraderie and set goals about the best way to handle transgressions and better assist the child's social development.

### Problem-Solving

When parents and I work together towards achieving a stable environment for the child at school, we are building a positive relationship. In many instances, this includes brainstorming on how to solve a problem. When we discuss situations that arise, we can form new understanding together. Respect can be earned between us when we jointly form goals for the child.

Often, a child's behaviors at home surface at school. It is through transition time conversations with parents that I further my understanding of each child's behavior in order to better work with them. Additionally, understanding of activities between home and school can promote and extend children's interests and learning. It also establishes school as a safe place to grow and develop.

I told Mary about a situation that occurred between Melanie and me on the playground. Another child jumped on Melanie so she became upset and hit me. The mom said, "She does that with me, too. I think it is with people she is most comfortable with. I tell her she can stamp her feet but can not say mean things or hurt me." I said, "Oh, that's very good for me to know." I learned from this conversation that Melanie's behavior was not new and should be handled in the same way that Mary handles it. I am sure it would help Melanie to see that there was continuity between home and school when I say exactly what Mary says to her.

When Diana arrived to take Danny home, I told her he had picked up a duck egg at the duck pond. She said "Oh! Well he picks up chicken eggs at his uncle's farm." I told her that naturally explains Danny's confusion as to why he picked up this egg. In this situation, home and school were discontinuous and caused confusion for him

One winter morning, Betty approached me and said, "Jill, we are working on getting her to blow her nose at home since she is just rubbing it raw." She demonstrated how Barbara does it with her finger. I nodded as she was talking and she continued, "If you could also help her with that, I would really appreciate it." The desire for the parent to achieve continuity between home and school emerged.

When Neil dropped Ned off at school, he told me that Ned loved the big boxes I placed in the dramatic play area so Nancy got some big boxes from a nearby hotel. Nancy and Ned made a spaceship out of them. After this conversation with Neil, I said to Ned, "Would you like me to get the space props?" With Ned's excited grin for an answer, I brought the props in from the other room. Neil then said goodbye and left. I was glad Neil told me about the activities at school that were important to his child. The type of information he provided me with at transition time helped me further extend the child's interests at school that day.

Fran arrived at school with Farrah clinging to her. She said, "Farrah brought these cups from home. I told her she might like to paint with them." I agreed and told the child we could go over to the art table together and work on the cups. Fran then left. The way these cups aided Farrah's transition into the classroom showed me the importance of having a connection between home and school for the child's adjustment at school.

One day, the children built a large structure for Happy to play in. The structure was left in position so the parents could see a concrete example of the children's activities that day. The children seemed very proud of this building when they brought their parents over to show it to them. This structure seemed to promote conversation between parents and children, parents and parents, and provoke questions from parents to me during departure

time. Hopefully, this will provide an even bigger connection for the children between home and school.

As shown in the excerpts above, the children were benefited by knowledge passed on between home and school. In several cases it was revealed how the children's adjustment into school was forged with a connection between the two environments of home and school. This connection was sometimes just cups a child brought in from home to paint with at school. Transition time conversations also helped me plan activities when parents shared what their children enjoyed doing at home such as in the conversation with Neil. Thus, I am learning from personal experiences with the parents that it is good for the child's adjustment and development to have a connection between home and school. This connection can involve routines, objects, and activities. Throughout such conversations, parents and I continually provided one another with needed information for the child's best development.

During transition time conversations, parents and I have an opportunity to brainstorm together in order to gain understanding or solve a problem. Generally, these conversations involve parents asking me questions about their child's activities. Sometimes parents ask what home activities further stimulate their child's development. Reading my field notes showed me ways that parents and I together develop new understanding of a subject. Thus, the novice-expert relationship (Rogoff, 1990) surfaces during transition time conversations as we learn from one another. During such conversations, parents educate me in many ways by suggesting ideas, informing me of family needs, and providing me with insight into school and non-school related topics. This type of information exchanged between adults assists us in forming respectful relationships. When our knowledge, ideas, and opinions are seen as valuable by the other person, we can be more at ease in sharing additional personal information. I can then consult these parents with my concerns about school and non-school related matters. The field notes below contain transition time interactions which reflect the concerns and problems parents encounter in caring for their children.

Diana arrived late and explained the battle she was having with Danny. He wanted to bring a pocket knife into school and was mad because she would not let him. I listened to her tell me this and then enticed him in playing with the motorcycles at the Duplo block table. Diana observed him for a second and said she would go out to the car to get his overalls. When she came back in and placed the overalls in Danny's cubby, she smiled at me and said, "Thank you." I smiled back at her as she left.

Mary arrived late with Melanie on Monday. Mary said, "Melanie did not eat breakfast because she was upset that I was rushing her to school." Melanie was holding the rice crispy treat that she did not eat in her hand. So the three of us sat down while Melanie ate her breakfast at the snack table. Farrah came over and sat on my lap. Mary, Melanie, Farrah, and I discussed what we normally eat for breakfast. When Melanie was done, she wanted to read a book. Mary walked her to the book corner and, seemingly grateful, said to me as she left, "Thank you."

After talking to several parents, Fran walked up and said, "Jill, I am ready for you to take Farrah now." So I held Farrah, who was crying, as Fran left. Later, when I arrived home, I found an e-mail that said, "Thank you for dealing with me and Farrah in the morning. Sometimes I am short on energy and ideas to coax her into staying. So thank you!"

One school day, Hetty placed a small colored rock up her nose. Heather came to school in order to take her to the doctor. That evening, I called to check on Hetty's nose. When Heather walked in the next morning she immediately said, "Jill, thanks so much for calling last night to check on her." I said, "I wanted to make sure she was doing okay." She replied, "Well thank you. It was very nice of you."

One afternoon, Gary had a cut on his finger that an assistant bandaged. When he came back in the classroom he did not want to join the sharing circle. The assistant left him alone in the book corner so she could join in the circle with the other children. When Greg arrived, Gary was crying loudly in the book corner. Greg took Gary out the door immediately so I did not have a chance to speak with him. The following morning I met Greg in the cubby hallway and said, "I wanted to check and see how things were about yesterday." He said, "Not good, I wish you could have seen Gary in the afternoon. He didn't want to go to his other school, but I had to take him. I know he can get loud when he cries and he needs to let his emotions out. He was left there to cry by himself and all the other children could hear him. He needs a room by himself to cry in." I replied, "Gary's cut was taken care of right away by the assistant. Then, he did not want to join circle so she let him stay in the book corner." Greg stated, "I just don't want this to happen again." To reassure the father I said, "Well next time, if need be, we will give him his own separate spot and I will stay with him." The father said as he left, "Thank you."

When a parent says "thank you", I assume their child's needs have been adequately met as they had requested. The parents came to me with a problem that I helped them effectively address. It is through conversations such as these that I learn the type of care I can provide which is valuable to the parents. Good listening skills can assist me in understanding what parents need for themselves and their child. This is why I try to listen attentively to the concerns of parents. As in the situation with Greg, I had to be receptive to the concern he had about his child in order to develop a possible solution to the dilemma. If parents know that I hear and understand what they need, it may make parents more willing to share other problems with me.

Parents seem to feel comfortable sharing certain information with me about their daily struggles other than the topics of school or their children. I, too, will share these types of things with parents when I am comfortable.

Diana approached me in the morning and stated, "I have had such a bad morning! I burnt my finger and that new puppy of mine dog just chews everything up." I asked, "Do you have a crate for him?" She said, "No we leave him tied up in a dog house during the day. But at night we let him loose and he chews anything in sight. I had some clothes to give to the thrift store and he got into the clothes and pulled them out all over the driveway. I had to clean that up this morning." I said, "I guess they must like to make their presence known." She sighed and I expressed my hope that her day became better.

One week Janice and I shared problems we were having with repairing our cars. We were both having difficulty with the car dealerships. The following Monday, when Janice dropped Jenny off at school, she informed me, "Jill, I still don't have my car back. I still have the rental car." She explained what had happened to it at the dealership and why they were not returning it. I relayed my surprise at this and wished her well in getting it back.

One winter morning, Heather arrived with Hetty and helped her become involved in an activity. Then she came to me, sighed, and said, "My dog has been sick for the past week so I am going to the vet today. I am worried that he may be very sick." I expressed my concern, "It is always sad when an animal is sick." She said, "Especially geriatric ones." The next day I saw her in the hallway and I asked about the dog. She said, "He may have a parasite. We went to a pond a couple of weeks ago and he may have picked it up then. The vet gave me some medicine." I said, "Well good, I knew you were worried it could be something worse." She smiled and said, "Yes. I started giving him the medicine yesterday and he already seems perkier this morning."

One afternoon when I was dismissing children from the playground, Irene approached me. She said, "The day is just beautiful. You usually are in front of your computer on Fridays, right?" I said, "Yes. This weekend I am preparing to present at a conference next Friday. I am leaving on Wednesday right after work." Irene said, "Where is it?" I replied, "In Arlington, Virginia." Irene said, "Nice. We have family there. You know for summer vacation this year we are thinking of going to several places for a few days instead of just one place. I have been tempted to go up to North Virginia since my brother is there. We would have a free room and could take the children to see the Smithsonian museums." We discussed the different museums. Then I said, "Well, if you want to take the hamster again over Spring Break, I would appreciate it." She said "When do you need to know by?" I responded, "By Tuesday. Then I could still get someone else to care for him". Irene nodded and went to get Ida. Later, as she passed me by on the playground, she said, "Jill, we will definitely take the hamster. The kids would love to have her and I didn't get the carpets cleaned yet from her stay during winter vacation." She then burst into laughter at her last remark and I laughed, too. I said, "Thank you so much." She took Ida home.

These types of conversations make me feel happy because the content reveals that parents are able to comfortably converse with me about issues other than just the weather or the children. For example, my conversation with Irene seemed to have a lighthearted tone as we discussed the current events in my life and their family's possible plans for vacation. Her laughter at her own comment about the carpet was contagious so I also laughed heartily. I was glad that Heather and I had developed a relationship in which she could tell me her worries about the family pet. I honestly enjoy talking to the parents as an adult who has valuable ideas and thoughts. Since these conversations promote good rapport between us, they also provide an arena through which parents and I can effectively work with one another for the best of the child.

The problem-solving conversations suggest that mutual respect exists between the parents and me. This respect allows for a safe environment through which we can communicate personal worries or concerns. When parents approach me with a concern happening in their life, the conversation is usually longer than the average transition time interaction. I am pleased when these parents feel as if they can share information about concerns other than the child. In return, I will also contribute news about my own personal life. Sometimes we do not need to solve these

problems, but only need to listen to the other person's daily struggles. In this way, we provide a forum through which we talk about a variety of topics, strengthen our emotional bond, and build the parent-teacher relationship.

#### Factors that Enhance and Hinder Communication

This theme contains field notes that reveal the ways in which conversations can be enhanced between parents and me. Additionally, it presents some of the barriers that parents and I encountered during the course of transition time communication.

Influence of Tools. The following notes discuss the impact of the six types of tools on transition time conversations: newsletters, telephone calls, field trips, "Look What We Did Today" information sheet, portfolios, and sharing circle. Although, each tool had its own way of contributing to the communication of parents and me, some of these tools appeared to have little influence on transition time conversations. They were just another way to maintain contact and foster good will between us.

Newsletters and telephone calls were two tools that did not seem to promote extensive conversation at transition time. The newsletters were used to inform parents of current events in the classroom. However, it did not cultivate extensive conversations with parents or questions from parents regarding the information in the newsletter. Telephone conversations provided an additional arena through which parents and I stayed in touch when we were not in physical proximity to one another. They ranged in topic, although many involved questions about sharing circle. For example, parents would call to notify me of the sharing circle time they chose for the next day. I used the telephone to check on situations that needed to be addressed before the next day, such as the incident when Hetty had placed a pebble up her nose at school. Heather had to take her to the doctor as school ended so I did not know how the situation was resolved. Although phone conversations were a randomly used tool of communication, they were an important link between parents and me for current information that needed to be conveyed.

During the time frame of this study, only one off-site field trip occurred. Transition time conversations were used to obtain volunteers and promote discussion of the field trip. I recruited Kelly during transition time to lead us to the two field trip sites since I had never been to either place. Generally, trips furnish a way for parents and teachers to learn together with the children, as well as, provide an arena for pleasant communication. For example, Diana and I discussed the lambs in the barns. In addition, Janice supervised the children when they were petting the horses. I believe the topics of field trips are not serious because the parents and I are observing the children's actions and monitoring their safety.

I experimented with the 'Look what we did today sheet' which was posted at departure time and listed children's activities for the day. It was to assist parents in being aware of what happens during school. In order to observe the impact it had on conversations, I posted this chart

for five weeks and then did not post it for five weeks. While it was posted, I did not observe parents looking at this sheet, even though I verbally mentioned it and put a written notice about it in the newsletter. I also found that this sheet, in a half day program, can limit interactions with children. As a result I had little detailed information about the child to share with parents since I was involved in observing and writing down brief observations on the chart. These sheets may benefit full day program conversations because much occurs during longer days. It may then facilitate the teacher's recall and nap time can be utilized to complete the sheet. Overall, I noticed no difference in the content of the conversations or the nature of conversations when these sheets were posted and when they were not.

The two tools that appeared to enhance transition time conversations were portfolios and sharing circle. Portfolios are books that document a child's activities, learning, and development throughout the school year. I place pictures and captions of children's experiences at school in the portfolios on a weekly basis so that parents may peruse them at any time during transition time.

Kurt arrived with Kenny and his grandparents who were visiting from out of town. Kenny's grandparents walked to the front of the room to get Kenny's portfolio. His grandmother looked at the portfolio and beamed, "This is really wonderful." I responded, "Those are Kenny's many accomplishments during the day." Later that week, Kurt told me, "My parents just go on and on about the portfolio. They really liked how it showed what he did every day." I replied, "It is important to me to save that information, so I am very glad they liked it. "

Bert was the only parent who chose to look at his child's portfolio during transition time. He frequently commented on it. One day, I had photocopied a self-portrait Barbara drew during school and placed it in the portfolio. He saw this and said, "I am so glad you got a copy of this. This is the best self-portrait she has done." I agreed with him and said that is why I included it. We discussed the body parts she chose to include on the drawing.

Even though the portfolios were available to parents during transition time, most parents chose to look at them during parent conferences. I was pleased when several parents told me during conferences that they appreciated the extra time and effort I put into the portfolios. I feel this established good rapport between the parents and me. It is important to me to portray a picture of what the child engaged in during the school year for the parents awareness. Then, the parents have a continuing record of the child's development. Additionally, the portfolio is a tool of communication that facilitates knowledge between parents and me while paving the way for our future interactions.

Sharing circle was an event that fostered the development of positive relationships between parents and me. On occasion, a short interaction between parents and me occurred in regards to the time of sharing circle. However, many times parents would ponder their topic and ideas with me. Often such a conversation led a parent to discuss another concern with me. For example:

Fran approached me on Wednesday to check about doing a sharing circle on light. After their sharing circle on Thursday, Fran said Farrah had picked the topic because of her night light. She also explained how she arranged care for her youngest son because she did not want him to distract her daughter during the circle. We made comments about Farrah's close relationship with her younger brother. After we discussed this relationship, Fran took Farrah home.

After Tonya and Ted's sharing circle about football, Tonya said, "Jill, next time can we read the kid's favorite books? I would feel so much more comfortable doing that." She mentioned that sharing circle can be a stressful time since she worries the kids will not listen or that she is not 'performing' well enough. I commented, "All the parents are welcome to do circle in whatever way is easiest for them. The circles are enjoyable just because each of you is here. I like the book topic idea for next month." Tonya stated, "Good. I would really like that." I said, "Tonya, thank you so much for coming in. I learned things about your family I did not know before." She smiled and said, "No problem."

Irene arrived at 11:45 to read to the class the book her daughter had chosen for sharing circle. She turned to me during the book reading and said seemingly pleased, "The children are listening." I smiled and said, "They love books." The story ended and we opened the doors for the other parents. I thanked Irene for coming in. We discussed the book she read and how certain parts of older books date them, such as 'whipped that fox'.

Lisa shared part of her Austrian culture songs, dances, stories, and food at sharing circle one day. Afterwards I spoke to the Lisa to thank her for joining us. I also told her that Ted was singing the dance song that she had just taught us as he walked out of the classroom. She said, "Oh really!". I spoke to Larry about helping me do the dance again at circle time tomorrow. She said, "Oh it is easy," and recited the song again. "We do it quite a bit with little children." She handed me another piece of apple strudel and I thanked her again.

In January, I sent out a letter about the circle with the article from the journal so parents would know more about what it entailed. The circle ideally involved the family in the child's day. It was after this letter that during centers one morning, Greg approached me to ask about changing the date of Gary's circle so Gina and he could attend. We changed it to a Thursday instead of a Friday. He thanked me for doing this. I was pleased since he had not come in for Gary's three previous sharing circle days. On their child's day, both Gina and Greg joined us. Afterwards Greg said, "We probably shouldn't have come in." I said "No. No. It was special to him." Gina, who was on the other side of the room when I talked to Greg, walked over and asked if it was okay that they came to the circle. I explained how valuable it was for their child to have his family at school so he felt as if they were part of his life here. It was also a way for his family, friends, and I to learn more about each other. She said, "Well, okay if you think it went well." I said, "It sure did. Thank you so much for coming in."

The parents became an instrumental piece in the planning and participation of this special family circle time. Each child usually expressed pleasure that it was their circle day and their family would be attending school. Several of the parents had fears such as not performing well enough or intruding on the school environment. I learned how important it was to communicate with parents about this circle. It also enhanced the transition time conversations since sharing circle was discussed usually once a day regarding topic, time, or other arrangements.



Conversation Constraints. The following field notes explain why there are limitations in parent-teacher conversations during transition time. Some examples are:

Danny was crying when they arrived at school since his dad would not come pick the keys up that Danny had taken from him. Danny had taken the keys in hopes that his father would come see him at school in order to get them back. Diana left him in my care. In order to calm him down, I spent considerable time talking to him and interested him in an activity that he usually enjoyed. This made interactions with parents rather difficult.

One morning, I was sitting down with Farrah who seemed hesitant about being left at school. Farrah stopped crying when I started to read a book. Melanie chose to sit with us. Out of the corner of my eye, I noticed Kenny was crying about his mother departing from school. Kelly walked past me after leaving Kenny with an assistant. She said to me, "I'm so sorry." I said, "Don't worry about it," and smiled.

When I help children through separation anxiety, such as in the situations with Danny and Farrah, I limit my interactions with parents during transition time. However, parents seem to understand the priority I place on assisting a child to feel comfortable and secure in the school environment. I have noticed parents observe that I am busy and address a concern to me at a later time.

Location, such as where I am standing or sitting during arrival and departure of the child, can also be a hindering factor in transition time conversations. For example:

The book corner is not necessarily a convenient location from which to engage in conversation with parents. It is on the floor underneath a loft. However, I sit there sometimes because some children transition easier into school if I read them a book.

During arrival time, I was at a table, helping the children pour glue and water to make gack. One assistant brought boiling water for the gack from the kitchen down the hall. The other assistant was needed by the woodworking table. This made lengthy interactions with parents virtually impossible.

During departure time, I was in the classroom doorway and could not see the child who was shrieking. I walked over to the area I heard the cries in. I found an assistant who was frustrated with Ted because he would not put on his pants. As a result of checking on Ted, I was prevented from talking to some of the parents.

In addition, I can inhibit parent-teacher interactions for various reasons. Some examples of these types of situations are listed from my field notes below:

Today did not start off smoothly because I was not ready when the parents and children arrived. The centers were not set up because I spent ten extra minutes trying to find either flour or batteries in any of the cabinets. My lesson plans required these two items. I learned from this experience, that I will sometimes quickly need to change the plans if the items I need can not be found in a short amount of time.

When we dismissed outside on several days, I had to make a huge effort to talk to the parents because children were trying to leave the fenced area at the same time parents walked in. I do not believe dismissing outside is the best way to facilitate parent-teacher communication.

During departure time on one particular day, I was distracted and had only a few short interactions with parents. I had this difficulty communicating with parents because Hetty was sobbing in the office as a result of sticking a pebble up her nose. I had to leave her with the administrator for the last fifteen minutes of the day so I could be present at one of the family's sharing circle. This situation was hard for me because I wanted to be in two places at the same time.

One morning, Diana cried for twenty minutes when talking to me. I was trying very hard to understand her concerns and offer comfort as she explained she felt devalued by the administration. The sadness and tears she expressed made me feel weary, too. I was sorry she felt this way even though it was an unintentional oversight on the part of the administration. This encounter affected my interactions with other parents for the rest of the morning, since I was preoccupied trying to make the situation smoother.

These scenarios represent various situations and frustrations that are encountered through the course of my teaching. Such constraints cause the interactions with parents to be limited on certain occasions. Even though some of these situations that involved children like Hetty or upset parents like Diana are beyond my control to resolve, I can still become preoccupied worrying about them. Thus, my feelings are a crucial factor in my interactions with parents at preschool. Some days may have a situation such as these and I must prepare myself to do the best I can in working with the class as a whole and communicating with the parents. Overall, such constraints as those described above, help me to make a special effort later to find the time to talk to each of the parents. On occasion, I can not think of anything significant about a child's daily activities to say at the moment a particular parent arrives. Since this can be difficult, I believe a portfolio of a child is an important tool of ongoing communication. For this reason, I added to the portfolios on a weekly basis and invited the parents to peruse the portfolio at any time.

In the same way that I present barriers in conversations, parents may also contribute to barriers in our communication. For example:

Kelly was picking up three children today so she seemed a little bit in a rush. She needed my assistance since they were in a hurry. I helped Barbara prepare to leave and she left saying only, "Well, I have a full load today."

Sally rushed Shawn out of the classroom one day because her baby was waiting for her in the car.

Greg and I had an interaction that had become commonplace between us. He said, "Hi. How are you?" I said, "Good. How are you doing?" He replied, "Just fine." Then he left the classroom quickly. He generally seems to be in a rush because his schedule is tight.

I did not get a chance to talk to some of the parents on a regular basis because they did not approach me or they rushed out of the classroom. Although I wished to interact with them, this became very difficult if they were seemingly in a hurry. Thus, time constraints can certainly hinder

a conversation. This study further supported the literature (Fine, 1990) which found it was mostly parental time constraints, such as parents in a hurry for work or an appointment, that affected the content and nature of their interactions during transition time. I also found reported in the literature that (Endsley, Minish, & Zhou, 1993), parents have different ways to communicate information. For example, some parents may prefer visual notices of events, whereas, others request a verbal reminder. This was the case of a situation with Sally. She stated that the school's physical environment was too stimulating and requested that I always give her important information about upcoming events verbally. In addition, parents may use body language to convey agreement or disagreement to the information I share with them without vocalizing their opinion. I must become familiar with these differing needs of parents in order to better converse with them.

In summary, the conversations recorded through the use of field notes portray a story about the way parents and I communicate during transition time. In order to work together for the best development of the child, it is imperative to establish positive two-way communication between the parents and me. This chapter shows one aspect of communication, informal conversations, that assists parents and me to further develop good rapport and respect for each other.

Through this study, I realized how important it seemed to the parent for me to be able to listen to their needs and concerns. After sharing my observations of each child with the parent, I hoped they were able to feel comfortable addressing me. The child's needs could be met when parents and I compared behaviors and activities between home and school settings. For example, as noted previously in the chapter, I understood Melanie's aggressive actions on me more fully when I discussed the situation with Mary. In addition, many of these informal conversations allowed me to understand more about the family and develop a light-hearted relationship with them. One such conversation included jesting when I talked to Diana about her new aerobics class. Another conversation that made me feel connected to a family was when Irene seemed concerned about events approaching in my life and also shared stories about their upcoming vacation plans.

Each of the four themes found in this study provided an opportunity for me to learn about myself as a teacher. The theme of opening communication revealed to me how important it was to make the extra effort to establish the beginning of warm communication between parents and me. This communication which included greetings, smiles, and laughter, helped us develop relationships capable of conversing more in-depth at other times. When parents and I had conversations focused on the child, we were supporting the idea that this two-way sharing of information benefits the child's development. During problem-solving conversations, I realized how meaningful it was for us to talk about both the children and topics other than the children. It was valuable to our partnership to have each other listen in a respectful way, disclose insights, and provide ideas. These conversations were helpful in making me feel connected to the child, parent, and family. I also discovered the ways in which the parents and myself present barriers to

communication. With these insights, I can use tools and work on ways to tackle these barriers with parents in order to establish positive relationships. Overall, when I promote communication with parents during transition time, I can work more effectively for the needs of their children and their family .

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

This chapter is my reflections of the conversations I had with parents during transition time. The opportunity for such informal communication arose when parents arrived and departed with their children. This chapter is separated into two sections. In the first section, I discuss the recorded data of these conversations in reference to the literature that I reviewed regarding communication between parents and teachers during transition time in preschool. My interpretations of the data are separated into the four themes that I discovered: (1) Opening Communication, (2) Communication Focused on the Child, (3) Problem-Solving Communication, and (4) Factors that Enhance and Hinder Communication. The second section of this chapter contains this study's implications for future research.

### Interpretations

#### Opening Communication

Opening communication between parents and me are nonverbal expressions or brief conversations. I noticed some parents seemed to spend extra minutes from their day talking to me at transition time, although not all families and I had long conversations. The degree to which the parents required contact was revealed to me by the frequency with which they approached me and initiated long conversations. Certain parents appeared to need more information from me than other parents. However, a few parents and I generally communicated through nonverbal gestures and quick comments. These parents seemed to need little contact with me despite my frequent initiations for conversation. I made myself available for conversation by walking towards the parents and greeting them with a smile and a "hello." I would also comment about their child's activities of the previous day or ask a question about their family. In this way, I attempted to establish a forum through which the parents could approach me when they needed more details.

I believe greeting parents who seem to need little contact is a crucial component to quality communication. Similarly, Winkelstein (1981) cited the importance of having warm contact over time from teachers so that parents would feel comfortable addressing in-depth concerns at later dates. For example, a mother who spoke little English rarely approached me for conversation. However, I frequently reported information to her about her son's experiences and interests at school. She usually nodded and smiled when I provided her with such details. After three months, she approached me to inform me of her upcoming surgery. She explained how this would alter her son's schedule at home and school. Because of this conversation, I was able to be sensitive to the child's needs when the time for her surgery arose. I assume part of the reason she felt comfortable entrusting me with the details of her operation was a result of the manner in which I greeted her daily. Overall, I found friendly transition time conversations between parents and me on a regular basis assisted us in the development of more extensive conversations.

### Communication Focused on the Child

In this study, activities and behaviors of children appeared to be the most frequent topic parents and I talked about. Knowledge of these events in both home and school settings was crucial to the child's continuing development. For example, talking to a parent about her recent separation from her husband helped me to show support and nurturance to the child during this situation. The literature also cites it is imperative for the child to establish such connections between home and school (Powell, 1989). For example, a mother and I established a united front through which her son's transgressions in school and at home were handled in the same manner. Connections such as these can help the child feel stability in both places in order to maximize social, physical, and cognitive development. Since Bronfenbrenner (1986) states the importance of maintaining links between the mesosystems in which a child participates, parents and I helped form these links for the child. For example, a parent and I were able to provide for a child's continuing art exploration through respectful communication. Sally told me that Shawn disliked smocks and did not have to wear one when engaging in art activities at home. She said he may be more apt to participate in art at school if he did not have to wear a smock. We agreed that he would no longer be required to use a smock when doing art at school. This simple solution was another way for the child to see continuity between his two environments. In this situation, the child was able to witness problem-solving conversation between his mother and me.

In conclusion, connections formed through conversation between the parents and me assisted us in forming a relationship that could better provide for the child's and family's needs. This happened when parents and I shared information about activities and behaviors during transition time. For example, parents and I discussed ways to progress and support a child's potty training. Thus, we established routines and expectations for the child across settings. Through these conversations, I discovered that parents and I established a united front during which we exchanged information for the child's best development.

### Problem-Solving Communication

Maintaining regular communication with the parents of the children I teach, is crucial to the development of positive relationships between us. Developmentally Appropriate Practice guidelines (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997) suggest that positive relations between parents and teacher assist the child's best possible growth and development. Knowing this guideline, I must make a conscious effort to communicate with parents on a regular basis. Powell (1978) suggests that increasing interactions with parents may increase the variety of conversation content. It seems that the more often I greeted parents, the more likely it was for us to form a relationship in which we could cover a wide range of conversation topics. These discussions included home improvement plans, family problems, and feelings of inferiority with the administration. It should

also be noted that in order for conversations of variable content to occur, mutual consent without a time or other constraint was needed between the parent and me.

Even though the field note captions in this theme do not reveal the actual length of the transition time conversations, I often engaged in three to five minute conversations with some parents. However, literature found such interactions lasted only ten to fifty seconds (Endsley & Minish's, 1991; Smith & Hubbard, 1988). Long conversations happened when the parent or I had an important issue to convey to the other person. For example, parents approached me about medical worries, family stresses, and behavioral concerns. I also consulted parents on many occasions about classroom activities and behavioral concerns. When such issues arise, the interactions are more in-depth since both the parent and I use the transition time to solve a problem or form a goal.

Lengthy conversations generally occurred when parents and I lacked other constraints. Usually the parent seemed relaxed and had some free time. Some of these longer conversations happened when the parents had finished work for the day and were not in a rush to be on time as they had been in the morning. In addition, if the parents were early for work or an appointment in the morning, they seemed eager to stay that extra time to chat with me. I also facilitated in-depth conversations when I was able to pay my complete attention to what was being said. The environment was conducive to such conversation for me when children did not need my immediate attention. I also found if I felt relaxed without work or personal pressures, parents seemed to stay a little longer. Overall, these lengthy three to five minute discussions between parents and me were a way for us to establish mutual trust and respect.

Mutual respect between parents and me allowed us to educate one another during transition times. Vygotsky's (1978) idea of scaffolding, through which parents and teacher guide one another to further understanding, was evident during our conversations. It was through this concept of scaffolding that I relayed to a parent the national guidelines for a three year old's social development according to Developmentally Appropriate Practice (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). In turn, I was informed by a parent about the different paneling and vinyl choices available for renovating a house. I venture to say without mutual respect and acceptance between adults, this learning could not have occurred.

Smith and Hubbard's (1988) research found that transition time conversations were not likely to include adult problems. They mostly concerned child and center policy topics. However, I found that parents shared issues with me which did not directly affect their child's well being at school that day. Many of the parents in the Smith and Hubbard's (1988) study reported what they most valued from the teacher was information about what their child did during the day. Since activities and behaviors at home and school was one of the most prevalent types of conversations, this may have assisted me in developing friendly, respectful relationships with parents. In

response, parents may have felt comfortable sharing more personal issues with me. For example, Heather shared her worries about the family pet's illness, Irene provided me with confidential information about an in-law with whom she was not happy, and Diana discussed her separation from her husband. After a parent saw me troubled, I told her about a current situation in which I was feeling overwhelmed by work and school. I also shared with two parents why I abruptly left town one weekend and the deep concerns I had regarding this situation. In addition, I told a father about the difficulty I was encountering in clearly writing the material for this paper. These conversations reflect a respectful and reciprocating relationship between some of the parents and me. These relationships developed between us when we gave time, attention, and validity to each other's ideas and needs.

#### Factors that Enhance and Hinder Communication

This study explored the various tools I used to enhance interactions and communication between parents and myself. The tools of telephone calls, newsletters, field trips, and the "Look What We Did Today" information sheet, seemed to promote little quality communication between parents and myself. However, the tools of portfolios and sharing circle appeared to enhance our interactions during transition time. Throughout this study, I also discovered ways in which parents and I hindered conversations with one another.

Influence of Conversation Tools. The field notes revealed that telephone calls, newsletters, and field trips did not seem to enrich nature and content of conversations. Instead, these tools only allowed for routine and comfortable communication among parents and me. These three tools did not create opportunities for extensive information exchange between adults. Surprisingly to me, the "Look what we did today sheet" did not provide an arena through which further communication developed between parents and me. I displayed this sheet for five weeks during which I repeatedly encouraged parents to read it. Instead, the parents seemed satisfied verbally consulting me about their child's day or another concern without referencing this sheet.

There may be several reasons for parent's lack of interest in the "Look What We Did Today" sheet. First, this study was conducted in a morning program which did not include a lunch time or a nap time. Therefore, the parents may not have required news about the child's eating or sleeping behavior at school that would affect the rest of the day at home. Second, the sheet was not established as part of my classroom routine from the beginning of the year. Several months passed before I posted this chart so parents may have become accustomed to verbally gathering reports of their child's school activities. Third, I may not have provided the specific news that parents wanted to discuss with me on this sheet. This chart may be helpful to parents who have children in a full day program. Such a chart could list activities, food intake, and sleeping patterns. Further experimentation with this sheet may be useful in order to understand how to best implement it as a positive communication technique between parents and me.



The tools of portfolios and sharing circle appeared to contribute to important communication between parents and me. Many parents expressed their appreciation for the time and effort I placed in contributing to the children's portfolios. They told me how much they enjoyed the written observations, pictures, and comments about their child in the portfolio. Perhaps, this established respect between the parents and me because they felt I valued their children's experiences and education when taking extra time from my day to add to these developmental books. Additionally, sharing circle appeared to increase communication as parents and I collaborated about the day, time, and topic of the circle. Many parents consulted me about choosing a circle activity that would be interesting and beneficial to the children in the class. Sharing circle generally occurred at 11:45 A.M. However, some parents requested an earlier time in the morning for the circle. Thus, to accommodate them, I incorporated two time slots into the daily plans that could be used for sharing circle. I began to receive phone calls in the evening from parents concerning which time they would choose for their circle the next day. After the parents completed the circle, they frequently approached me for my view on how it went and to discuss other issues. Such discussions entailed family child care needs, nightly routines, and cultural practices. Both portfolios and sharing circle suggest that clear curriculum goals can increase parent-teacher communication.

Hindrances. Several barriers surfaced when I communicated with parents during transition time. The literature stated that such hindrances do exist when a teacher converses with parents. As Greenburg (1989) had noted, I found that I was less attentive to parental needs when I was especially tired, sick, or had personal problems on my mind. At those times, the interactions between parents and me were less meaningful. This occurred because I was not able to give the conversation my full attention. I also noticed on such days, I had to make an extra effort to keep my mind focused on what the parent was telling me.

Fine (1990) noted that time constraints of both parents and teachers were one of the largest hindrances on transition time conversations. In my study, I encountered such constraints when parents rushed out the door. This lack of time severely shortened any interactions with parents. In addition, if I was engaged in a lengthy conversation with another parent, other parents chose to walk out the door without addressing me. This logically shows that it is not very possible to talk to all parents at every arrival and departure. I also found a different type of hindrance that I did not find noted in the literature. Children who needed my immediate assistance because of unsafe play, sickness, or transition anxiety, also limited my interactions with the parents.

In summary, during transition time communication, parents expressed ideas covering a range of topics from the weather to personal and family concerns. Parental and my perceptions of what is appropriate to talk about in the home-school relationship influenced these conversations. The degree to which parents were comfortable with me also seemed to impact our interactions.

Overall, conversations happened between parents and me when mutual respect and effort were apparent in our transition time conversations.

#### Future Research

This study provides added knowledge about what occurs during transition time communication between parents and teachers. Through my recordings of natural interactions between parents and me, better understanding of what we may discuss in the preschool setting was revealed. While tentative inferences can be made from the study about communication nature and content, this study promotes some ideas for further in-depth research on how to establish the beginnings of good rapport and positive parent-teacher relations through transition time communication.

Four ideas for future research are listed below: First, continued exploration of various methods such as charts, tools, or communication techniques may prove useful in increasing interactions between parents and teachers. Second, more extensive documentation of those factors which influence informal conversations to last more than one minute could help researchers further understand transition time communication. Third, researchers could visit various preschool sites during transition time to observe the communication styles and conversation topics of other parents and teachers. Fourth, a future study may examine parental and teacher perceptions regarding transition time communication. Such a study may also look at what the parents and teachers perceive to be appropriate and inappropriate informal conversation topics.

This study showed samples of what the parents and I feel comfortable discussing in the preschool setting. Interactions between the parents and me are undoubtedly influenced by the type of relationship each of us desires to have. It may be challenging to obtain a complete understanding of what parents and teachers choose to talk about in the preschool setting. Overall, a partnership with open communication and respect seems worth acquiring since then the child's needs can more fully be met.

Through the course of this study, I learned there are many different ways to communicate with parents. I also noticed that my relationships with individual parents were unique. Each of these parents had diverse needs for themselves and their child. I heard parents report how valuable it was that I observe their child's activities and comments. I also saw parents smiles when we talked about something funny or solved a problem together. It seems that promoting parent-teacher relationships not only benefits the child but the adults as well. I felt connected to each of the families and better understood their needs when I communicated with them. In turn, friendly informal conversation, may assist the parents in feeling that I can adequately meet the desires they have for their child.

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Appendix A  
Letter to Parent Participants

Dear

This is a letter to inform you of the thesis research I will be conducting in the Lab school. The purpose of this study is to investigate parent-teacher communication. This research is needed because limited information is found in the literature concerning how communication can help establish parent-teacher relationships. In this study, me, the teacher, and you, the parents, will be the participants.

In order to collect data, I will write field notes of our conversations during transition time, pick-up and drop-off of your child. This type of study in a natural setting only requires you to continue interacting in the same way you have been throughout the year. I will write field notes of these interactions which will explore how different tools can enhance parent-teacher communication. These field notes will help me examine the kinds of issues, topics, and concerns parents and teachers discuss in relation to a child's daily activities. This research may be able to benefit the Lab school and other early childhood program in finding ways that will enhance parent-teacher conversations.

I extend a warm invitation to you to participate in this project. In order for this study to be a success, your assistance is greatly appreciated. I wish to assure you that our conversations will be kept strictly confidential. Attached is a consent form that further explains the research and the rights of the participant. I hope you will choose to participate by signing the attached form and return it to me. If there are any questions, do not hesitate to call me at **552-2042**, or talk to me during Lab school, or call Dr. Victoria Fu, my advisor, at 231-4796.

Thank you for your favorable consideration,

Jill V. Sobon

## Appendix B

### Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

#### **Informed Consent for Participants of Investigative Projects**

**Title of Project:** Parent-Teacher Communication During Transition Times: A Teacher's View

**Investigators:** Jill Veronica Sobon, Victoria R. Fu, Ph.D.

#### **I. THE PURPOSE OF THIS RESEARCH**

You are invited to participate in this study of how informal communication can enhance the development of parent-teacher relationships to benefit a child's learning and growth. This study will examine (1) conversations between parents and teachers during transition time at the Virginia Tech Child Development Lab school and (2) the quality and content of those conversations. Thirty parents of the children in the three year old class at the Virginia Tech Child Development Lab school will be invited to participate in this study.

#### **II. PROCEDURES**

As the teacher of the three-year old class, at the Virginia Tech Child Development Lab school I will participate in and also observe the informal communication that occurs between all parents and me. I will keep field notes of conversations between us during transition times at the Lab school. My interactions with you, as a parent, will be recorded through the use of observations, reflections, and interpretations concerning these transition time conversations. Daily records of children's activities, newsletters, phone calls, field trips, sharing circle, and portfolios are tools that will be used to enrich such conversations.

#### **III. RISKS**

The parent-teacher conversations and observations in the Virginia Tech Lab school are not designed to cause any discomfort or risk.

#### **IV. BENEFITS OF THIS PROJECT**

The findings of this study may provide information to teachers regarding ways to enhance parent and teacher communication in order to develop better home-school relationships. In addition, they may provide needed information regarding how communication tools can be used to enhance informal conversations between parents and teachers. Parent-teacher communication can enhance a child's learning and development.

#### **V. EXTENT OF ANONYMITY AND CONFIDENTIALITY**

All participant's names will be kept confidential and referred to by numbers. Only me and my thesis committee chair will have access to the field notes. The list directly linking participant names to their assigned numbers will be destroyed upon completion of this project. Until that time, the list will be stored in a locked file drawer in my home.

#### **VI. COMPENSATION**

Other than my sincere appreciation, there is no compensation for participation in this project.

#### **VII. FREEDOM TO WITHDRAW**

You are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.

#### **VIII. APPROVAL OF RESEARCH**

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



**IX. PARTICIPANT’S RESPONSIBILITIES**

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.

**X. PARTICIPANT’S PERMISSION**

I have read and I understand the Informed Consent information and the conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge receipt of a copy of the consent form. I agree to participate in this project.

If I participate, I may decline to answer questions or withdraw at any time without penalty.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

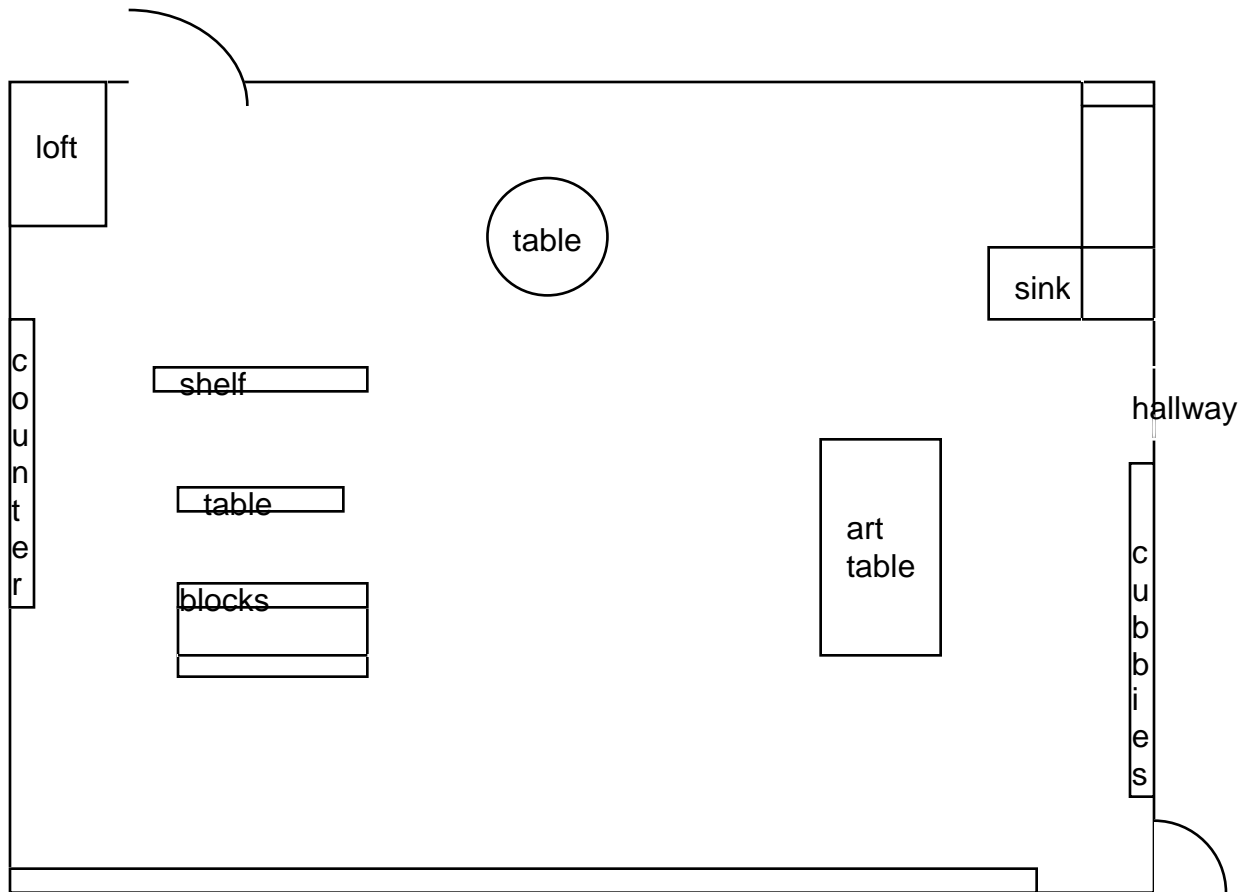
Should I have any questions about this research or its conduct, I may contact the following persons at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University:

Jill Sobon, investigator Phone: 540-552-2042

Victoria R. Fu, Ph.D., Faculty Advisor Phone: 540-231-4796

H. Thomas Hurd, Ph.D  
Chair, Institutional Review Board  
Research Division Phone: 540-231-9359

Appendix C  
Diagram of Classroom



## Appendix D

### Pseudonyms Assigned to Parent Numbers and Their Children

| Parent Number(s) | Name of Mother | Name of Father | Name of Child |
|------------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|
| 1, 1D            | Betty          | Bert           | Barbara       |
| 2                | Diana          | -----          | Danny         |
| 3, 3D            | Fran           | Fred           | Farrah        |
| 4, 4D            | Gina           | Greg           | Gary          |
| 5, 5D            | Heather        | Harry          | Hetty         |
| 6, 6D            | Irene          | Ian            | Ida           |
| 7                | Janice         | -----          | Jenny         |
| 8, 8D            | Kelly          | Kurt           | Kenny         |
| 9, 9D            | Lisa           | Leroy          | Larry         |
| 10, 10D          | Mary           | Marty          | Melanie       |
| 11, 11D          | Nancy          | Neil           | Ned           |
| 12, 12D          | Patty          | Paul           | Peter         |
| 13, 13D          | Rita           | Rick           | Ronnie        |
| 14, 14D          | Sally          | Seth           | Shawn         |
| 15, 15D          | Tonya          | Tim            | Ted           |

Appendix E  
Daily Record of Activities (Look What We Did Today)

| Child   | Blocks | Art | Manipulatives | Dramatic Play | Outside |
|---------|--------|-----|---------------|---------------|---------|
| Barbara |        |     |               |               |         |
| Danny   |        |     |               |               |         |
| Farrah  |        |     |               |               |         |
| Gary    |        |     |               |               |         |
| Hetty   |        |     |               |               |         |
| Ida     |        |     |               |               |         |
| Jenny   |        |     |               |               |         |
| Kenny   |        |     |               |               |         |
| Larry   |        |     |               |               |         |
| Melanie |        |     |               |               |         |
| Ned     |        |     |               |               |         |
| Peter   |        |     |               |               |         |
| Ronnie  |        |     |               |               |         |
| Shawn   |        |     |               |               |         |
| Ted     |        |     |               |               |         |

Appendix F  
**Coding Categories**

1. Opening Communication
  - Nonverbal Expressions
  - Pleasant Conversations
  
2. Communication Focused on the Child
  - Health and Safety
  - Activities/Behaviors at Home and School
  
3. Problem-Solving Communication
  
4. Factors that Enhance and Hinder Communication
  - Influence of Tools
  - Conversation Constraints

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Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University (Virginia Tech),  
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#### WORK EXPERIENCE

Lead Teacher, George Mason University Child Development Center, NAEYC  
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Head Teacher, Virginia Tech Child Development Lab School, NAEYC  
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