

THE TRANSITION FROM EARLY INTERVENTION TO EARLY CHILDHOOD SPECIAL  
EDUCATION PROGRAMMING: THREE CASE STUDIES

by

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Abstract

The reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) in 1997 increased educational standards and accountability for the education of students with disabilities. Specifically, the amendments of IDEA 1997 were directed at improving the results for all children served in Part B (early childhood special education) and Part C (early intervention). IDEA 1997 required that states develop a plan, including transition policy, procedures and practices to create a smooth transition from Part C (early intervention) to Part B (early childhood special education) services. IDEA 1997 also required that parents, school administrators, service coordinators, and special educators be involved in the transition process.

In 2004, IDEA 1997 was amended and is now known as IDEA 2004. Among the many amendments of this legislation are increased emphasis on early intervention services and transition. This suggests that the transition process from Part C to Part B should be revisited by all agencies involved to ensure that smooth transitions occur. Few studies have addressed the transition process and no studies were found that looked comprehensively at the transition process among parents, administrators, and other service providers. The purpose of this study was to better understand the facilitators and inhibitors to successful transitions through the perceptions of all stakeholders involved in the process using three case studies. Major findings indicate that factors that may interfere with a smooth successful transition process include: (1) parents' concerns about services, (2) confusion about meetings, and (3) lack of information,

while factors that facilitate a successful transition include: (1) meaningful involvement and communication among all parents and school representatives and (2) having adequate information for decision-making. The findings reveal that although the school system was in compliance with the transition process, there were clear areas for improvement.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

The problem and its relevance to the field of education are stated in this chapter. The historical context of the problem and the research questions guiding the study of the problem are also discussed in this chapter.

#### Statement of the Problem

When a child is born with a disability and is eligible to receive special education services, these services are coordinated by state and local agencies where the child resides. These services may include, but are not limited to physical and occupational therapies. The right to these special education and related services is protected by federal legislation known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). In 1986, IDEA was created to ensure that infants and toddlers found eligible for special education services receive a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) (Walsh, Smith & Taylor, 2000). The portion of the legislation is commonly known as Part C and early intervention and emphasizes the need for providing special education and related services to children ages birth to three years old.

Prior to 1986, IDEA was written to ensure a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to school age children eligible for special education services. This portion of the legislation is commonly known as Part B. In 1992, FAPE was extended to children ages three to five. In 1997, FAPE became available for children ages birth to five years old; however, with the reauthorization of the legislation, the IDEA Amendments of 1997 were

directed at improving the results for all children in Part B (early childhood special education) and Part C (early intervention) with specific emphasis on children ages birth to three (Walsh, Taylor & Smith, 2000). IDEA 1997 required that states develop a plan to serve young children with disabilities. The early intervention services are coordinated by the parents and professionals working with the child and documented on an Individual Family Services Plan (IFSP). This plan identifies the type and extent of special education and support services that the child and the family will receive. The plan also identifies how progress will be measured, as well as the placement of the services. Additionally, the IFSP should include a plan for transition, as mandated by IDEA. The Virginia Department of Education Technical Assistance Document for Early Childhood Transition from Part B to Part C (2003) outlines the regulations from IDEA on the transition content of the IFSP.

- (1) The IFSP must include the steps to be taken to support the transition of the child upon reaching age three, to
  - (i) Preschool services under Part B to the extent that those services are considered appropriate; or
  - (ii) Other services that may be available, if appropriate.
- (2) The steps in paragraph (h) (1) of this section include
  - (i) Discussions with, and training of, parents regarding future placements and other matters related to the child's transition
  - (ii) Procedures to prepare the child for change in service delivery, including steps to help the child adjust to, and function in, a new setting

- (iii) With parental consent, the transmission of information about the child to the local education agency, to ensure the continuity of services, including evaluation and assessment information

To ensure that these mandates are implemented, the Technical Assistance Document (2003) further explains the policies and procedures for each state.

- (1) Definition of how the state will ensure a smooth transition at age 3, including a method of ensuring that when a child turns three and IEP has been developed and be being implemented by the child's third birthday [Part B Sec. 613(a) (15)].
- (2) Description of how families will be included in the transition planning [Part H Sec. 678 (a) (8)]
- (3) Description of how the 0-2 lead agency will notify the local agency and convene a conference, with the approval of the family, at least 90 days before the child is eligible for the preschool program under Part B in accordance with state law. The conference is to include the representatives of the two agencies and the family and is intended to :
  - (i) Review the child's program options from the third birthday through the rest of the school year and;
  - (ii) Establish a transition plan [Part H Sec. 678(a) 8].
- (4) Families are to be included in the transition planning [Part H Sec. 678 (a) (8)].

In the State of Virginia, the Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse (DMHMRSAS) is the lead agency for Part C and the Virginia Department of Education (VADOE) is the lead agency for Part B. Additionally, an interagency coordinating council has been established to provide assistance to the lead agency and other agencies providing services in Part C. The interagency coordinating councils work to create interagency agreements that enforce federal and state regulations, as well as transition procedures and policies. Although Virginia policies and procedures for transition from early intervention services reflect federal requirements one noticeable difference is the age at which children are eligible to transition from Part C to Part B services. According to federal regulations, children are age eligible for Part C services until their third birthday. In Virginia, early intervention service providers and public school divisions both have responsibility for serving children eligible ages 24 to 36 months. If eligible for Parts C and B, parents decide whether their child remains in Part C or transitions to Part B; however, a child may not receive Part C and Part B services concurrently.

In 2004, IDEA 1997 was amended by Congress and is now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Improvement Act (IDEA 2004). Among the many amendments of this legislation are increased emphasis on early intervention services, transition and preschool grants (Virginia Department of Education Guidance Document, 2005). IDEA 2004 includes an optional state program that must be developed and implemented jointly by the Part C lead agency and the local education agency (LEA). IDEA 2004 also requires that the Individual Education Plan (IEP) Team consider the Individual Family Services Plan (IFSP) that was developed while the child was receiving

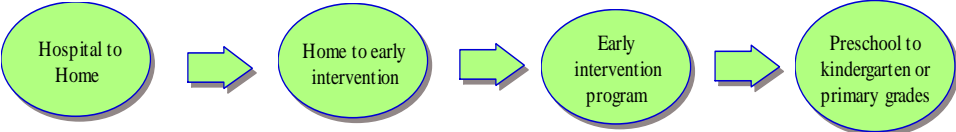
services in early intervention (Part C). IDEA 2004 states, “Consideration will enhance the development of the IEP by the LEA and should not create any burden on the district staff” (Virginia Department of Education Guidance Document, 2005, p.1).

The Virginia Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation, and Substance Abuse Services (1996) states:

“The transition from early intervention services into a local school division’s services is a critical time for young children with disabilities and their families. This will be one of several transitions that children and families make throughout their lives. Yet, for which planning should begin as the child and family enter the early intervention system” (p.42)

Transition is the movement of children and families from one service-delivery setting to another (Lazzari, 1991). Children and families have been moving from Part C (early intervention) to Part B (early childhood special education) services for many years; however, the transitions have not always been smooth and in some instances, have not served or established positive interactions among families, school personnel and agency personnel (Lazzari, 1991). Figure 1 details the chronological transitions that may be experienced by children and families.

Figure 1-Chronological transitions of children and families from birth to preschool



Clear communication and clear expectations from the state and local agencies and the local school division need to be present in order to facilitate a smooth transition for

the child and the family from Part C (early intervention) to Part B (early childhood special education) (Lazzari, 1991; Hanson, et al., 2002; Rice & O'Brien, 1990; Harbin, et al., 2004). Furthermore, the birth of a child can be a stressful time in any family; however, finding out that the child has developmental delays and is eligible to receive special education services may create additional stress for the family due the additional support that is needed to understand the identified delay(s) and what services are needed to address the delay(s) (Rice & O'Brien, 1990; Hanson, et al., 2002). The federal mandates coupled with the need to reduce stress on the family when making the transition from Part C (early intervention) to Part B (early childhood special education) makes this topic worthy of inquiry.

#### Rationale for the Study

A review of the literature related to the transition from Part C (early intervention) to Part B (early childhood special education) revealed information that focused on the perceptions of Part C Coordinators (Harbin et al., 2004; Wischnowski, Fowler & McCollum, 2000), service coordinators (Hanson, et al, 2002; Harbin, et. al 2004; Doerr, 1997) and families (Hanson et al., 2002; Smith, Gartin, Murdick & Hilton, 2006; Lovett & Haring, 2003, Hoover, 2001; Soodak & Erwin, 2000; Doerr,1997). However, none of these studies collectively included the perceptions of all of the above stakeholders. Additionally, only one study included the perceptions of special education teachers (Doerr, 1997). According to IDEA 1997, a special education teacher along with parents, a representative from the public agency, an individual who can interpret the instructional implications of evaluation results are all required participants of an IEP meeting (Walsh, Smith & Taylor, 2000). IDEA further mandates that the special education teacher must be

informed of the child's specific accommodations, modifications and supports that must be provided for the child in accordance with the IEP (Walsh, Smith, & Taylor, 2000). Special education teachers can be a very integral part of ensuring successful transitions from Part C to Part B. "Although federal regulations do not address many of the transitions that children and families must experience, schools should identify typical problems that occur during these transitions and have procedures for addressing these problems in place as part of school policy and procedures" (Smith, Gartin, Murdick, & Hilton, 2006, p.226).

Most of the literature has focused on families, specifically mothers as the primary caregiver. Preparing families for the transition, exchanging information between professionals, giving families opportunities to visit preschool settings, providing support to families from a service coordinator or school administrator, and ensuring continuity between services are strategies and supports that were found throughout the literature (Hanson et. al., 2002; Smith, Gartin, Murdick & Hilton, 2006; Lovett & Haring, 2003, Hoover, 2001; Soodak & Erwin, 2000, Doerr, 1997).

The intent of this study is to identify the perceptions of parents, school administrators, service coordinators and teachers regarding the transition from Part C (early intervention) to Part B (early childhood special education) to better understand the transition process. Parents, school administrators, service coordinators and teachers who are involved in the transition process from early intervention to early childhood special education will participate in this study. Students will have met the established eligibility criteria to receive services under Part B within the past year. The study explored the following research question:

What are the inhibitors and facilitators in creating a successful transition process as identified by parents, school administrators, service coordinators and special education teachers?

### Conceptual Framework

The purpose of a conceptual framework is to provide an outline for research. The literature focused on the perceptions of families, mothers, service coordinators and Part C coordinators. The federal and state policies have mandated that the transition process be a coordinated effort to ensure that: (a) discussions and training with parents take place regarding future placements and other matters related to the child's transition, such as IEP process and parental rights in special education (b) procedures to prepare the child for changes in service delivery, including steps to help the child to adjust to, and function in, a new setting, and, (c) with parental consent, the exchange of information about the child to the local educational agency, to ensure the continuity of services including evaluation and assessment information required in IDEA and copies of the IFSPs have been developed and implemented in accordance with IDEA. A comprehensive model of the transition process should include all of the required participants, as well as attention to the coordination that is needed to facilitate a smooth and effective transition between the participants. Harbin and McNulty (1990) state that this coordination requires the effective communication of one's own perspectives and the ability to hear and understand the perspectives of others. They state that the following six dimensions should be considered in the process of collaboration: climate, resources, policies, people, process, and agency. Facilitating successful transitions of children and their families from Part C

to Part B is a collaborative process, thus the six dimensions they have developed are relevant to this study.

The conceptual framework in Figure 2 displays how the six dimensions should be integrated into the federal and state policies governing the transition process. By integrating these dimensions into the process, all participants can begin to understand the importance of recognizing the dimensions of collaboration and they may lead to creating successful and effective transitions.

Table 1 includes definitions for the six dimensions as defined by Harbin and McNulty. The interactions between climate, resources, policies, people, process and agency can range from simple to complex. “The relationship among these dimensions is often multidirectional, because an event or factor in one dimension may influence change in another dimension” (Harbin & McNulty, 1990, p.704). Acknowledging the role of these six dimensions in the collaboration of the transition from Part B (early childhood special education) to Part C (early intervention) will be helpful to understanding the components that are likely to ensure a successful transition.

#### Limitations

This study has the following limitations: (1) the participants were concentrated in one region of Virginia, (2) information given to the researcher was based on the memory and comfort level of the participants. It is assumed that the participants responded truthfully to the interview questions.

Figure 2. Integration of the six dimensions into the federal and state policies regulating the transition process (Harbin & McNulty, 1990)

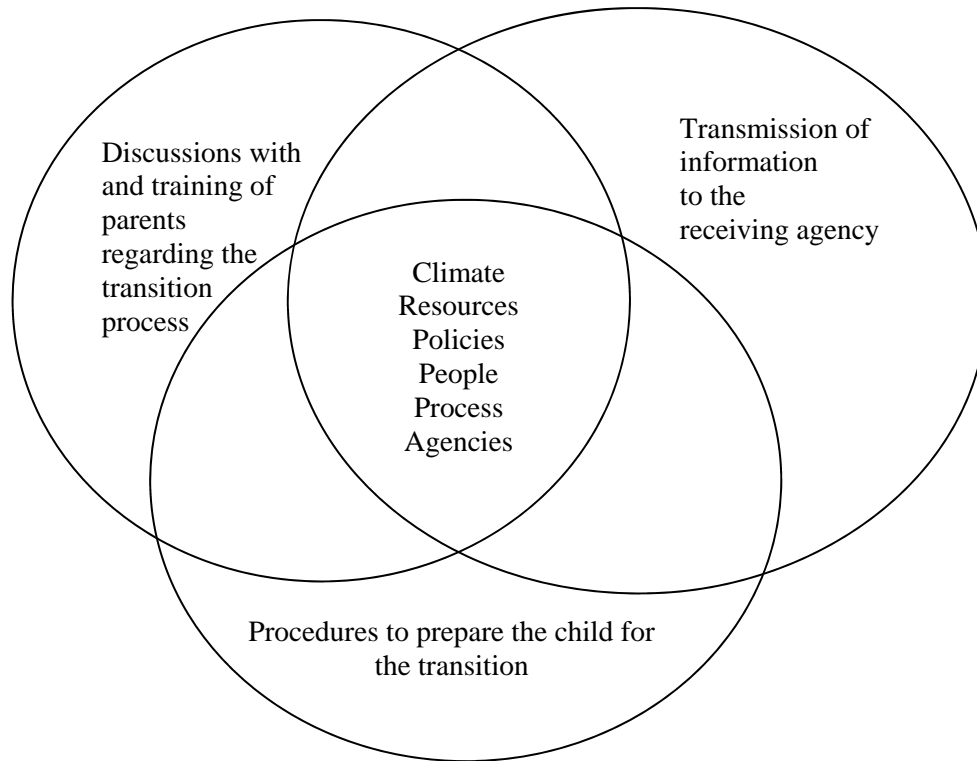


Table 1

## Six Dimensions of Collaboration as defined by Harbin and McNulty (1990)

Dimensions	Definitions
Climate	The general atmosphere in which cooperative efforts are attempted. Includes considerations of attitudes, priorities and support of key decision makers, as well as those direct service providers and the general populace, to enhance collaborative efforts.
Resources	The availability and the nature of assets. Assets are defined as human or capital resources.
Policies	Those sets of governing principles that have been established within and among agencies. Policies may include federal or state regulations.
People	Participants involved in the effort
Process	That series of actions and operations used by an interagency group that has a critical impact on the success of interagency collaborative efforts. An example of a process may include the eligibility process used in special education.
Agencies	Complex or simple and can range from having classical to bureaucratic

### Definition of Terms

1. Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) is a term referring to services for young children in the birth to eight inclusive periods (Bowe, 2004, p.468).
2. Early Intervention refers to services for infants and toddlers and their families to address the special needs of very young children who have disabilities, or developmental delays. This term is used in Part C of IDEA (Bowe, 2004, p.469).
3. Transition is a movement from one stage or program to another (Bowe, 2004, p.475).
4. Lead agency is the term used in Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act to refer to the state agency authorized to carry out the state Part C plan and to coordinate the work of other public and private agencies. In some states, the state education agency is the lead agency; in others, a health agency, social services agency, or child care agency serves as the lead agency (Bowe, 2004, p.471).
5. Individualized Education Program (IEP) is a written document that identifies the unique needs of the child, the special education and related services needed to meet those unique needs, annual goals and short-term objectives, how the child's progress will be assessed, the date of initiation of services and the projection of duration of those services. The IEP is used in Part B of IDEA (Bowe, 2004, p.471).
6. Individualized Family Service Plan (IFSP) is a written document outlining services for infants and toddlers and (if families concur) their families as well. IFSPs note the infant's or toddler's development in five domains, services the child (and family) will receive, and similar information, as well as the service coordinator's name (Bowe, 2004, p.470).

7. Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the landmark special education law in the United States. Formerly called the Education of Handicapped Act, it includes (as Part B) PL 94-142, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (Bowe, 2004, p.470).

8. Part B is the part of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) describing how children with disabilities aged three to 18 shall receive a free appropriate public education (Bowe, 2004, p.473).

9. Part C is the state operated program created in 1986 for infants and toddlers with disabilities and their families. It is an early intervention programs for children under three years of age and (with family concurrence) their families (Bowe, 2004, p.473).

10. Transition is a movement from one stage or program to another (Bowe, 2004, p.475).

#### Overview of methodology

A qualitative, multiple case study design was used to focus on the study of early childhood transition, thus allowing the opportunity to focus on the way a particular group of people perceive the process and problems. I interviewed parents, school administrators, service coordinators and special education teachers who have been involved in the transition process of three students.

The method of purposeful sampling was used to select the three students. Purposeful sampling involves specifying the criteria for selecting the participants for the study. The criteria included the selection of students and their families who have transitioned from early intervention to early childhood special education programs within the last year. The criterion also included ensuring that the teachers, administrators and service coordinators were still in their current positions and available for face to face

interviews. The parents, school administrators, service coordinators, and special education teacher involved in each of transition processes were interviewed by the researcher.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

An examination of the transition process from early intervention to early childhood special education is timely in an era of increased accountability. The reauthorization of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 2004 and the implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in 2001 are two pieces of legislation that demand accountability for the success of children. It is important that all participants in the transition process realize and recognize their roles in creating a successful transition for children and their families.

In this chapter, I first provide the legal requirements for transition. After legal overview, I provide a review of the literature search procedures I used to identify research studies investigating major findings related to the transition from early intervention to early childhood special. Next, I synthesize the major findings from this review. In particular, I focus on literature related to the transition process.

#### The Legal Requirements for Early Intervention

When a child is born with a disability, they are entitled to receive services under federal law to ensure that they receive a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE). These services, mandated by Part C of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act are coordinated by the state and local agencies where the child resides. Part C also requires that states provide early intervention services in the child's natural environment. The natural environment is described as the child's home, a community-based setting with children who do not have disabilities, or a community based setting that serves primarily children with disabilities (Turnbull, et al., 2000). The family of the child may also receive

services to support these early intervention efforts. Depending on specific needs of the family and child, the services may include, but are not limited to, physical therapy, occupational therapy, speech therapy, and family counseling. Part C services are documented and monitored in an Individual Family Services Plan (IFSP). The agencies and service providers coordinating the services are responsible for monitoring the IFSP to ensure progress.

#### Transition from Early Intervention to Early Childhood

When a child reaches the age of three, they transition from early intervention (Part C) to early childhood special education programs (Part B). As shown in Table 2 these Part B services are usually provided in a preschool setting, rather than in the child's natural environment. Services are documented and monitored through an Individual Education Program (IEP).

To help families assure a successful transition from early intervention to early childhood special education, IDEA mandates that the IFSP document "steps to be taken to support the transition of the child, upon reaching age three, to preschool services provided under Part B of the act, to the extent that those services are considered appropriate, or [to] other services that may be available if appropriate" (Technical Assistance Document, August 2003) Additionally, IDEA states that the following must take place to ensure a successful transition: (a) discussions with and training of parents regarding the transition, (b) procedures to prepare the child for the transition, (c) transmission of information about the child to the receiving agency (Technical Assistance Document, 2003)

The transition to Part B is challenging in that children and families are often not eligible to receive the same services or same level of services in preschool programs that they received in early intervention. For example, a child may be receiving the related service of speech therapy in Part C, but when they transition to Part B, they may not be eligible to receive speech therapy because of the change in eligibility requirements from a developmental need to an educational need. Often parents are inadequately informed of these types of changes, thus they perceive that school personnel are “just taking away services.” Equally, family counseling is not a direct service offered in Part C. Table 2 highlights major differences in Part C and Part B services.

#### Importance of the Study of the Transition from Early Intervention to Preschool

The study of the transition from early intervention to early childhood special education is a very timely topic of inquiry since the reauthorizations of IDEA in 1997 and 2004 included an increased emphasis on early intervention services, transition, and preschool grants. The amendments of IDEA 1997 were directed at improving the results for all children served in Parts B and C and required that states develop a plan, including transition policies and procedures and practices to assure smooth transitions from Part C to Part B. Most recently, the reauthorization of 2004 also requires that the IEP team consider the IFSP that was developed while the child was receiving services in early intervention. IDEA 2004 states, “Consideration will enhance the development of the IEP by the Local Education Agency (LEA) and should not create any burden on the district staff” (Guidance Document, 2005).

Table 2

## Legal Requirements for Early Intervention and Preschool Services for Children with Disabilities

	Early Intervention Services (Part C)	Preschool Services (Part B)
Ages Served	Children birth to age three who meet the eligibility criteria	Children ages three to five who meet the eligibility criteria
Eligibility for services	Children below age three meet eligibility as having “developmental delay” after a comprehensive evaluation	School districts, also known as the Local Education Agencies (LEA), establish their own criteria for the category of “developmental delayed” after a comprehensive evaluation
Focus	Services focus on helping meet the needs of the child and family	Services focus on the child and his/her developmental and educational needs
Type of Plan Used	Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) documents the goals of the family and the child	Individual Education Program (IEP) or IFSP documents the needs of the child in form of goals and objectives
How services are delivered	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Services are based on the needs of the family and the child</li> <li>• Services are implemented in the child and family’s natural environment; home or community daycare</li> <li>• Meetings are held to discuss the desired outcomes and strategies for the child and family</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Services are based on the child’s needs</li> <li>• Services are implemented in a center-based setting, elementary school or community daycare</li> <li>• Meetings are held to develop goals and objectives based upon the child’s present level of performance and the parent’s concerns and goals for the child</li> </ul>

Note. From *From Early Intervention ...to Preschool Programs...and School Age Services* (p.30), by P. Sarathy, 2006, Pennsylvania: LRP Publications. Copyright 2006 by LRP Publications. Reprinted.

The importance of facilitating a successful transition from early intervention to early childhood special education has been noted in literature. A range of reasons have been given including: (a) to ensure continuity of services, (b) to minimize disruptions to the family system by facilitating adaptation to change, (c) to ensure that children are prepared to function in the receiving program, and (d) to fulfill legal requirements (Worley, 1989; Lillie & Vakil, 2002; GAO, 2005).

Equally, the reasons why transitions were not successful have been noted in literature. Although families need to be aware of the difference between Part C and Part B prior to the actual transition, families indicated that they do not know what to expect in the transition process (Hanson et al., 2000). The literature also reveals problems with the collaborative process that should take place to facilitate the transition. While the federal mandates of IDEA require that collaboration takes place to ensure successful transitions, IDEA does not suggest a method of evaluation to determine whether successful transitions take place. The success of the transition is left to those responsible for implementing the transition process and what they view as successful.

The literature indicates that the facilitators for creating a smooth transition from Part C to Part B focused on transition as a “process rather than an event” (Hanson, 2000). In order for it to be a process and not an event, all participants need to be aware of the need for collaboration and coordination. Harbin and McNulty (1990) state that coordination requires effective communication of one’s own perspectives and the ability to hear and understand the perspectives of others. They state the following six dimensions are considered in the process of collaboration: climate, resources, policies, people, process, and agencies. The transition process is a collaborative process because its success is

dependent on more than one person; therefore it is necessary that all participants are aware of the climate, resources, policies, people, process and agencies involved in the transition. The remainder of this chapter will focus on the research literature that addresses the transition from early intervention to early childhood special education, and what has inhibited or facilitated a successful transition.

### Search Procedures

To conduct this review, computer searches of ERIC, EBSCOHOST, Dissertation Abstracts, Psych Info., Education Research Complete and websites related to the topic were completed. The keywords used were: (a) transitions in special education, (b) inter-agencies and special education, (c) early childhood special education, (d) Parts B and C, and (e) early intervention. References contained in articles, reports and dissertations provided additional resources. Organizations such as the Council for Exceptional Children and Infant and Toddler Connection were also sources of information. The search included research findings from 1986 to the most recent research based on new legislation requiring transitions. Public Law 99-457 Part H (1986) required that infants and toddlers who were found eligible receive a free appropriate public education (FAPE).

### Literature Findings

Studies on the transition of students is relatively limited with only eight empirical, peer-reviewed studies, one dissertation study, and one government study. Table 3 outlines the research studies on the transition from early intervention to early childhood special education. This table outlines the (a) purpose(s) of the study, (b) methodology and (c) results. Most of the researchers used survey methodology and to a lesser extent interviews and document reviews.

Researchers have focused on the perceptions of Part C coordinators (Harbin, et al., 2004; Wischnowski, Fowler & McCollum, 2000; Rous&Meyer, 2006), service coordinators (Hanson, et.al, 2002; Harbin, et al. 2004; Doerr, 1997; Rous&Meyer, 2006), and families (Hanson et al., 2002; Smith, Gartin, Murdick, & Hilton, 2006; Lovett & Haring, 2003, Hoover, 2001; Soodak &Erwin, 2000; Doerr, 1977; Rous&Meyer, 2006), with only one study including the perceptions of special education teachers (Doerr, 1977). Moreover, none of the research collectively included the perceptions of all participants.

**Table 3**  
**Transition from Early Intervention (Part C) to Early Childhood Special Education (Part B)**

Author/Year	Purpose	Methodology/Sample	Results
Dinnebeil & Rule (1994)	To explore variables that either enhance or detract from successful collaborations between parents and service coordinators	Five national experts in the field of early childhood completed questionnaires Structured interviews conducted with 32 parents and 30 service coordinators	Major Findings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Facilitators to collaboration: service coordinators being a “supportive consultant” and having the ability to build a rapport</li> <li>• Detractors to collaboration: “unhelpful actions” and “lack of confidence”</li> </ul>
Hanline (1998)	To identify information and services which would be helpful as children and their families make transition to public preschool	92 parents of infants and preschoolers who were waiting to transition and who had already transitioned participated in a survey (38 parents of infants and 54 parents of preschoolers)	Major findings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Receiving information about available resources perceived as helpful</li> <li>• Parents of preschoolers rated information about community services and child development as more helpful than parents of infants</li> <li>• Parents of infants considered information about preschool most helpful</li> </ul>
Hanson (2000)	To provide a qualitative description of the transition process and the family’s choices and participation in decision making when their child was entering preschool	22 families participated in this national study Service coordinators, school system representatives, and other people involved also participated Structured interviews were conducted as the child and family entered, participated in and exited the transition process Observations were made of transition meetings Documents were also reviewed	Major findings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transition is an event not a process- for both parents and professionals</li> <li>• Impact of shifting systems on families and children was viewed as problematic</li> <li>• Family choices were limited because of their lack of knowledge</li> <li>• Importance of information exchange and communication to be prepared for meetings</li> </ul>

Table 3 (continued)

## Transition from Early Intervention (Part C) to Early Childhood Special Education (Part B)

Author/Year	Purpose	Methodology/Sample	Results
Harbin, Bruder, Adams, Mazarella, Gabbard & Staff (2004)	To examine the policy infrastructure that undergirds coordination across the U.S. with regards to early intervention	Likert scale questionnaires were mailed to Part C Coordinators in all 50 states	<p>Major findings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• States lack sufficient specificity in the lead agencies policies regarding the role of the service coordinator</li> <li>• Service coordination is hampered by the lack of authority in performing legally required responsibilities</li> <li>• Caseloads are too large to manage</li> <li>• Service coordination models are reported to be working “somewhat” to “slightly more than somewhat” (mean of 4.8 on 7 point scale)</li> </ul>
Lovett & Haring (2003)	To examine family perceptions of three major transitions that occur in early intervention including the transition from early intervention to preschool	Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 48 parents (extended family and close friends) of children who were identified as eligible to receive early interventions services. Interviews were conducted twice a year over a 5 year period	<p>Major Findings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 46 percent of the participants reported that they were comfortable with the process</li> <li>• 43 percent reported that they were uncomfortable with the transition process</li> <li>• 10 percent of the families found that their children were no longer eligible for special education services when they turned three (based on the school or state’s evaluation) and were happy with the progress in early intervention</li> <li>• Two families were not happy with the change in not being eligible for services</li> </ul>
Rous & Myers (2006)	To identify transition practices that have been implemented effectively for children, families, staff, administrators and communities	10 Focus group sessions were conducted with questions given ahead of time to administrators, practitioners in early childhood programs, national experts, family members of children with disabilities who had experienced the transition process	<p>Major Findings:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Different policies across local districts and agencies which made transition planning inconsistent</li> <li>• Lack of direct support from administrators</li> <li>• Lack of relationships between agencies to facilitate communication</li> <li>• Training needed to develop “an approach to transition”</li> <li>• Alignment of standards and expectations from each agency is needed</li> </ul>

Table 3 (continued)

## Transition from Early Intervention (Part C) to Early Childhood Special Education (Part B)

Author/Year	Purpose	Methodology/Sample	Results
Spiegel-McGill, Reed, Konig & McGowan (1990)	To assess the effectiveness of parent workshops regarding the transition to preschool	Likert scale and an open-ended questionnaire administered to seven sets of parents following participation in six (2 hour) transition workshops	Major findings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As a result of the workshops, parents felt prepared for the transition and understood what to expect in meetings</li> <li>• Parents also understood what to expect for their child in a preschool and how to advocate for their child               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents reported that the follow-up transition assistance was the most useful</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Wischnowski, Fowler, & McCollum (2000)	To review interagency agreements compiled in response to the transition needs from Part C to Part B and to determine whether supports and barriers varied at different points in the collaborative process	Phone interviews 16 participants included Part C Coordinators, School Administrators, Early Intervention Administrators and Parents	Major Findings: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 22 supports and 31 barriers surfaced from the interviews</li> <li>• Some supports included: attitude and involvement in writing teams, the availability of conflict resolution</li> <li>• Some barriers included: attention to the process from the team, absence of collaboration from parents and agencies</li> </ul>

While none of the research included the perspectives of all the participants in the transition process, the research does include information from selected participants' views regarding the facilitators and inhibitors to creating a smooth transition. The literature indicates that the facilitators and inhibitors for creating a smooth transition from Part C to Part B centered on attention to the transition as a "process rather than an event." In order for it to be a process and not an event, all participants need to be aware of the need for collaboration and coordination.

The coordination of the transition process requires effective communication of one's own perspectives and the ability to hear and understand the perspectives of others (Harbin & McNulty, 1990). Harbin & McNulty identified the following six dimensions in the process of collaboration: climate, resources, policies, people, process, and agencies, explained in more detail below. The transition process is a collaborative process because its success is dependent on more than one person. The remainder of this chapter will focus on findings related to the factors that facilitate and inhibit a successful transition from early intervention to early childhood special education.

#### Policies and Process

Harbin & McNulty (1990) define policies as a set of governing principles that have been established within and among agencies. The laws and regulations governing the transition from early intervention (Part C) to early childhood special education (Part B) are outlined in IDEA. Part C of IDEA requires that the IFSP must contain a description of the appropriate transition services for the child.

The description should include the following:

- (1) discussions with and training of parents regarding the transition
- (2) procedures to prepare the child for the transition
- (3) transmission of information about the child to the receiving agency (Technical Assistance Document, 2003)

Harbin and McNulty further define the process as the series of actions used by the agency in collaborative efforts. In this case, the manner in which the governing principles of IDEA are implemented is considered the process. According to Sarathy (2006), many families report that they experienced feelings of anxiety and related stress during the transition process. When Hanson, et al. (2000) surveyed twenty-two families and service providers regarding the transition process and the families' choices and participation in decision making when their child entered preschool, they found that both families and service providers viewed the transition as an event, rather than a process of decision making. Over half of the families reported having no choice in terms of a child's preschool placement. They stated that the professionals were the primary decision makers of the placement. Some parents reported significant problems stemming from not knowing what to expect.

One parent reported,

But what the teacher did was she just rang me up. She said, "We need it. We are going to do a transition meeting. Can you make it Thursday afternoon?" And I said, "Yes." And, you know, I never thought to say, "Oh, what does that exactly mean?"... So, I didn't know what it (the meeting) was about. (Hanson, et. al, 2000, p. 258).

The concern of not knowing what to expect was also articulated as a concern of parents in the study conducted by Soodak and Erwin (2000). More than half of the parents who were interviewed noted that they were concerned about who would be involved in the meetings and how communication would take place when it was time to schedule a meeting (Soodak & Erwin, 2000). Not knowing what to expect contributed to parents feeling “uncomfortable” (Lovett & Haring, 2003). Loving and Haring (2003) interviewed parents and key informants of children who were identified with disabilities that would make them eligible for services. Additional information was obtained from interviews with service coordinators and family observations. Forty-three percent of the families reported that they were uncomfortable with the transition. The families defined uncomfortable as: (a) being abandoned by the service coordinator they had come to rely on for information (b) having minimal participation in IEPs and (c) not being given choices of placements.

IDEA mandates that parents be involved in the process of developing both an Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) and IEP. This means establishing mutually agreeable times to meet, providing the parent with adequate notification of meeting, and informing the parent of the provisions relating to the participation of other individuals on the IEP Team who have knowledge or expertise about the child. The literature suggests that parents do not receive timely notice of meetings and/or they are not sure what to expect at the meetings. Not having access to this information makes the transition more of an event than a process for children and their families.

Ensuring involvement in the process of developing and IFSP and an IEP also means that parents are knowledgeable about process and differences in eligibility in Parts

C and B. According to Hanline (1988), over fifty percent of parents of infants and preschoolers surveyed indicated that the difference between infant and preschool programs would be helpful information to have. Many times parents are not informed about the differences in eligibility in Parts C and B, and often times the services and the resources the family received in Part C may not be received in Part B. Eligibility for Part C services is determined by an evaluation conducted by a team of people knowledgeable about early childhood development and intervention. Most children who have been diagnosed with a mental or physical condition with high probability of resulting in developmental delay; a child experiencing delay; and who is at risk of a developmental delay at the discretion of the state in which the child resides are eligible to receive services under Part C. Depending on the strengths and weaknesses identified in the evaluation, the level of services may range from educational to therapeutic for the child and the family. The services needed by the child and the family are documented in an IFSP.

In contrast to the eligibility requirements for Part C services, eligibility for Part B services is based on a comprehensive and multidisciplinary evaluation to determine if the child qualifies as a “child with a disability” under one or more of the categories of disabilities for children ages three through nine. Mostly importantly, a definite difference in the eligibility criteria for Part C services is that the disability must also affect the educational performance of the child. The services needed by the child are documented in an IEP.

## Agencies

According to Harbin and McNulty (1990), the structure and flexibility of agencies will have an influence upon the successful coordination of services. In addition to requirements between early intervention and school districts are policies that govern the coordination of agencies that may be involved in the transition. The agencies form an Interagency Coordinating Council (ICC) to provide advice and assistance to the lead agencies in each state. For example, in the State of Virginia, the lead agency for Part C is the Virginia Department of Mental Health, Mental Retardation and Substance Abuse (DMHMRSAS). The lead agency for Part B is the Virginia Department of Education (VADOE). Other representatives in the Virginia Interagency Coordinating Council (VICC) include parents, public or private service providers of early intervention services, state agency personnel and a legislator.

The interagency agreements must include the following: (a) the assignment of financial and other responsibilities for the performance evaluation, development of IFSPs, and provision of services on a continuous basis, (b) procedures to ensure a smooth transfer of responsibilities from local service providers to local educational agencies, and (c) other provisions that are necessary to ensure effective transition of children to preschool services and to ensure that gaps in services do not occur.

According to Wischnowski, Fowler and McCollum (2000), participants involved in writing agreements identified the attitudes, skills and involvement of the team members as supports and barriers in creating interagency agreements. The “knowledge of the law and the system” and the “experience with interagency work” were examples noted with regards to skill.

Formalizing agreements between agencies will help ensure that both program needs and administrative needs can be met while maintaining the primary focus of the needs of the children and their families (Lazzari, 1991). Interagency agreements are also a part of the transition puzzle that needs further guidance and monitoring. These agreements ensure that sending and receiving providers know the role and responsibilities of one another, so that the information may be effectively conveyed to the parents.

### Resources

Part of ensuring the roles and responsibilities of sending and receiving agencies may include the knowledge of resources available to the families. At least three factors contribute to the level of resources available to support collaborative efforts (Harbin & McNulty, 1990). These three factors include money, people, and facilities. Lack of staff time and scarce fiscal resources are frequently mentioned as barriers to facilitating a successful transition process.

IDEA does not specifically address resources; however, the allocation of resources to provide the services and supports the child needs is noted in the legislation. The literature suggests the lack of knowledge about available resources and services has contributed to unsuccessful transitions of children and families from early intervention to early childhood special education (GAO-06-26, 2005; Hanson, et al., 2000; Harbin, et al., 2004, Hanline 1988). As previously noted, parents who have had children to transition from Part C reported that the lack of knowledge regarding the type of services that can be provided in Part C was an issue.

The service coordinator plays a vital role in facilitating successful transition for children and their families. To provide effective service they must understand their roles

and responsibilities. According to Harbin et al., 2004, the results of her study indicate that service coordinators are hampered by a lack of authority in performing their legally required functions and responsibilities. In addition, in many states, the caseloads of service coordinators are so large that they probably do not have sufficient time to spend with families to develop a trusting relationship and learn about their needs. According to a study conducted by Dinnebeil & Rule (1994), both parents and service coordinators described productive qualities of service coordinators that primarily fell into the category labeled “builds rapport.” One mother commented:

I think the thing I like best about her is that she- we’ll sit and talk about personal stuff. We’ll laugh and get to know each other; it’s not just the meeting stuff. You can go in there and laugh and tell how rotten or good your week was. (p. 356).

The number of students on their caseloads; however, was not the source of concern in the study by the United States Department of Accountability (2005). They indicated significant challenges in the recruitment and retention of individuals to provide specific services to children in early intervention in various states. Equally, challenges among the states participating in the study were noted in securing additional funds to support Part C services.

### Climate and People

IDEA requires that meetings take place to facilitate the transition process from early intervention to early childhood special education. Ensuring a positive climate and meaningful involvement of people in transition meetings can be vital to the success of the transition meetings. According to Harbin and McNulty (1990), “climate is the general atmosphere in which cooperative efforts are attempted...” (p.703). The ability of a group

to accomplish its goals is dependent on the people involved in the effort (Harbin & McNulty, 1990). According to the Technical Assistance Document (2003), with the family's approval, an individual transition planning conference between the family and local education agency (LEA), which is commonly the receiving school, is held at least 90 days before the child's third birthday, or the date on which the child is eligible for early childhood special education services under Part B of IDEA. The purpose of this conference is to discuss appropriate services the child may receive and to review the child's options for services if the child is found eligible for services under Part B. The transition conference commonly serves as a child study meeting. The purpose of the child study meeting is to "identify and recommend strategies to address the child's learning, behavior and communication, and development (Regulations Governing Special Education Programs for Children with Disabilities in Virginia, 1999). Participants at this meeting must include the parents, the principal or designee, at least one teacher, the referring source and at least one specialist. The referring source is often the service coordinator, who has worked with the family throughout early intervention. Because this meeting may serve as an introduction to people the parents have not been familiar with, as well as a shift to new rules, regulations, service models and philosophies, it is important that the climate of the meeting is considered. "Creating a climate for partnership from the beginning enables families and other team members to communicate openly and honestly" (Turnbull, et al., 2006, p. 187).

The service coordinator is a key component of early intervention services according to IDEA, thus the service coordinator is an important person when ensuring a positive climate. It is important that parents understand the purpose of the child study meeting

and the differences in service delivery, eligibility criteria, location of services, and who will provide the services. Service coordinators should play an integral part in providing this information and assisting parents in understanding the information. Parents reported that well informed service coordinators who are honest in sharing new information and have tact enhanced collaboration (Dinnebeil & Rule, 1994).

In contrast, parents indicate “a rushed, hurry-up approach to meetings and making assumptions” detracted from the transition process (Dinnebeil & Rule, 1994; Lovett & Haring, 2003). Parents also indicated that working with unfamiliar people and a lack of information about the services offered by the school district was a major concern (Hanline, 1988).

For many children with special needs, transition will be a life-long process as they move from different types of service or placements. This also means life-long transitions for the families. Attention to the climate and people involved in the early transition from early intervention to preschool programming, may assist in setting the tone for all future interactions between the school and family (Turnbull, et al., 2005).

#### Summary of Literature

Although, the transition process from Part B to Part C has been in place since the 1980’s, the process still requires improvement and further study. While it is difficult to draw many conclusions about the transition process from early intervention to early childhood special education given the limited number of research studies and methods used to conduct the research, the noted conclusions have appeared more than once throughout the literature.

Research findings suggest the need to strengthen collaboration, communication, and participants' understanding of the transition process from early intervention to early childhood special education. This pattern; however, was only evident through the perceptions of families, Part C coordinators and service coordinators. Many parents reported being dissatisfied with service coordination during the transition process when they did not feel well informed. Service coordinators and Part C coordinators report that they were unclear about their roles and responsibilities, thus not able to provide the needed support during the transition process.

#### Improving the Transition Process

Although the literature sheds light on some facilitators and barriers to the transition process, not all perspectives are well documented. The literature suggests that the following elements would assist in facilitating a successful transition process:

- knowledge of available options for the students,
- knowledge of the differences in eligibility requirements in Parts C and B,
- knowledge of the differences and parental rights governing an IEP and an IFSP,
- knowledge of available resources and services within the school and community,
- adequate communication between the sending and receiving agencies,
- adequate communication in meetings to ensure that parents feel like “true” partners in decision making.

The literature equally suggests that the absence of any of these elements would inhibit the transition process.

## Research Considerations

There is a need for studies that take an in-depth look at the transition process and include the perspectives of all participants coupled with acknowledging the federal and state regulations surrounding the transition from Part C to Part B. In-depth interviews, observations of the process, and a study of the transition process over time is needed to better understand how the process currently works and to gather information to improve the transition. Equally, there is a need to conduct case studies including the participants involved in the transition process. Conducting case studies would allow the researcher to gather information from all perspectives to draw conclusions that may be helpful to practitioners and policymakers who are responsible for ensuring the success of the transition process. For example, the information gathered from case studies may assist a school division in improving the policies and procedures they have in place for ensuring successful transitions. According to Dinnebeil & Rule (1994), because professionals are paid to work well with families it is clear that the onus of developing collaborative skills falls on their shoulders.

What is known about the transition process is viewed from the perspectives of Part C Coordinators, service coordinators, and parents. One of the missing components in the literature was acknowledging the perceptions of school administrators and special education teachers, who are required participants in the transition process, as noted in IDEA. Equally, most of the literature included interviews and or surveys with few reviews of key documents that may have including eligibility minutes and/or Individual Family Service Plans.

The study of the transition process has just begun and much remains to be learned. The importance of the transition process was emphasized by Sarathy (2006), “when transition proceeds smoothly and the child launches off into a successful start in the educational environment, families and service providers feel satisfied. The initial positive experience of the early childhood years will endure for many years to come” (p. 56).

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

The methodology that was used to facilitate the study of the perceptions of the transition of children from early intervention to early childhood special education is described in this chapter.

#### Purpose

The purpose of this study is to better understand the transition process from early intervention to early childhood special education from the perspectives of parents, school administrators, service coordinators, and special education teachers. Inhibitors and facilitators to creating a successful transition process will be identified.

#### Research Question

The research was guided by the following question:

What are the inhibitors and facilitators in creating a successful transition process as identified by parents, school administrators, service coordinators, and special education teachers?

#### Research Design

A multiple case study design will be used to gather data. The multiple case study design allowed a focus on the phenomenon of transition, thus allowing the opportunity to focus on the way a particular group of people view the transition. Parents, school administrators, service coordinators and special education teachers who have been involved in the transition process of three selected students were interviewed.

### Purposeful Sampling

Purposeful sampling was used to obtain participants for this study. Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned (Merriman, 1998). This method of sampling allowed to carefully determine the criteria for who will participate in the study, thus increasing the amount of information that is learned from the study. Contact was made with the Director of Special Education of the identified school division in Southeast Virginia to request permission to conduct this study. This contact was made by phone and followed up with a letter outlining the purpose of the study, and information requested. Upon approval of the study, a list of students found eligible for early childhood special education services within the past year, after having received services in early intervention was obtained.

Contact was made by phone to up to six families from the list until three families and team members agreed to participate in my study. Efforts were made to include case studies that include variations of services that the child receives. Contact was made with the school administrators, and service coordinators who participated in each of the six families' transition process. Consent was gained from at least three of the families and transition participants.

The names and contact information of the families, school administrators, service coordinators and special education teachers involved in the transition process was also requested. Additionally, documents from the director of special education and families related to the eligibility of the child for Part C services and transition services were requested. These documents included a copy of the eligibility minutes and a copy of the

IFSP. Minutes from the eligibility meeting and a copy of the IFSP were provided the researcher with insight into issues that are relevant to the study.

### Instruments

The family member(s), school administrators, service coordinators, and special education teacher involved in each of transition processes were interviewed. The interview guide was semi-structured allowing for specific questions, as well as questions that are more open-ended. However, open-ended questions were structured to allow for other information that may be important to the participants that go beyond these six dimensions. The open ended questions served as probes to encourage the participants to add more information or clarify their responses.

The interview guide (Appendix A) was adapted from the following sources: The Families Outcomes Survey developed by the *Early Childhood Outcomes Center (ECOC)*, a transition checklist contained in the *Transition Sourcebook (1991)* and an interview guide developed by Paula Hoover in the facilitation of her dissertation research on the perception of mothers with regards to the transition process. Permission to use and adapt these surveys and interview questions was granted to the researcher (see Appendix B).

### Data Collection

Initial contact of all participants was made by phone and followed up with a letter. Once written consent had been given by all participants for at least three of the students, the researcher scheduled individual interview sessions. During the initial conversation, one face to face interview at a convenient place and time for the participants was set up. A second interview, by phone, was also set up to clarify any information needed by the researcher. A letter was sent to reiterate what was discussed in the initial conversation.

During the initial interview, rapport with the participants was established by sharing personal history. According to Patton (2002), establishing rapport is built on the ability to convey empathy and understanding without judgment and can be a very beneficial in the process of interviewing. During the first interview with the participants, an introduction including the explanation of the purpose and procedures of the study took place. Participants were informed that names would be assigned to protect their privacy and that the information gathered from the interviews would be kept confidential and would be used for the purpose of the study. Participants were given a written consent form that addressed the description of the study and the protection of the subjects ( see Appendix C). The initial interview for the parents varied slightly from the others in that the researcher will gather background information about family and the child. During the first interview, the interview guide was used to facilitate the asking of questions. These interviews were audio-taped, with the permission of the participants, to gain an accurate account of what was said during the interviews. The second interview was conducted via the telephone to clarify any needed information. During all interviews, the probes were used to obtain more detail, clarification and examples of responses given by the participants. According to Merriam (1998), a good strategy for probing is to scrutinize a verbatim transcript of one of the interviews. Transcripts from the first interview were used to guide questions in the second interview. In addition to the interviews, a review of eligibility documents and IFSPs took place, to determine the need for further questioning and clarification during the interview process.

### Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted utilizing the same interview guides. This information was helpful to me as I refined data collection procedures. Participants who met the same criteria as listed above were chosen for the pilot study.

### Data Analysis

The constant comparative method, as described by Merriam (1998) was used to analysis the data. This method combines inductive category coding with a simultaneous comparison of all units of meaning obtained. “As each new unit of meaning is selected for analysis, it is compared to all other units of meaning and subsequently grouped with similar units of meaning” (Merriman, p.181.). According to Merriman, if there are no new units of meaning a new category is formed. The steps in this method include: (1) inductive category coding and simultaneous comparing of units of meaning across categories, (2) refinement of categories, (3) exploration of relationships and patterns across categories and (4) integration of data yielding an understanding of people and setting being studied.

Prior to the process of inductive category coding, each interview was transcribed following the guidelines for transcribing interviews as described by Merriman (1998). The transcripts were read several times and notations were made in the margins to begin the process of coding. Each line of the transcript was also numbered to assist in organization. During the first read of the transcript, notes were made in the margins that comment on the data. During the second reading, categories were established that were recorded on post-it charts.

In order to identify the facilitators and inhibitors for each participant, the researcher assigned each case with a number. Each inhibitor and facilitator was also assigned a number, and each participant a letter of the alphabet. For example: Case 1, Facilitator (F-1), Teacher (t), Case 1, Inhibitor (I-1), Teacher (T). Any comments that were not related specifically to an inhibitor or facilitator was coded as “other” and received a case number and a letter for the participant. During the third reading, the information was placed on the post-it charts by categories in three broad categories. The categories included inhibitor, facilitators and other. These categories were used because of their direct correlation to the research question. After this process, the researcher gathered the facilitators, inhibitors and other comments for each case by participants and made three long lists. Next, the researchers analyzed reoccurring themes with the broad topics, identifying sub-themes in each of the broader themes.

Once the categories had been developed, the transcripts were revisited to ensure that no data had been left out. Some of the categories needed to be refined as a result of the rereading of the transcripts. This process took place to ensure that all the rules of inclusion have been followed for each category.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESEARCH FINDINGS

In this study, the author explores the inhibitors and facilitators to creating successful transition experiences for parents, teachers, service coordinators and administrators involved in the transition process from early intervention (Part C of IDEA) to early childhood special education (Part B of IDEA). Data were collected and analyzed utilizing procedures unique to case study methodologies as outlined by Merriman (1994). According to Merriman (1998), one of the main purposes of conducting case studies is to “develop a better understanding of the dynamics of a program” (p.34). While the transition process is not directly defined as a “program,” the success of the transition process from early intervention directly influences the “program” that the children will be a part of once in early childhood special education.

This study included analyses of three cases involving twelve participants. The cases consisted of interviews with the parent, teacher, administrator and service coordinator who participated in the transition of three chosen children. The children were chosen based on an established timeframe of participation in the transition process, to ensure a reasonable amount of recall of information from the participants. The children could not have transitioned from early intervention more than two years from the beginning of the study. Each participant participated in two interviews. The first interview was tape-recorded and included open-ended questions. Following introductions and an explanation of the interview process, each participant was asked to respond to the following question: Tell me everything that you remember about \_\_\_\_\_’s

transition from early intervention to early childhood special education. When necessary, the interviewer inserted the following prompts:

Tell me more about...

Would you further explain...?

Is there anything else you would like to add about...?

This type of open ended questioning allowed the participants to provide the researcher with their own experiences of the transition process, thus making it more exploratory as defined by Merriman (1998). The open-ended question and probes set the stage for the second interview, which was conducted by phone to clarify or elicit additional information. This information is contained in the appendix.

After the interviews were completed, they were transcribed by the researcher. The transcripts were read several times and notations were made in the margins to begin the process of coding. During the second read of the transcripts, the coding was used to identify the inhibitors and facilitators to the transition process. In order to identify the facilitators and inhibitors for each participant, the researcher assigned each case with a number. Each inhibitor and facilitator was also assigned a number, and each participant a letter of the alphabet. For example: Case 1, Facilitator (F-1), Teacher (T), Case 1, Inhibitor (I-1), Teacher (T). Any comments that were not related specifically to an inhibitor or a facilitator were coded as "other" and received a case number and letter for the participant. After a third reading of the transcripts, the researcher began to group the comments into three broad categories by cases. The categories included inhibitors, facilitators and other. These categories were used because of their direct correlation with the research question. The researcher used large post-it paper to organize the data. After

this process, the researcher gathered the facilitators, inhibitors and other comments for each case by participants and made three long lists. Next, the researcher analyzed reoccurring themes within the three broad topics identifying sub-themes in each of the broader themes. After the three categories were established, additional category construction began, as outlined by Merriman (1998) to further reflect the purpose of the research and to provide answers to the research question. For example, among the inhibitors, a sub-theme emerged that parents did not know what to expect regarding the services their child would be receiving in early childhood special education (Part B). The remainder of the chapter includes the findings of the study in the following format: introduction of the overall themes, summary of each case, and a cross case analysis to illustrate the themes.

## Findings

### *Introduction of themes*

Developing the practices associated with transition mandates have been left to the discretion of states and many times local education agencies (school divisions). When the practices are not known or clearly articulated, problems can occur in the transition process. Likewise, when practices are known and clearly articulated, problems can be diminished within the transition process. This research sought to answer the following question: What are the inhibitors and the facilitators in creating a successful transition process as identified by parents, school administrators, service coordinators and special education teachers? Table 4 includes the findings of the study as they relate to the research question.

Table 4  
Major Categories from Interviews

Inhibitors	Facilitators
<p><i>Concerns about services</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Eligibility requirement to receive services in early childhood special education</li> <li>• Dismissal requirements</li> <li>• Transportation services</li> </ul>	<p><i>Meaningful involvement and communication</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Questions answered during and after meetings</li> <li>• Level of involvement of the service coordinator</li> <li>• Level of involvement of the parents</li> <li>• Timely exchange of information</li> </ul>
<p><i>Confusion about meetings</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Types of meetings</li> <li>• Purpose of meetings</li> </ul>	<p><i>Having enough information to make decisions</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explanation of various settings</li> <li>• Opportunities for parents and children to visit the preschool</li> </ul>
<p><i>Lack of information</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Residency issues</li> <li>• Choices in preschools</li> </ul>	

## Summary of Cases

The following summaries have been included to give a brief introduction and some background for each of the three cases. To assure anonymity, the children were given pseudonyms by the researcher. The perceptions of the participants in the study will be referred to by these assigned names, not their real ones. In addition, the other participants in the case were referred to by their titles and the child's assigned name. For example, the administrator in Trey's Case or the teacher in Lewis' Case.

### Mary's Story

Mary was referred to her local school division by the service coordinator from early intervention, when it was time for her to transition from early intervention. At the time of the referral, her mother's main concerns were her lack of language skills, lack of physical mobility skills, and lack of socialization skills. Mary was diagnosed with leukemia and Down's Syndrome at birth. Throughout her first years of life, she received speech, physical and occupational therapies. Mary's early intervention services were provided in the home setting. When Mary was found eligible to receive services under Part B, the IEP Team determined that her needs would be best met in a class with other students with special needs and typically developing peers. She was also found eligible to receive speech, physical and occupational therapies.

### Trey's Story

Trey was referred to the school division by the service coordinator when it was time for him to transition from early intervention. At the time of the referral, his parents were concerned that he was not speaking and playing with toys at the same rate as some of his peers. At birth, he was diagnosed with Norrie Syndrome, an inherited

nerodevelopmental disorder, and congenital blindness. In early intervention, he received occupational and physical therapy, as well as orientation and mobility services. Trey received early intervention services in the state of North Carolina before transitioning to preschool services in the state of Virginia. In North Carolina, his early intervention services were provided in the home and center-based settings. The transition from early intervention to preschool was slightly different from the normal transition because of moving to a new state. Upon meeting eligibility requirements for Part C, the Individual Education Program (IEP) determined that Trey's needs would be met in a classroom with other students with special needs, as well as typically developing peers. He also received occupational and physical therapies.

#### Lewis' Story

Lewis was referred to the school division by the service coordinator from early intervention, as a part of the transition process. At the time of the referral, the parents were concerned about their son's communication skills. They were concerned that he did not talk with his siblings. He received speech services in early intervention. His services were received in a center based setting. Upon meeting eligibility requirements for Part C, the IEP determined that Trey's needs would be met in a classroom with other students with special needs, as well as typically developing peers. He also received occupational and physical therapies.

#### Cross Case Analysis

Although teachers, administrators, and service coordinators were interviewed as a part of this study, most of the information came from parents. However, the researcher sought to determine what helped and interfered with the process through the eyes of all

participants, since their participation is mandated by state and federal laws. In this section, common themes across cases are presented. As previously mentioned, for the purpose of organization for the reader, the children were assigned pseudonyms and others in the case were discussed by their assigned roles.

### Inhibitors to Transition

#### *Concerns about services*

*“We make sure they know that there are different requirements for eligibility. This is what trips most parents up the most, because they may qualify for speech in early intervention, but not at the school level. The members of the evaluation team even have to help us sometime.” ~Administrator in Mary’s Case*

Parents of children with special needs display a range of concerns when it comes to making decisions regarding their children. When a child is born with a disability or when a disability is later diagnosed, children and families will come in contact with many professionals surrounding the services that will be provided. The professionals providing services are governed by policies and procedures that are not commonly known to parents. Parents rely on the professionals to share the policies and explain them, if needed. They also rely on the professionals to be truthful and let them know what to expect during the transition process. In this study, the need for clarification of different policies and procedures surrounding the transition process raised several concerns about the services their child would be receiving. Parents were concerned about (a) eligibility requirements to receive services in early childhood special education, (b) dismissal requirements from special education related services, (c) transportation services.

Mary's mother was extremely unhappy with the way her concerns were addressed with regards to the lack of proper equipment on the bus for her child. She realized on the day that her child was picked up for the first time that the car seat they had chosen was not going to fit her daughter. She was told by the bus driver it was the best they could do for now, but that the situation would be corrected before they brought her home in the afternoon. The situation was not corrected in the afternoon or by the next school day. This situation left Mary's mother with no other recourse but to call the transportation director. She did not receive what she felt was a timely response. "I called the director of transportation and tried to follow the chain of command. No one called me back. It seemed like no one cared." The parent ended up calling the supervisor of special education to have the issue resolved. According to *Regulations Governing Special Education Programs in Virginia (2002)*, the local education agency (LEA) should have provided accommodations or modifications according to the child's IEP for transportation.

Lewis' father was also concerned about transportation. His frustration was equally shared by the teacher in this case, who tried to remedy the situation. The issue involved who was responsible for putting the child on and off the bus from daycare. The local school division was providing the transportation for the child on the bus and provided an aide to assist. The daycare provider wanted the bus aide to come into the daycare center in the morning to get the child and put him on the bus and bring the child into the daycare center in the afternoon. According to the teacher in Lewis' case, this was against the local division policy, so the daycare provider was instructed to have a staff member from the daycare center put the child on and off the bus. The daycare provider refused, thus

placing the parent in the middle of a dispute. Because of the dispute, the child was brought back to school in the afternoon, because no one would take the child off the bus. This resulted in the parent having to leave work to get his child and take him to daycare. While this situation did not directly affect the special education services that the child was receiving, it was information that should have been conveyed to the parent, to facilitate a smoother transition.

Equally, not knowing what to expect regarding dismissal from services should have been conveyed to Mary's mother. Mary's mother reported that during early intervention the therapist attempted to dismiss Mary from services before she had met various criteria. The parent remarked, "The therapist kept talking about her graduating from therapy because of her progress, but she did not give me information about her progress...so I read the rights myself." Not knowing what to expect regarding the dismissal from physical therapy resulted in this parent being concerned about the entire eligibility process for services in early childhood special education. Trey's mother expressed concern about keeping the same services in the school setting that he had in early intervention. The administrators, working with Mary and Trey expressed concern about the criteria for eligibility for early intervention versus preschool. "I was confused when they started talking about the medical model versus the educational model," said the administrator in Trey's case.

"We make sure they know that there are different requirements for eligibility.

This is what trips most parents up the most, because they may qualify for speech in early intervention, but not at the school level. The members of the evaluation team even have to help us sometimes," said the administrator in Mary's case.

Mary's mother recalled wanting to know the difference in the medical and educational models for speech services. "I was told that there were different criteria for whether my child would have speech in preschool," she said. The service coordinator in Trey's case indicated that explaining the differences in eligibility was one of the hardest parts of her job. "Parents just don't understand why their child can't have the same type of services in preschool if they need them...it took me awhile to understand it too," she commented.

*Confusion about meetings*

*"I would encourage them to make some changes to make sure parents are informed better about meetings." ~Parent in Trey's case*

There are many meetings that take place during the transition process. According to IDEA, at least three formal meetings are required to facilitate the transition process. They include the transition conference, sometimes known as the child study meeting; the eligibility meeting; and the IEP Meeting.

According to Trey's mother, not knowing the types of meetings and who would be in attendance left her feeling unprepared. "I wish I had known more about the different meetings we were expected to attend. I was told it was called one thing and then something else. I was sitting at the head of the table with people I did not know, I felt like I was on display," said Trey's mother. "I would encourage them to make some changes to make sure parents are informed better about meetings," she added. Mary and Lewis' parents, felt prepared about what would take place in meetings, but they did not realize there were so many meetings. "I wished that we could have one big meeting and get everything straight at one time. It was hard to get off work," commented Lewis' mother. Mary's mother remarked, "It was hard for me to find someone to keep my daughter for

the eligibility meeting ‘cause I just brought her to child study with me, so I just brought her with me again.”

The service coordinators in each case noted that they had informed their parents about the meetings and what to expect. (The service coordinators in each case also attended the first meeting at the school with the parents.) However, the service coordinator in Trey’s case stated, “I know it is hard to keep up with for parents. It took me a while to catch on. I try to use short phrases to help them understand.”

*Needing more information to make decisions*

*“Once that was all completed, things were great, but that was a process that could have been avoided if I had gotten the right information, the first time.”*

*~Parent in Trey’s Case*

As previously mentioned, parents rely on the professionals working with their child to be truthful and to follow policies and procedures related to the transition process. Often, professionals involved in the process assume that parents or other professionals involved have the necessary information. Two themes emerged regarding the need for more information to make decisions. The themes included residency issues and choices in preschool programs. Trey’s mother experienced problems with regard to what services could be provided due to residency issues. She stated, “Originally, I was told that he could have services at the early intervention services at the early intervention center in Virginia even though I lived in North Carolina, but it was okay since I worked in Virginia. I stopped some of the services in North Carolina, only to find out that my son had to have a Virginia address.” Due to this misinformation, her son had a lapse in

services. She ended up giving partial custody to her parents, so that he could receive services in the state of Virginia where she worked. “Once that was all completed, things were great, but that was a process that could have been avoided if I had gotten the right information, the first time,” said Trey’s mother.

The administrator in Trey’s Case recalled the issue of residency. “They lived in North Carolina, but the mother worked in Virginia. When they came to child study,...I wasn’t sure what he was eligible to receive or if we should be meeting, but I got the referral from the service coordinator in Virginia.”

Mary’s mother expressed concern about the choices that were available for her child in preschool. She was concerned about how services would change after early intervention. “I wanted to make sure that my child would have the therapies by herself, and I was told that it would be done across something called multiple settings,” she said. She was confused about the term “multiple settings,” although it was clarified by the teacher when they met for the IEP Meeting. The teacher in Mary’s Case recalled having to define many of the terms in the IEP for the mother. “I even went to the house to explain things before the meeting (IEP).”

The father and service coordinator in Lewis’ case shared similar concerns regarding the placement choices that were available for Lewis. They both realized that the child would benefit from being in a language-rich environment, but due to the time of the year when eligibility took place, the parent could not visit any classrooms before a placement decision was made. Therefore, they had to rely on the other members of the IEP Team to make the decision based their personal knowledge of the setting and Lewis.

However, the service coordinator in Mary's case stated that even when visits are possible "remembering which school has which classes can be confusing."

### Facilitators to Transition

#### *Meaningful Involvement and Communication*

*I talked to the service coordinator in Virginia to make sure she had received everything to make the transition as smooth as possible. ~Service Coordinator in Trey's Case*

Ensuring that parents are involved in the transition process is required in federal and state special education laws. However, the level of involvement is often left to interpretation by professionals. This is equally true of the involvement of the professionals. Being able to make the right decisions depends on the level of communication and involvement of all of the participants. Parents reported that the following factors contributed to meaningful involvement and communication during the transition process: (1) questions answered during and after the meetings; (2) high level of involvement of the service coordinator during the transition process; (3) high level of involvement of the parents during the transition process and (4) timely exchange of information.

"I did not always know the questions to ask, but when I did, the principal could answer them. She was so helpful," said Mary's mother. Mary's mother found the conversations she had with the principal of the school and the service coordinator to be very helpful during the transition. She commented that as they talked they did not use "educational words" so she could not understand. While the preschool settings were limited in the school division, she felt like the best choice was being discussed at the

meetings. “The service coordinator helped me a lot too, by coming to the meetings with me,” she added.

Lewis’ dad expressed how detailed information was explained at the school level. “The communication with the school was much better than with early intervention when it came to things I thought that really mattered,” he said. He commented that the evaluation process was explained to him by the administrator at the meeting at the school, and she even called him to see if he had more questions after the meeting. The administrator in Lewis’ Case recalled explaining the details of the timeline for eligibility and the writing of the IEP. “We talked at length about the timeline because I wanted Mr. \_\_\_\_ to fully understand the timelines”, said the administrator in Lewis’ Case. The service coordinator also attended the meetings with Lewis’ dad, but he did not note any additional help she provided to him.

Trey’s mother’s experiences with timely information to make decisions during the transition process came from the relationship she developed with the teacher. By working with the teacher, she was able ask and get answers to questions to prepare Trey for school. “His visual impairment made me question more things,” she commented. She said she was also prepared for his placement because the teacher explained the options to her. “After all the meetings, I would ask her if she had any specific questions that were not addressed,” said the teacher in Trey’s Case.

Trey’s case was quite involved due to the residency issues and his disability. His mother indicated that throughout the transition she felt like a “true partner” in the process. “We talked about how he would master certain goals and how I could help at

home,” she commented. She also stated that she was often asked if she had questions during meetings.

Mary’s mother was grateful for the continued involvement of the service coordinator “once things got started.” The service coordinator made sure she had a copy of the condensed version of the special education handbook before the child study meeting. “I don’t like for my parents to be exposed to the special education handbook for the first time at the meeting,” said the service coordinator in Mary’s case.

All three parents commented on the organization of the school personnel and how all the information about their child was “at the meeting.” I was told that the service coordinator would forward the reports to the school, and they did,” said Mary’s mother. “I keep a copy of everything, but they already had it,” commented Trey’s mother. Mary’s mother also commented on the information that was in reports done by the evaluation team at the school. “The social worker’s report was very good, it sounded just like us,” said Mary’s mother.

The administrators in each case also identified the exchange of information as a strength while working with each family. The school staff received the appropriate reports to prepare for the meetings with the families. The administrator in Trey’s case said the service coordinator sent more than one copy of many reports.

*Having enough information to make decisions*

*She took us to the buses and showed us the class. She made me feel like a true partner.*

*~Trey’s Mother*

Parents have to make lots of decisions during the transition process. These decisions range from making a decision regarding an evaluation to choosing a preschool

placement. Factors that contributed to parents feeling like they had enough information to make decisions included: (1) explanation of various settings in preschool, and (2) opportunities for parents and children to visit the classroom and bus prior to the first day of school

Trey's mother was the only parent who said that knowledge of the placement options helped during the transition process. However, the service coordinators indicated that the school division usually keeps them well informed of placement options, so they could share this information with the families. "The school personnel invited me in to see different classrooms?" said the service coordinator in Lewis' case. "This helped me to help the parents. Things change from year to year, so I would make contact with the schools about options, plus I needed to know where to send the referrals," commented the service coordinator in Mary's case.

Trey's mother was very excited about the opportunity she and her son had to visit the bus he would be riding to school. They also had an opportunity to meet the bus driver and visit the classroom. This was especially important for her son because he is blind. He was able to hear the voice of the bus driver and the teacher. Trey's mother was also pleased that the teacher went to visit him at his preschool before he started school. "I gave the daycare permission for her to go and to talk to her about Trey," she said. "This helped them to get familiar with each other.... She did not have to do this," she commented.

Lewis' father was also impressed that he and his son were allowed to visit the classroom. During the transition process, Lewis' father was also given a guide with a list of things he could do to work with his son to prepare him for preschool. "The paper

outlined things like what we should continue to work on...recognizing his name,” he said. Lewis’ father also commented on how he got to know the people who were conducting the evaluations. “I liked that they gave me a list of people and the evaluations they would be doing and their phone numbers, in case I had questions,” he commented.

Mary’s mother was impressed by the visit the teacher made to her home during the evaluation process. “The teacher asked me if she could come to see how Mary interacted with me and other people at home,” commented Mary’s mother. She said that this would help in creating goals and objectives for her.

### Chapter Summary

As previously mentioned, developing the practices associated with transition mandates have been left to the discretion of states and many times local education agencies (school divisions). When the practices are not known or clearly articulated, problems can occur in the transition process. It was evident that the degree of involvement and exchange of information on the part of the professionals varied. It most be noted that in each case one or two participants from the school system contributed greatly to the transition process. For example, the teacher in Trey’s case seemed to provide the bulk of the information to the parent during the process, and in the other cases it was the service coordinator.

Although transitions are unique experiences for children and their families, there are many common factors that can inhibit or facilitate the transition for them. The interviews revealed that there is still a need to revisit those issues that are considered facilitators and decrease those that are identified as inhibitors. The next chapter will include a discussion of what this research adds to the current body of literature.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The reauthorization of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 2004 included amendments intended to ensure successful transitions from early intervention to early childhood special education. The purpose of this study was to better understand the facilitators and inhibitors related to the transitions from early intervention to early childhood special education, through the eyes of all stakeholders involved in the transition process. The stakeholders included parents, teachers, service coordinators and school administrators. Previous studies have only examined the views of parents with regards to the transition process. A few studies have explored the views of service coordinators and teachers. However, no studies have been found to collectively explore the perceptions of parents, service coordinators, teachers and school administrators involved in the process of an individual student. This study contributed to the current literature by providing a clear context in the format of case study research. By studying the perceptions of the participants the researcher was able to gather data based on the specific context of each case. For example, data in each case was given to the researcher based on personal experiences and feelings as it related to the transition process. The remainder of this chapter will describe conclusions across these findings and relate these to previous research. Following this discussion, implications and recommendations for practitioners are described.

Parents in this study wanted to ensure that their child's needs would be met in preschool. The needs ranged from transportation needs to a related service of speech

therapy. Ensuring that their children's needs are met is critical to parents. After all, these are students under the age of five with special needs. They are not able to advocate for themselves. These are also parents who were accustomed to their child receiving services at home or at a local center. Now they will be going to "big school." So when a parent is told that their child may or may be eligible to receive a service (such as speech therapy) without explanation, the parent is concerned. The existing literature supports the need for parents to be more informed, so that their child's needs may be met. Hanline (1988) reported over fifty percent of parents indicated that they were not informed about the differences in eligibility in early intervention and preschool. This information is extremely critical because parents of children with special needs rely on professionals to tell them what to expect. They expect them to have their child's best interest at heart. Creating a sense of collaboration and coordination with all participants, so parents know what to expect has been identified as the vehicle that is necessary in the transition process (Harbin & McNulty, 1990; Hanson, et. al, 2000; Loving & Haring, 2003).

Even when collaboration and coordination were working well, there were unexpected things that occurred during the transition process. For example, questions such as who was going to be responsible for taking a child off the bus when they traveled to and from daycare and issues of residency were of concern to parents in this study. These unforeseen problems did not fit neatly into the three mandates regarding the transition process that are defined in IDEA 2004. This means that professionals working with parents need to anticipate challenges and questions that are not necessarily part of the standard transition process.

Several researchers have noted the importance of considering transition as a process and not an event (Hanson, 2000; Lovett & Haring, 2003; Soodak & Erwin, 2000). When the participants view the transition as a process, the focus is on the family and not just completing paper work. This means that parents concerns will need to be addressed and time needs to be made for these during meetings. When the focus is on the family, the school administrators and service-providers can work on building rapport. The literature supports that building rapport increased the comfort level during the transition and participation in meetings (Dinnebeil & Rule, 1994).

While building rapport may increase the comfort level during meetings, it must be noted that even though parents attend meetings, they may not be comfortable, and they may not understand the process. Previous studies, as well as this study, noted that parents often feel uneasy in meetings because of the number of people seated around the table, coupled with their lack of education or knowledge (Hanline, 1998). Parents may nod and smile, but this should not be used as an indicator for understanding. This study suggested, like others (Lovett & Haring, 2003; Turbull et al., 2006; Hanline 1988), that parents are first and foremost confused about the types of meetings and the focus of the meetings.

Providing timely and correct information during the process is necessary for success. It can be frustrating to parents when they are given two different answers to the same question or are told, "I meant to tell you that at the other meeting." All information relevant to making a decision for their child needs to be presented in a timely fashion and with as much accuracy as possible. Professionals working with families during this process must remember that this is their first encounter with public schools and that first impressions are lasting ones. The transition team should take this opportunity to get the

parents on their team, so that student achievement can be maximized. Prior research also emphasizes the importance of timely and correct information in preparation for meetings (Hanson, 2000; Hanline, 1998).

Visiting the receiving school and having an opportunity to interact with the teacher and bus driver helped parents feel more comfortable with the process. As previously mentioned, many of the children received their early intervention services within the home or a center-based setting. For many of them, it is their first experience with riding the school bus. Visiting the classroom also gives the parents a concrete idea about what the setting is like, which contributes to their comfort level with the transition. Previous literature supports this finding and further concludes that an initial visit to assist in program placement would be helpful in creating successful transitions (Hanline, 1998; Lovett & Haring, 2003). However, some professionals do not like for parents to visit various placements, because it could be viewed as “shopping around” for a class. Also many administrators are cautious and would like to protect the privacy of other students in the class. However, all parties need to understand that this is a process and that often many things can be learned from a visit that cannot be learned in any other way.

Weak collaboration sometimes exists between the administrators and service coordinators. Both of these individuals have an important influence over the transition process. The job of the service coordinator is to ensure that information is timely and accurate when sending it to the receiving school. It is also the job of the service coordinator to bridge any gaps of information that the parent may have. Often, the gaps occur because incorrect information is given by the service coordinator. If the service coordinator does not get necessary and accurate information from the receiving school's

administrator, he or she cannot convey it to the parents. This means the service coordinator has to keep abreast of programs and procedures at various schools, and administrators and service coordinators must work closely together. According to Harbin et al. 2004, the service coordinator caseload made it impossible for collaboration to occur in each case. However, the number of students on the caseload of the service coordinators in this study was not an issue.

The required components of the transition process were followed in each of the three cases in this study. The participants made sure that some level of communication took place to ensure that the guidelines outlined in IDEA were being followed. This means that participants understood the basic governing requirements for transition. This is how Harbin and McNulty (1990) defined policies. For the purpose of this research, the policies would be the mandates governing the transition process in IDEA. Attention to policies is just one of the six dimensions identified by Harbin and McNulty (1990). The others include: climate, resources, people, process, and agencies. Comparing what we know from previous research, this study included varying degrees of attention to these other five dimensions. I feel that this was due to the absence of clear roles and responsibilities of the participants.

Like other studies (Harbin, et. al, 2000; Rous and Meyers, 2006; Wischnowski, 2000), there were no clear roles and responsibilities for the professionals involved in the process. Often, roles and responsibilities are defined in the development of agreements among agencies and the local school division. These agreements help to ensure that everyone is aware of the roles and responsibilities during the transition process. The agreements also help to ensure that both program and administrative needs can be met

while maintaining the primary focus of the needs of the children and their families (Lazzari,1991). However, unlike other studies the absence of defined roles and responsibilities did not fully inhibit the transition process. In each case, a different individual from the school division performed the role of providing necessary tasks and information. In Mary's Case the supervisor of special education, not even a transition participant, provided information to solve a problem related to transportation services. In Trey's case, the teacher provided information about the goals and objectives of the IEP. In Lewis' case the administrator followed up with the father to make sure he understood the timelines of the process.

#### Recommendations

Schools should identify typical problems that occur during transitions and develop procedures for addressing these problems (Smith, Gartin, Murdick & Hilton, 2006, p.226). Professionals must not forget that many of the problems may not stem from the mandates not being followed, but may because of specific needs of the child and/or the parent. Local education agencies can improve the transition process by evaluating the process and attending to participants' perspectives on the process. Below are several recommendations that evolved from this study.

Ensuring that parents are informed about the services their child will be receiving and that accurate information is given should not be the responsibility of one person. Within each locality, participants in the transition process need to meet to ensure that all roles and responsibilities are clearly defined. The meeting times should not be limited to the school year because many students transition during the summer because of their birthday. During the meetings agreements should be developed and reviewed. The

agreements should contain a checklist or chart and timelines that outline roles and responsibilities for each individual on the team. The size of the locality would determine the number of people who would need to attend. In each locality; however, a representative from each sending agency should attend. This information would be used as a guide in the locality for each transition.

Ensuring that parents are not confused about the types and purpose of various meetings should be the initial responsibility of the service coordinator, followed by the administrator. Information regarding the types and purposes of meetings should be provided to the parent when the referral is made to the local school division. The service coordinator should provide the parent with information in layman's terms to describe the progression of events. This same information should be articulated by the administrator in the initial meeting at the school. An agenda for each meeting would be helpful for parents to guide the discussions in each meeting. The agenda should include the topics to be covered as well as the participants, their roles and contact information.

Ensuring that the transition process contains meaningful involvement and communication should be the priority of all members of the transition process. Specifically, service coordinators and administrators should take time to talk to parents while waiting for meetings. They should also make sure they are invited to ask questions and share concerns during meetings. Service coordinators and administrators should also and make phone calls to check on the families at various times during the process.

Ensuring that the parents have enough information to make decisions should be the responsibility of the service coordinator and the administrator. Parents should be given information about various settings available for their child. Parents should also be

afforded the opportunity to visit possible placements for their child, so they may participate in the decision making during the IEP Meeting. These visits, however, should only be conducted with a service coordinator or an administrator who is knowledgeable about the child and the placements. This type of visit should be arranged, so that the parents would have someone to ask questions of and to narrate the visit.

### Further Research

This study was conducted because of the increased emphasis on ensuring that families and children experience a smooth transition from early intervention to early childhood special education. It was also conducted due to the lack of research available that focused on the perceptions of each participant involved in the transition process. Most the literature focused only on the perceptions of parents. There was limited research that addressed the perceptions of service coordinators and none that involved the teachers or administrators. In addition, there was no empirical research found that focused on the transition process on a local level.

This case study model provided the opportunity to address the perceptions of all participants based on their individual experiences. It must be noted that the data collected should be viewed within this context, thus creating the need for additional study. The following recommendations warrant further study.

This study needs to be duplicated in other localities and with larger samples to gain additional information from the perspectives of multiple participants in the transition process. Participants in the transition process should use the information to help them

understand the family's individual strengths and needs to design interventions accordingly.

This study might be replicated using alternative methodologies, such as focus groups, to increase the opportunity for dialogue among the various participants. As participants listen to others' responses, it may jog their memory about other information that should be shared. Equally, it may allow for areas of concern to be addressed that are not directly related mandates governing the transition process and difficult to express. For example, feelings of trust and intimidation in meetings may be surface in focus groups.

A written survey should be developed to determine all school participants' knowledge of special education rules and regulations with regards to the transition process. This survey should be administered to help identify areas of confusion and/or misinterpretations that exist among the participants in the process.

Finally, this study should be duplicated to include observations of IEP, child study or eligibility meetings to gain additional knowledge with regards to the collaborative process. The need for effective collaboration is evident when working with students with special needs and is important for overall student success. The process of collaboration should entail two-way communication with parents and the professionals. After all, in most circumstances the professionals have the majority of the information needed to facilitate meetings. Reexamining how parents are true partners in the process would make them more aware of information and facilitate trust.

## Summary

Although it is clear that change in the transition process can be legislated by Congress, real and lasting changes in practice are controlled by those who implement the policies. Therefore, the information gained from this study coupled with additional information from future studies would provide insight that would be helpful for educators and practitioners to examine current practices as they relate collaboration within the transition process. This would mean that professionals would have to develop new thinking and procedures that would help all team members to understand and participate in the process.

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## Appendix A

### Transition from early intervention to early childhood special education: Case studies Interview Questions for Caregivers

*(The statements/questions in italics are probes to be used by the interviewer.)*

#### Interview Questions for the first interview...

1. First tell me about your family and \_\_\_\_\_.
2. Tell me everything that you remember about \_\_\_\_\_'s transition from early intervention to early childhood special education.

#### Interview Questions for the second interview will include the following questions with probes, as dictated by the information from the first interview.

3. In the first interview, you mentioned \_\_\_\_\_, tell me more about...
4. Tell me what things did you find to be helpful to you during the transition process?
  - a. *Tell me more about...*
  - b. *What types of things did professionals help you with during the transition process?*
5. Tell me what you found confusing (not helpful) during the transition process?
  - a. *Tell me more about...*
  - b. *Were there any differences in early intervention and early childhood special education that were of concern to you?*
6. Tell me about any meetings that were held during the transition process.
  - a. *Were you invited to a meeting called a transition conference or child study meeting?*
    - i. *Who attended the meeting?*
    - ii. *What happened during the meeting?*
    - iii. *How did you feel about the meeting?*
7. In what ways were you made to feel like a "true member" of the team in making decisions in the transition process?
  - a. *Tell me more about...*
8. Did you have an opportunity to visit the receiving school?
  - a. *Tell me about your visit*
9. What are some ideas that you feel would be helpful to other parents going through the transition process?
  - a. *Tell me more about...*

#### *Additional Probes:*

*Tell me more about...*

*Can you explain...?*

*What do you mean by...?*

*Can you give me an example of what you meant by...?*

### Teacher/Administrator Interview Questions

*(The statements/questions in italics are probes to be used by the interviewer.)*

#### Interview Questions for the first interview...

1. Tell me everything that you remember about \_\_\_\_\_'s transition from early intervention to early childhood special education.

#### Interview Questions for the second interview will include the following questions with probes, as dictated by the information from the first interview.

1. In the first interview, you mentioned \_\_\_\_\_, tell me more about...
2. Tell me about any meetings that were held for \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. *Were you invited to a meeting called a transition conference or child study meeting?*
    - i. *Who attended the meeting?*
    - ii. *What happened during the meeting?*
    - iii. *How did you feel about the meeting?*
3. Tell me how \_\_\_\_\_ was a part of the team during meetings?
  - a. *Tell me more about...*
  - b. *Did \_\_\_\_\_'s family/parent visit the school?*
4. Tell me what you as a teacher/administrator found confusing during the transition process?
  - a. *Tell me more about...*
5. What are some ideas that you feel would be helpful to other parents going through the transition process?
  - a. *Tell me more about...*
6. What additional information do you think would be helpful to your role in the transition process?

#### *Additional Probes:*

*Tell me more about...*

*Can you explain...?*

*What do you mean by...?*

*Can you give me an example of what you meant by...?*

### Service Coordinators Interview Questions

*(The statements/questions in italics are probes to be used by the interviewer.)*

#### Interview Questions for the first interview...

1. Tell me everything that you remember about \_\_\_\_\_'s transition from early intervention to early childhood special education.

#### Interview Questions for the second interview will include the following questions with probes, as dictated by the information from the first interview.

1. In the first interview, you mentioned \_\_\_\_\_, tell me more about...
2. Tell me about any meetings that were held for \_\_\_\_\_.
  - a. *Who attended the meeting?*
  - b. *What happened during the meeting?*
  - c. *How did you feel about the meeting?*
3. Tell me how \_\_\_\_\_ was a part of the team during meetings?
  - a. *Tell me more about...*
  - b. *Did \_\_\_\_\_'s family/parent visit the school?*
4. Tell me what "you" as a service coordinator found confusing during the transition process?
  - a. *Tell me more about...*
5. What are some ideas that you feel would be helpful to other parents going through the transition process?
  - a. *Tell me more about...*
6. What additional information do you think would be helpful to your role in the transition process?

#### *Additional Probes:*

*Tell me more about...*

*Can you explain...?*

*What do you mean by...?*

*Can you give me an example of what you meant by...?*

## Appendix B

**Veleka Gatling**

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**From:** Paula\_Hoover@scos.k12.fl.us  
**Sent:** Monday, July 24, 2006 7:57 AM  
**To:** Veleka Gatling  
**Subject:** Re:Permission to adapt interview guide

**Hi there,**

**I just started back to work today. Yes, you have my permission to adapt the interview guide. Hope the summer institute is going well at Tcch.**

**Thanks, Paula**

## Appendix C

**Veleka Gatling**

---

**Sent:** Thursday, July 27, 2006 12:14 PM  
**To:** Veleka Gatling  
**Subject:** Re: Permission needed

Veleka,

You are welcome to use the survey and we thank you for letting us know of your intention. You do not need to do anything else. I have noted your request. Please just be sure that reproductions of the survey are identified as "Developed by the Early Childhood Outcomes Center with support from the Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education." Also, we are currently in the process of validating the survey, however, please know that if you are making substantive changes to the surveys, the psychometric properties, when we get them, may not be accurate for your adapted versions.

Courtney Valdes

Social Research Assistant

The Early Childhood Outcomes Center

Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute The University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill

On Wed, 26 Jul 2006 10:23 , 'Veleka Gatling' <[velgatling@spsk12.net](mailto:velgatling@spsk12.net)> sent:

>To Whom It May Concern,

>My name is Veleka Gatling. I am a doctoral student at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg, Virginia. I am conducting a study on the perceptions of mothers regarding the transition process from Part C to Part B.

>I am writing to request permission to use and adapt the Family Outcomes Survey for Parts B and C for use in my study. If you need any additional information, please let me know.

>Thank you in advance for your consideration of this request.

>

>Veleka Gatling

## Appendix D

### VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY **Informed Consent for Participants in Research Projects Involving Human Subjects**

Title of Project: The Transition from Early Intervention to Early Childhood Special Education

Programming: Case Studies

Investigator(s): Veleka S. Gatling

#### **I. Purpose of this Research/Project**

You, as a participant in the transition process of early intervention to early childhood special education, are invited to participate in a study which will provide you an opportunity to share your experiences about the transition process. The primary purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the ways all participants, including parents and caregivers, administrators, and teachers, perceive this transition process. This study will involve approximately 12 participants.

#### **II. Procedures**

The procedure in this study will include in-depth interviewing and document reviews. The following documents will be included in this study: (1) minutes from the eligibility meeting, in which the child was found eligible to receive special education services in an early childhood education setting and (2) a copy of the families' Individual Family Service Plan (IFSP) from early intervention services. You will be asked to be available for up to two interviews. The anticipated time for the first interview is 1 to 2 hours. A second interview will consist of a follow-up phone call to clarify information and ask some focused follow-up questions. The anticipated time for second interview is approximately 30 minutes. This research will take place at a convenient time and place for you.

#### **III. Risks**

It is possible that you might become uncomfortable at times discussing the issue of transition for the child with disabilities. If at any time you want to discontinue the interview or withdraw from this study, please indicate that to me. If at anytime you feel that your discomfort may necessitate the services of a counselor, I can refer you to a licensed professional at your expense.

#### **IV. Benefits**

Your participation in this study will provide information to other parents and professionals, both in early intervention and the school system, about the transition process for children with disabilities. No guarantee has been made to encourage you to participate in this study. Discussing the issues of transition may help us better understand how to provide a smoother transition for students with disabilities and improve the process of transition. If you are interested and at your request, you may contact me at a later time for a summary of the results of the study.

#### **V. Extent of Anonymity and Confidentiality**

All responses made by you as a participant in this study will be kept strictly confidential. Your child's current program will not be affected. At no time will the researcher release the results of the study to anyone other than the individuals working on the project without your written consent. The information that you provide will be coded with different names in both the transcripts and any other reports. The interviews will be audiotaped to gain an accurate account of the discussion.

The tapes and any written documents will be kept in a locked file cabinet and accessible only to Veleka S. Gatling and the chair of the graduate committee. The tapes and written documents will be destroyed after the study.

#### **VI. Compensation**

You, as a participant will not be compensated for your time.

**VII. Freedom to Withdraw**

You are free to withdraw from this study at any time without penalty. You are also free not to answer any questions you choose not to answer.

**VIII. Approval of Research**

This study has been reviewed by the Institutional Review Board at Virginia Tech and a representative from Suffolk Public Schools.

**IX. Subject's Responsibilities**

I voluntarily agree to participate in this study. The following responsibilities are to meet with Veleka S. Gatling at least once at a convenient time and place and to participate in a follow-up telephone interview. If I am unable to keep my appointments with Veleka, I will call her. I have read the Consent Form and conditions of this project. I have had all my questions answered. I hereby acknowledge the above and give my voluntary consent:

\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Subject signature

\_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_  
Witness (Optional except for certain classes of subjects)

Should I have any pertinent questions about this research or its conduct, and research subjects' rights, and whom to contact in the event of a research-related injury to the subject, I may contact:

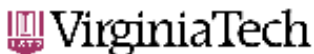
\_\_\_\_\_  
Investigator(s) Telephone/e-mail  
Veleka S. Gatling [vgatling@vt.edu](mailto:vgatling@vt.edu) (757)538-0470

Chair, Virginia Tech Institutional Review  
Board for the Protection of Human Subjects  
David M. Moore 540-231-4991/[moored@vt.edu](mailto:moored@vt.edu)  
Office of Research Compliance  
1880 Pratt Drive, Suite 2006 (0497)  
Blacksburg, VA 24061

Dr. Bonnie Billingsley  
[billingsley@vt.edu](mailto:billingsley@vt.edu) (540 231-8335)  
Faculty Advisor Telephone/e-mail

**[NOTE: Subjects must be given a complete copy (or duplicate original) of the signed Informed Consent.]**

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VirginiaTech

Office of Research Compliance  
 Institutional Review Board  
 2000 Kraft Drive, Suite 2000 (0497)  
 Blacksburg, Virginia 24061  
 540/231-4991 Fax 540/231-0959  
 e-mail moored@vt.edu  
 www.irb.vt.edu


PWA0000572( expires 1/20/2010)  
 IRB # is IRB0000667

DATE: April 7, 2008

MEMORANDUM

TO: Bonnie S. Billingsley  
 Veleka Gatling

Approval date: 4/7/2008  
 Continuing Review Due Date: 3/23/2009  
 Expiration Date: 4/8/2009

FROM: David M. Moore 

SUBJECT: IRB Expedited Approval: "The Transition From Early Intervention to Early  
 Childhood Special Education Programming: Case Studies", IRB # 08-129

This memo is regarding the above-mentioned protocol. The proposed research is eligible for expedited review according to the specifications authorized by 45 CFR 46.110 and 21 CFR 56.110. As Chair of the Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board, I have granted approval to the study for a period of 12 months, effective April 7, 2008.

As an investigator of human subjects, your responsibilities include the following:

1. Report promptly proposed changes in previously approved human subject research activities to the IRB, including changes to your study forms, procedures and investigators, regardless of how minor. The proposed changes must not be initiated without IRB review and approval, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.
2. Report promptly to the IRB any injuries or other unanticipated or adverse events involving risks or harms to human research subjects or others.
3. Report promptly to the IRB of the study's closing (i.e., data collecting and data analysis complete at Virginia Tech). If the study is to continue past the expiration date (listed above), investigators must submit a request for continuing review prior to the continuing review due date (listed above). It is the researcher's responsibility to obtain re-approval from the IRB before the study's expiration date.
4. If re-approval is not obtained (unless the study has been reported to the IRB as closed) prior to the expiration date, all activities involving human subjects and data analysis must cease immediately, except where necessary to eliminate apparent immediate hazards to the subjects.

**Important:**

If you are conducting federally funded non-exempt research, please send the applicable OSP/grant proposal to the IRB office, once available. OSP funds may not be released until the IRB has compared and found consistent the proposal and related IRB applicaton.

cc: File

*Invent the Future*

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE UNIVERSITY AND STATE UNIVERSITY

*An equal opportunity, affirmative action institution*

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