

TRANSITION TO KINDERGARTEN ACTIVITY
THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF TEACHERS, PARENTS AND CHILDREN

BY

AVE M. LATTE

A Dissertation Submitted to

The Graduate School of Education

Rutgers-the State University of New Jersey

In partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree

Doctor of Education

Graduate Program in Early Childhood Education

Approved by

Dr. Sharon Ryan, Chair

Dr. Carrie Lobman

Dr. Susan Golbeck

New Brunswick, New Jersey

May 13 2012

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Transition to Kindergarten Activity The Lived Experiences of Teachers, Parents and Children

By: Ave M. Latte

Dissertation Chair: Dr. Sharon Ryan

PROBLEM: Transitioning into kindergarten marks an important time in the lives of young children and their families. While many families and teachers participate in transition events little is known about the ways that transition activities actually inform and support key stakeholders. The purpose of this study was to describe district transition policy and practices that are experienced and evaluated by key stakeholders to inform effective transition practices.

METHODOLOGY: This case study explores the nature of transition activity within the constructs of what it means to be ready for school. Two school districts are investigated for policies and transition experiences that describe participation in and evaluations of these events by focal parents(6), children(7) teachers(4) and administrators(2). Continuities such as shared curriculums and cross grade professional development activities are addressed as means to smooth the move to kindergarten. Results indicate that transition activities are important experiences in the ways that each district designs specific experiences within local contexts. Cross case comparisons indicate that transition activities need to occur more often and with more attention to the goals for these activities. Teachers need to be better trained to understand the value for these experiences. Parent absence from planning processes indicate that the partnership model suggested in research (Pianta, Cox & Snow, 2007) has not been achieved. Children's responses add value to the transition experiences in the ways that they participate in and respond to planned transition events (Dockett & Perry, 2007). Persistent tensions linger related to organizational issues that address teacher understanding and value for these experiences, parent and children interconnectedness with teachers, parents need to feel more deeply connected to the schools, and children being included in the conversations about the purpose for transition activity. Implications suggest closer examinations of the ways policies inform these processes, and the need for more flexibility when executing transition activities. Limitations of the study and future research suggestions are discussed.

SIGNIFICANCE: This case study adds to the limited body of research that describes transition experiences from the perspectives of those who plan and enact these events, and for whom which these transition activities are developed.

Acknowledgements

Inspiration for this investigation came from my desire to capture lived experiences of young children in order to discover how they understand and participate in transition to kindergarten. Acknowledgements first go out to the children, teachers and families whose participation and candid reflections allowed this investigation to take its rich dimension. Most importantly, I want to acknowledge my chair, Dr. Sharon Ryan, whose professional expertise as researcher and mentor has given me endless inspirational insights into research methodologies and writings to accomplish this goal. You never gave up on me, thank you. To my doctorate support group, although you are many, I want to particularly thank Donna, Laurie, Kim and Kim, Julie, Linda and Randi, the core team, whose support and guidance I relied upon time after time. To the many professors and researchers at Rutgers who continue to serve as my mentors, thank you.

Any intellectual endeavor as grand as this cannot reach success without the loving support, understanding and patience experienced from family, dear friends and professional peers. To you David, my best friend and lifelong partner, to my loving children Stephanie, Pascal and Christopher, and of course to my sweet and ever so invigorating granddaughter, Giavanna Marie, my most grateful appreciation. To my dear friends Alba and Patrick, you are always there to listen and provide professional guidance. Most assuredly, I want to acknowledge friends and professional peers at my community college who never lost faith in my abilities. Most importantly I must mention by name Art Marshall, Jayne McBride, Mary Ellen Hurley, Frank Paoni and Joseph Robinson, my humblest gratitude. Finally to the many professional peers in my career of choice, as advocates for young children we know how important it is to find ways to support children's development, this study is dedicated to the vision and passion you hold for the well being of all young children.

This doctorate study is dedicated to my mother and father, Marie and Dante Latte, who could not be here in person, but carried through with me in spirit. I love you, mom and dad.

TRANSITION TO KINDERGARTEN

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Table of Contents	iv
List of Tables and Figures	v
Chapter 1 Introduction Statement of the Problem	2
Chapter 2 Literature Review	6
Chapter 3 Study Design	40
Chapter 4 Experiencing Transition Activity in Two School Districts	71
Chapter 5 Summary and Conclusions	153
References	172
Appendices	
Appendix A Consent Forms and Letters of Introduction	184
Appendix B Parent Interview Protocol	188
Appendix C Teacher Interview Transition Planning Protocol	190
Appendix D Teacher Transition Activity Reflection Protocol	192
Appendix E Administrator Interview Protocol	194
Appendix F Children Informal Conversation Interview Protocol	196
Appendix G Rubric Children's Awareness of Kindergarten	198
Appendix H Document Collect Log	199

List of Tables and Figures

Tables

Table 3.1 Alignment of Research Questions to Data Collection Method 41

Table 3.2 Local District Demographic Comparisons 43

Table 3.3 Sample Selection 45

Table 3.4 Data Collection Schedule 59

Figures

Figure 4.1 Mrs. Walter's Classroom Space 95

Figure 4.2 Alex's Cubby Space 113

Figure 4.3 Gay's Cubby Space 113

Figure 4.4 Andrew Hanging His Backpack in the Kindergarten Cubby 114

Figure 4.5 Alex Sitting at the Primary School Cafeteria Table 114

Figure 4.6 Andrew Sitting at the Primary School Cafeteria Table 115

Figure 4.7 Andrew Sitting on the Carpet in the Kindergarten Classroom 115

Figure 4.8 Gay Recalls Library Fish Tank 116

Figure 4.9 Gay Recalls Toilet in the Nurse's Office 116

Figure 4.10 Alex and His Twin Going to Kindergarten 117

Figure 4.11 Gay's Friend Mitchell 118

Figure 4.12 Gay's Family on the First Day of Kindergarten 118

Chapter 1

Statement of the Problem

Transition to kindergarten is considered to be an important developmental and educational period in young children's lives. The move to kindergarten marks a change from what are often more informal learning environments (preschool or home) to the formal system of schooling. Research (Ramey & Ramey, Phillips, Lanzi, Brezaussek, Katholi & Snyder, 2000; Petriwskyj, Thorpe & Tayler, 2005) has found that helping children make the transition to kindergarten through carefully planned and executed activities (e.g. school visits, information sessions etc.) contributes to their school success. When children experience smooth transition from preschool to kindergarten they perform higher on reading, mathematics and general knowledge test scores (Ramey, Ramey, et. al, 2000; Schulting, Malone & Dodge, 2005). These effects have been found to persist to the end of kindergarten and into the first two years of school, with marked difference "beyond the effect for a school with no transition practice" (Schulting, Malone & Dodge, 2005, p. 867). Moreover children who successfully transition to kindergarten have been found to demonstrate greater prosocial behaviors toward peers and teachers such as being cooperative and willing to share with others (Ladd & Price, 1987).

To ensure these positive outcomes, children and families need to participate in particular kinds of transition experiences. Several large scale studies (Pianta, 2007; Ramey & Ramey, et. al. 2000; Dockett & Perry, 2007) have concluded that successful transition programs are those which foster partnerships among, and between, families and teachers. A seven year national Head Start study found that successful transition

programs made efforts to communicate with parents by offering videos, books, and other information resources about positive school transition practices. In addition these schools made frequent home visits and disseminated periodic newsletters to families about school and community initiatives (Ramey & Ramey, et. al., 2000). Similarly it was found that effective transition practices took place when teachers in both preschool and kindergarten settings worked together in the transition process. Several positive outcomes of these coordinated responses are that there were improved communications as well as enhanced respect and understanding of one another's roles (Ramey & Ramey, et. al., 2000). In short, the research shows that effective transition policies and practices support strong continuities among programs, provide links to community resources for parents, and enhance relationships among all individuals involved in the process.

Despite an extensive research base that documents what makes for effective transition programs; most local programs either do not have transition plans or if they do these plans tend to not be of a high quality. A national study of transition practices among Head Start programs, Ramey and Ramey (2000) found that only about 20% of the 450 participating sites implemented very strong programs. Other studies have found that many public schools have lowered their emphasis on transition (Kagen & Newman, 1998). Sadly the lack of attention to effective transition models and programs persists with the National Center for Early Development and Learning disclosing that fewer than half of all schools across the nation have formal transition activities (LaParo, Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2003; see also Nelson, 2004). Therefore the problem is that while effective transition practices are beneficial to children and families, very few programs are implemented and not all programs are based on what research suggests is good practice.

Thus even if a student does have access to a transition program it may not produce the desired outcomes that research has found results from high quality programs.

Complicating the matter further, is the research base on transition. Most research to date has been large scale quantitative studies (for instance see Petriwskyj, Thorpe & Tayler, 2005; Silver, Measelle, Armstrong & Essex, 2005) which speak to policy issues rather than examining actual transition practices as they are experienced and enacted by key participants. Little information, therefore, is available for administrators and teachers about what goes into implementing successful transition programs and what key stakeholders find the most effective. Moreover, while it is evident that there are particular components that contribute to successful kindergarten transitions, it is not clear whether all of these components are necessary for all communities. This is particularly important given that children considered to be at risk because of various socioeconomic factors have been found to be less prepared for school if they do not experience a high quality transition program (Fantuzzo, Rouse, McDermott, Sekino, Childs & Weiss, 2005; Hair, Halle, Terry-Humen, Lavelle & Calkins, 2006; Pianta, Cox, Taylor & Early, 1999). As a consequence, different transition strategies may be needed to ameliorate the disparities between children's different life circumstances. For example in communities where children are from low socioeconomic backgrounds and parents have less education it may be necessary to implement a family transition approach that might include aspects of literacy. It does not follow, however, that in a middle class suburban district where the parents are typically more educated, a family literacy approach would be required.

With rich descriptive studies of different programs at the local level it may be possible to analyze the complexities of transition activities and tease out the relationships

and factors that contribute to effective transition practices. The purpose of this case study is to try to address this issue in the literature by providing a multilayered description of how children, parents and teachers participate in and experience transition events in two local urban school districts. The overarching questions guiding this study are:

1. How do school districts prepare their children and families for transition into kindergarten?
2. What are key participants experiences and evaluations of these transition events?
3. What implications can be drawn from this investigation for stakeholders who are preparing children and their families to transition into kindergarten?

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The transition into kindergarten takes place during a juncture of rapid developmental changes that emerge between 4 and 7 years of age. Observed across cultures this period of growth seems to mark significant changes in children whereby they increase their independence from their families, begin building relationships with peers and other adults outside of the home, and take on greater responsibilities within their community (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009; Rogoff, 2002; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). In recognition of this developmental change, where typically in western cultures children move from a predominantly home-like setting to formalized learning environments, educators and policy makers have begun to advocate for formal consideration of the transition from one setting to the other.

This chapter reviews the related literature on transition with the aim of situating this study in the current research base. In doing so I define what I mean by transition through the theoretical frameworks shaping this conceptualization. The first section of this literature review examines the links between school readiness and transition. In the next section of the review I examine the research base on transition. As part of this review I look at factors that constitute good transition experiences, research on stakeholder perspectives, and the approaches taken by local communities in response to transition policy.

Theoretical Constructs Framing Readiness and Transition

The two theoretical constructs that I use to frame this study are the ecological theory and the socio-cultural theory of development. First the ecological theory of development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) is often associated with transition study because it speaks to the various systems and relationships that impress upon and are provoked by the developing child. The second theory I utilize is not often applied to transition investigation. However I believe that it provides me with a cultural perspective which makes sense when observing the different ways in which culture influences beliefs and relationships. I reach out mostly to research conducted by Barbara Rogoff (2002) for this theoretical framework. Each of these frameworks is described below.

The ecological theory of development (Bronfenbrenner, 1977) is the core underpinning for many transition studies (for instance see Pianta & Cox, 1999; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). Bronfenbrenner (1977) proposes a theory of human development that positions the child in a “nested arrangement of structures” (p.154) each contained within the next that attempts to identify the relationships among individuals within settings. These reciprocal relations are progressive and mutually accommodated throughout the lifespan of the child.

Accordingly Bronfenbrenner (1979) describes ecology as “the mutual accommodation between an active growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives as this process is affected by relations between settings and the larger contexts in which the setting is embedded” (p. 21). By this explanation the developing child is both influenced by and presses upon the natural events, relationships and settings in which he or she is actively engaged. For

instance a young child experiencing the transition into kindergarten may have direct influences upon the first visit to the setting if he or she becomes actively engaged in forming relationships with the new teacher, participates in activities as they naturally occur in the setting and imposes his or her perceptions of setting influences upon the various activities and relationships that are formed.

Bronfenbrenner's model (1977) conceptualizes this nested structure as four interrelated systems. At the central most immediate sphere is the microsystem, described as "a complex of relationships" (p. 514) between the developing person and environment in an immediate setting containing that person in particular activities for particular periods of time. For example families and teachers may collaborate with one another to ensure that children are meeting academic expectations or to ensure that children's social relations which are forming in school persist during after school activities. As an array surrounding the microsystem, the mesosystem comprises the interrelations among major settings containing the developing person during particular points in his or her life. For instance the school system would be part of the mesosystem in that it embraces relationships among parents, teachers and children within that setting. Further out is the exosystem. This sphere includes the relationships among specific social structures both formal and informal, that do not in themselves include the developing person, but impinge upon or encompass the immediate settings in which that person is found. An example of an exosystem entity would be the parent's workplace. While this setting does not directly include the developing child, it impacts the ways that parents can interact and form relationships with teachers when, for instance, their work schedule impedes their ability to attend school functions. Finally the furthestmost sphere affecting a person's

development is the macrosystem. Described as general prototypes existing in cultures and subcultures that set the patterns for the structures and activities occurring at local levels, the macrosystem breaches time and experience to include overarching beliefs, values, customs and habits of a particular culture. Accordingly, each of these spheres is separate from one another in distinctly different ways.

This model is beneficial as a conceptual tool for understanding the complexities of transition experiences because it includes the developing child in relationship with others within the contexts which these relationships occur. Specifically Bronfenbrenner (1979) states that transition events can be enhanced when there exists “indirect links between settings that encourage the growth of mutual trust, positive orientation, goal consensus, and a balance of power responsive to action on behalf of the developing individual” (p. 216). Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) suggest that this theoretical model provides the structure for examining how family school relations are formed over transition periods. For instance when families and schools share similar values and beliefs their children tend to benefit from those exosystem and macrosystem consistencies. However when families come from diverse backgrounds that are not similar to the dominant cultural beliefs modeled in the schools, discontinuities occur that can impact relationships and ultimately the ways children develop. Pianta and others (for instance see Pianta, Cox & Snow, 2007) believe that the quality of these relations can be viewed as outcomes rather than antecedents to school transition. For instance when children and parents are given opportunities to share their values, beliefs and experiences about their home life while participating in transition activities with teachers; participants are more likely able to build partnerships with one another. These bonds influence other

developmental systems such as social skills and emotional development; for instance when parents understand and can contribute to the bonds children make with teachers and peers (Raver, Garner, & Smith-Donald, 2007; Pianta, Kraft-Sayre, Rimm-Kaufman, Gercke & Higgins, 2001).

On another level the ecological model is helpful for understanding important implications for policy, as it embraces the dynamics between policy, in the exosystem, and family-teacher relations in the microsystem. For instance the readiness goals outlined by the National Association for the Education of Young Children (1995) acknowledge partnerships as important components for supporting the ways children are readied for school. Accordingly, NAEYC is committed to support family roles in learning and child development by calling upon early education systems to provide readiness learning experiences through parent participation. Yet these partnerships are often limited by the restrictions parents experience through their work schedules, leisure time activities and socioeconomic conditions (Hernandez, Denton & Macartney in Pianta, Cox & Snow, (Eds), 2007). The complex interrelationships between low socioeconomic conditions, immigrant status issues and transition practices provide an example of how policies and practices press upon and are impressed by the interrelationships between individuals who experience transition events. For instance transition research studies seem to indicate that while low socioeconomic conditions and immigrant status present various risks to school success, the assumption that these factors contribute negatively to child development ignores the differential experiences children have in their home life and communities (Farver, Xu, Eppe,& Lonigan, 2006). When immigrant parent aspirations and expectations about their children's school performance were studied outcomes indicated

that while expectations are generally lower than aspirations both remain high in spite of local community conditions, parent education levels and years in the United States (Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese & Garnier, 2001). Both studies seem to indicate that exosystem influences such as parent background, and macrosystems such as community beliefs about discrimination indirectly influence the ecological development of young children. That is, when the relationships among individuals in the microsystem and mesosystems enhance “direct and indirect links to the power that each setting contributes to the developing child” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 48) To clarify by example, when teachers perceive social conditions or minority cultural status as deficits there is a potential to create barriers which undermine positive partnerships from forming. As a result parental influences that potentially enhance positive transition experiences can be overlooked diminishing the positive influences families can bring to transition experiences and, as a consequence, to their young children’s successful transition into school.

To accommodate culturally diverse developmental beliefs among families, schools and communities, I will also rely on a socio historical perspective. The ecological developmental theory compliments the social historical perspective of development on several levels. While the ecological theory addresses systematic ecological changes and reciprocal relationships among participants in microsystem activities that enhance the development of the young child, the socio historical theory makes contributions to the culturally specific beliefs that are manifested in the everyday lives of participating teachers, children and families (Rogoff, 2002, p. 10). In her work on human development Barbara Rogoff (2002) emphasizes that “human development is a process of people’s

changing participation in sociocultural activities of their communities and that people contribute to the processes involved in sociocultural activities at the same time that they inherit practices invented by others (p. 52). Rogoff (2002) argues that “we need to go beyond thinking solely of membership in a single static group and instead focus on people’s participation in cultural practices of dynamically related communities “(p. 26). This means that any particular individual is impacted by participating in community activities both in the ways that they make contribution to these events and in the culmination of historical beliefs that are manifested by the cultural tools and activities made available from previous generations. That, in turn, people develop through their shared use of cultural tools and practices while they simultaneously contribute to the transformations of cultural tools, practices and institutions (p. 54).

This theory advances opportunities for understanding child development in culturally specific ways. For instance children in the United States are considered mature enough to enter school when they reach age 5 (i.e. see the National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1995). According to Rogoff (2002) this is not the case for developing children among all cultural groups. For instance in some cultures the ability for children to gain self reliance is not universally defined by age, rather it is situational. That is to say that children gradually learn independence by engaging in tasks alongside family members, for instance when they pitch in to help with adult activities. In essence these children are provided opportunities for increased responsibility within the social and emotional constructs provided by their family, in the tasks they share alongside trusted adults, rather than within institutions that mark developmental readiness by maturational milestones.

The socio-historical theory places the focus of transition events and programs on developmental milestones in culturally specific ways. For instance several studies on transition bring to light the contextually rich collaborations families of diverse backgrounds share with teachers (for instance see Sy, 2007; Lam & Pollard, 2006, Diamond, Reagan & Bandyk, 2000). In one small study Lopez and Cole (1999) conducted a transition intervention technique among Puerto Rican children and their Spanish speaking mothers who traditionally remain reluctant to get involved in their children's academic preparation for school. In this study mothers were instructed in how to teach their children letter names and sounds, either in Spanish or English. Based upon success rates of how the children improved their letter- sound recognition, and more importantly, how the parents rated their involvement in helping their children prepare for the transition to academic learning; this study demonstrated the importance of including families in transition activities.

These cultural contrasts mark developmental differences that are not readily absorbed by teachers or other individuals accountable to the task of assessing children's readiness for school. In point of reference Graue (2006) recognizes "readiness as an ethical responsibility" (p. 51). Graue believes that schools have "cultures all their own that quite often have impermeable boundaries" (p. 53). She continues that our knowledge of development and the ways that these beliefs are enacted in the daily school routines are "culturally bound within specific groups" (p.53) especially among white middle class groups. She suggests that one of the first steps is to come to consensus on the readiness goals for early care and education by accepting that even though general knowledge about development is helpful it must be applied to "children and their families in locally

sensitive ways” (p. 53). Current research supports Graue’s tenants and suggests that the best way to appreciate the value of well executed transition events is to embrace them as ongoing activities across time and within cultural belief systems (Doucet & Tudge, in Pianta, Cox & Snow (Eds.) 2007; McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGennaro & Wildenger, 2007).

Taken together the ecological model and the socio-historical model are useful theoretical constructs for understanding how transition to school prepares children for their first start in formal education. One main goal of effective transition practices is to facilitate change among participants and settings so that they may build adaptations that ensure later school success. Accordingly Doucet & Tudge (2007) outline three cornerstones of effective transition practices. They are collaborative relationships between families, schools and delivery systems; continuity among programs and practices; as well as sound transition activities that recognize unique cultural contributions within locally derived transition models. Each of these cornerstones can be linked back to the socio-historical and ecological conceptual models in specific ways. The ecological model draws attention to the differences between kindergarten and preschool settings and the changing relationships between teachers and parents as when parents are required to pull away from participating in their children’s daily school routines. It places the focus on those relationships that contribute to child development in the “interconnectedness of relationships among child characteristics; and peer, family, school and neighborhood contexts” (p. 510). The importance of these relationships cannot be understated; however the conceptual nature of this model as nested systems

precludes the impact that diverse cultural values and beliefs have on the everyday lives and encounters among these individuals (Rogoff, 2002).

The socio-historical framework provides a platform for understanding how cultural values influence alternate ways of interpreting transition experiences. It emphasizes the need for families and schools to embrace one another in culturally specific ways that consider the benefits each stakeholder contributes to the developing child. For instance by recognizing that there are alternate ways of describing development from variant cultural perspectives, teachers can better embrace the contributions families make to their developing children.

School Readiness and Transition

Transition to kindergarten is closely linked to readiness in the ways that these factors support children's abilities to construct meaning from transition activities. Defining readiness has been challenging researchers and practitioners for quite some time. Readiness can first be looked at as those internal structures children possess which facilitate their success in school. That is children who are developmentally ready for school are assumed to have the ability to control emotions and self regulate, possess social skills, and have the academic aptitudes that enables them to succeed as students (Graue, 2003, 2006; Saluja, Scott-Little & Clifford, 2000). Digging deeper into the constructs that define readiness reveals a socially interactive nature to its meaning. For instance children's ability to function in socially appropriate ways refers to how successfully children can separate from their families to build and maintain trusting relations with adults outside of the home. Another social readiness factor is the ability for

children to build and maintain positive relationships with their peers (Fantuzzo & McWayne, 2002). For instance children who possess socially appropriate readiness skills are able to take turns or give in to other's desires in appropriate ways. The ability for children to control emotional impulses is another readiness factor often observed when considering whether or not children are ready for the start of school (Graziano, Reaves, Keane & Calkins, 2007). Current research on self regulation demonstrates that children must be able to possess flexibility in different situations while at the same time develop a sense of efficacy about themselves as students. For instance children should be able to use appropriate language to express wants and desires, sit still but remain alert for longer periods of time, finish tasks they begin and follow teacher instructions (Lin, Lawrence & Gorrell, 2003).

While social skills and emotional self regulations are developed throughout the preschool and kindergarten years, academic demands in schools are equally pressing upon preschool and kindergarten teachers and curriculum enough so that serious attention is now being paid to children's emerging academic skills (Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta & Cox, 2000). A number of states now have early learning standards as benchmarks by which children are often measured to determine whether they are ready for formal academic rigors. For instance by the time children leave preschool they are expected to know their names, addresses and phone numbers. Likewise they should have accomplished number and letter recognition, letter sound recognition and other memorizations that provide the bases for early reading, writing and mathematical skill development (Wesley & Buysse, 2003; Lin, Lawrence & Gorrell, 2003). In general defining readiness in this way conceptualizes it as a set of inherent characteristics in the

child. It is assumed then that children either have those characteristics or they don't and therefore they may or may not be ready for school.

More recently researchers have begun to use an ecological framework to define readiness that suggests that readiness is actually a set of factors that exists in the relationships formed among families and teachers within the schools and in the communities that they exist. The ecological model presumes that these relationships shape children's development within various contexts. Readiness cannot be conceptualized only as something that exists within children, but rather in the relationships and support structures that are provided within the family, as well as within the schools. Pianta and Cox (1999) argue that an ecological model contextualizes readiness as it considers the beliefs, attitudes, actions and responses among families, classrooms and communities "at any given time and across time" (p.4). For instance schools can become ready for children by hiring highly skilled, developmentally trained teachers and by providing appropriate learning environments for young children. Likewise families become readied for school when they develop routines and habits that support children's focus on school demands and behavioral expectations such as being able to listen and follow directions from adults outside of the family. Ready communities provide opportunities for families to access high quality preschool programs based on sound research as well as to support family's economic, health and divergent needs. Rather than conceptualizing readiness as internal structures that are influenced by developmental processes, contextual definitions for readiness places the individual within ecological constructs.

By applying ecological constructs to understand readiness researchers can examine factors that impede children's abilities to function in school. For instance why children from impoverished backgrounds come to school severely disadvantaged, or at risk to failure, compared to their more affluent peers. Understanding the contexts of ready children, families, schools and communities assists policy makers when developing structures that will help children make the transition into school more effectively. For instance an extensive research base has emphasized that when children from low socioeconomic conditions attend high quality preschool programs they are more likely to succeed in school (Schweinhart, Montie, Xiang, Barnett, Belfield, & Nores, 2005). Compelling evidence from this body of research has promoted recent rapid expansions of high quality publically funded preschool programs; and as a result has placed the spotlight on how effective transition experiences facilitate the move from preschool to kindergarten.

Guided by The National Association for the Education of Young Children (1995) readiness indicators and effective readiness programs established through the National Education Goals Panel (1998), Head Start has taken the lead in implementing formal transition policies that maintain shared relationships between contracted early childhood centers and public schools (Department of Health & Human Services, 2000). As a response to these national policy statements many states have implemented family responsive readiness and transition programs within an ecological framework. For example the state of California has initiated the First 5 program that funds program initiatives providing support services between key stakeholders including parents, early childhood and kindergarten teachers, health care providers, administrators and policy

makers (Bates, Mastrianni, Mintzer, Nicholas, Furlong, Simental & Green, 2006). One important goal of the First 5 initiative is to ensure smooth program transitions for children most likely to be at risk for kindergarten difficulties. New Jersey has a formal preschool policy for children from low socioeconomic communities that assures children have the skills that prepare them for school, and that teachers and parents have the ability to shape children's readiness skills. Taking on the ecological model these initiatives assume that programs cannot focus solely upon the internal structures of child development to determine readiness for school; but must also include schools and families in readiness initiatives. From this perspective transition to kindergarten is defined as a complex set of policies, programs and practices that are meant to ensure a fluid movement for children from preschool to formal learning which begin in the contexts of ready schools, ready families and ready communities.

Research on Transition Practices

In order to gain a clearer understanding of the research on transition to kindergarten I have grouped it in two ways. In the first set of studies I look at the connections between policy and practice. The second and largest set of studies examines the perceptions of those involved in transition events. That is these studies look at transition to kindergarten from the perspectives of key stakeholders; mostly represented by teachers and parents, and to a much lesser extent, by children and administrators.

Descriptions of Transition Programs

A group of studies conducted by a handful of researchers look at what goes on in different transition programs from policy perspectives mostly with the aim of determining what program factors make them work more effectively. Most notable

among these studies was a set of policy studies conducted by National Head Start Transition Demonstration Project (Department of Health & Human Services, 2000). This series of investigations looked across national preschool programs and practices to identify how transition policies have been enacted, the consistency of transition practices across sites and time, and the effectiveness of these transition practices when children move into kindergarten. In another series of national policy studies Pianta and his colleagues (see Pianta, Cox & Snow, 2007; Pianta & Cox, 1999) have built a strong literature base on the ways that family-school relations affect children's experiences in transition; and also on how the lack of broad policies or inferior policy guidelines create barriers to effective transition experiences. A third body of research, The Starting School Project in Australia (Dockett & Perry, 2007), is one of the few series of investigations that involve children in transition research to understand how transition to school can be contextualized by their experiences. Still other smaller policy studies look at the ways that effective transition policies impact children's academic continuities from preschool to kindergarten (Schulting, Malone & Dodge, 2005) and the social emotional impact that transition programs, or the lack thereof, have on children's self efficacy as students (Dockett & Perry, 2007).

While national investigations have added deeper understandings that influence transition policy and practice I have found only one small study that tries to describe transition experiences in depth. In this qualitative study Dail and McGee (2008) detail how parents and teachers developed positive relationships with a series of transition events that they implemented over the course of a summer school experience. Outcomes from this study confirmed the benefits that are derived from positive relations between

teachers and parents in the ways that they provided children with a seamless move as they transitioned into kindergarten.

In general these series of studies have found that preschool teachers have different perspectives about the value of transition events than kindergarten teachers, and that consistency across programs and practices assures continuities during transition experiences. These studies have also demonstrated that while families want their children to have effective transition experiences, they are not clear about how to help their children achieve this partly because of the minimal communication they have with teachers before the start of school. Finally these studies have demonstrated the need for a closer look at the ways that transition experiences smooth the move into kindergarten within an increasingly accountability driven public education systems.

Key Stakeholders Perspectives and Transition Experiences

Studies that examine key stakeholder's perspectives look at the separate expectations and beliefs that are held by these individual constituencies within the contexts of the relationships that form among teachers, parents and children. I will now look across the literature to explain the ways that each of these stakeholders express their beliefs about transition outcomes.

Teacher experiences. Studies that summarize teacher beliefs and participation in transition experiences rely upon teacher reporting mechanisms such as questionnaires, surveys, and teacher assessed academic outcomes of children. In general the research suggests that preschool and kindergarten teachers have different goals and experiences for transition events. For example LaParo, Kraft-Sayre and Pianta (2003) provide

evidence for these contrasting beliefs reporting that of the 10 preschool and 37 kindergarten teachers they surveyed all preschool teachers visited the kindergarten classroom; while only 20% of the kindergarten teachers reciprocated this practice.

Goal differences for transition events can also be discerned by the ways that, kindergarten teachers participated school wide, that is kindergarten teachers have more contact with first grade parents during spring orientation times than they do with preschool parents at any time. In fact less than one fourth of these teachers met with preschool parents in conference about their children's prospects for successful transition preparation. Moreover while kindergarten teachers met with preschool teachers about specific children, less than 20% of the kindergarten teachers shared other school-to school activities with this group. Explaining their absence kindergarten teachers reported that they were not as involved in these activities due to non compensated work, especially when events were held during the summer. They also mentioned that school practices that typically provided late class roster lists, at times being unsettled as late as the second to third week in September, prevented them from becoming involved in transition activities with incoming parents. Finally teacher participation in transition events was more likely to occur if they were compensated for these activities and if they were properly trained to value how transition experiences improved children's academic, social and emotional skills (LoCasale-Crouch, Mashburn, Downer & Pianta, 2008).

Other research studies have found that preschool teachers tended to participate in transition activities much more often than kindergarten teachers; and that these activities typically focused on their support for children's social and behavior competencies over that of academic competencies. Moreover preschool teachers participated in a variety of

transition activities that promoted positive adjustments to kindergarten especially those involving direct children experiences. On average preschool teachers implement around 6 activities per year (LoCasale-Crouch, Mashburn, Downer & Pianta, 2008; Wesley & Buysse, 2003), with visits to kindergarten being the most frequent form of activity. It has also been found that preschool teachers share records with kindergarten teachers more often than the reverse, with specific mention that the most effective contacts are those where talk about a certain child or contact with kindergarten teachers about curriculum takes place (LoCasale-Crouch, et. al., 2008). Wesley and Buysse, (2003) found that preschool teachers looked for professional development opportunities that enriched their understanding and supported their efforts for effective children's transition experiences.

Another set of studies considers how transition experiences are affected by teacher perceptions of children in the contexts that form teacher-child relations. For instance correlations between teacher-child relations and teacher expectations for children's academic success are influenced by factors such as whether children who come from urban areas are being rated fairly by teachers who were not from these areas (Burchinal, Peisner-Feinberg, Pianta & Howes, 2002); and whether or not children attended high quality preschool programs (Brooks-Gunn, Rouse & McLanahan, 2007; Howes, Burchinal, Pianta, Bryant, Early, Clifford & Barbarin, 2008). Teacher predictions about children's academic success seem to be clouded by their perceptions about family situations. For instance Hughes, Gleason and Zhang (2005) reveal that if teachers are not of the same ethnicity as the families in their school, they use different judgment systems to evaluate children's academic abilities. This became evident with teachers of European American origins who usually rated student academic skills higher if they were of the

same ethnicity when compared with their rankings of children who were either African American or Hispanic ethnicities. Garcia and Cuéllar (2006) adds to this risk to successful transition into kindergarten by emphasizing the pressures that are placed on immigrant children when they “move through these same critical transitions [from home to school] *and* those associated with transitioning to a new culture and language” (p. 2240). (Italics added). Accordingly, it is imperative that teachers learn to value the contributions families add to transition experiences; contributions that enrich teacher-child relations, especially when families rely so heavily on teachers to help them gain access into the school culture.

In general teacher expectation not only influences their relationship with children and parents but also plays an important role in predicting children’s later academic successes (Hughes, Gleason & Zhang, 2005; Nelson, 2004; Dockett & Perry, 2003). For instance if teachers believe that young children lack the ability to focus on tasks over extended periods of time or if they sense that children cannot effectively listen and respond to their requests, they are likely to believe that these children are at greater risk for school failure (Palermo, Danish, Martin, Fabes & Reiser, 2007)

Parent experiences. It has been thought for some time that when parents of preschool children get a better sense of how their children develop and understand what they can do to facilitate their children’s academic readiness skills; they tend to spend more time helping their children with emerging academic activities that go beyond the traditional social, emotional preparedness tasks they typically employ. Much of what has been learned from parents involved in transition outcome studies comes from qualitative self report surveys and questionnaires. Parents, typically represented by cross sectors of

demographics including those from urban and suburban areas as well as those representing various backgrounds; African American, Caucasian, Hispanic and other ethnicities; have been asked about their understanding of transition and the value they derive from these experiences (for instance see La Paro, Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2003; McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGennaro & Wildenger, 2007). What follows is a review of the literature on the outcomes of parent practices that prepare their children and themselves for the transition from preschool to kindergarten.

Studies of parent reports on how they partake in transition activities reveal that parents provide numerous support structures to prepare their children for the anticipated changes their families will experience transitioning from preschool to kindergarten (Wildenger, McIntyre, Fiese & Eckert, 2008; LaParo, Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2003). For instance they spend time talking to their children about safety with strangers and other concerns for the start of school, they read to their children and they visit schools with their children. Although a few studies suggest that parents do take responsibility for their role in promoting effective transition experiences, most studies reveal that parents are not well informed about current school cultures to support this role. Instead they tend to rely on memories of their own school experiences (Dockett & Perry, 2005). While parents take the initiative to ease their children's transition into school, they express concern that they are neither included in transition activity planning; nor are they informed about kindergarten daily routines prior to the start of school; making them feel isolated from kindergarten classrooms (McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGennaro & Wildenger, 2007).

Parents are specific about family practices that contribute to successful transition experiences. Included among the practices they identify as being important are teaching

their children how to care for themselves, such as learning toileting skills, dressing themselves or learning their phone number and address (McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGennaro & Wildenger, 2007; Dockett & Perry, 2007). Parents believe that regularities such as daily routines provide emotional support while communicating safe, caring home environments (Dockett & Perry, 2007). Moreover, parents emphasize that while school is primarily interested in academic gains, they believe that social adjustment needs equal attention (Dockett & Perry, 2005). They want their children to have positive relations with their peers. They are equally aware of the advantages for nurturing strong parent networks where they can share common experiences and seek out advice from parents who have similar experiences (Dockett & Perry, 2005).

It appears that family backgrounds, customs and daily routines influence the ways that school readiness competencies can be interpreted. Two localized studies on the contrasts between teacher and parent beliefs about school readiness best demonstrate these variant descriptions. In a comparison study of 461 parents, 46 preschool and 64 kindergarten teachers in a densely populated low income urban district Piotrkowski, Botsko and Matthews (2000) highlighted significant contrasts held by these groups when surveyed about readiness factors. Whereas parents of black and Latino children believed that their children should speak English before entering kindergarten in order to be able to clearly communicate their needs, teachers rated these skills less important. Secondly parents believed that children should have basic knowledge of body parts, alphabet and colors. Again teachers disagreed; instead they tended towards children's curiosities for, and interest in learning.

These findings were supported in another study (Farver, Xu, Eppe & Lonigan, 2006) which drew particular attention to other factors that mitigate school readiness; beliefs such as family stress due to close living arrangements, the interrelationship between children's interest in education and parent involvement in literacy development, and the number of years families lived in the United States. These readiness factors were further emphasized in a recent survey of 2,633 parent reports representing 8.7 million children in the National Household Education Surveys Program of 2007 (O'Donnell, 2008). Accordingly, issues affecting parent participation in transition activities have been found to include family stress factors such as mother's mental health and depression (McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGennaro & Wildenger, 2007; LaParo, Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2003; Department of Health & Human Services, 2000); family socio-demographic risk factors such as single parent families; conflicts with school and work schedules that alienate them from school involvement (Dockett & Perry, 2005); or coming from homes where English is either not spoken or is not spoken as the first language (McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGennaro & Wildenger, 2007; Dockett & Perry, 2005).

Espinosa (2007) also calls attention to the point that, particularly among teachers and Latino parents, cultural variations influence their contrasting views of school readiness. She points out that Latino family customs and habits are related to cohesiveness; and that respect and moral development seem to factor highly in parental beliefs about school readiness. For instance Latino children tend to come from two parent homes that stress a deep respect for adults. They tend to nurture responsible individuals who are expected to make meaningful contributions to the family. Likewise their notion of what "education" means extends beyond what is learned in school. For these groups,

Espinosa (2007) and others explain that, education means good citizenship, personal responsibility, and ethical behaviors (for instance see Farver, Xu, Eppe & Lonigan, 2006). As mentioned in teacher-child relations above it appears that parent views about transition experiences, taken within the diverse contexts from which they originate, become valuable resources for planning and implementing transition events.

In general research suggests that parents want the best for their children, and they are aware of the benefits of having effective partnerships with teachers to smooth transitions to kindergarten (Duda & Minick, 2006; Lopez & Cole, 1999). To achieve these goals they rely on teachers to provide nurturing classroom environments. For instance parents want teachers to be patient with their children as they develop academic skills, learn how to talk to their teachers, and develop appropriate expected temperaments for school behaviors. When children come from homes where English is not the primary language parents look to the schools for information about translation services (Dockett & Perry, 2005). They request brochures and other written communication to be presented in their native language (Duda & Minick, 2006; Lopez & Cole 1999). Finally, parents want more family-school contact that provides information on transition to kindergarten, with professionals who are willing to share knowledge about kindergarten programs and teacher expectations. For instance parents want kindergarten teachers to provide information about kindergarten experiences such as daily routines, including where their children will be eating lunch. They anticipate that teachers willingly respect their cultural differences (Dockett & Perry, 2005). Moreover parents look to schools for more direction on what they can do to best prepare their children for kindergarten. (McIntyre, Echert,

Fiese, DiGennaro & Widenger, 2007; La Paro, Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2003; Lopez & Cole, 1999).

Children experiences. Research on the ways that children talk about the transition to kindergarten is limited to a handful of smaller studies (for instance see Valeski & Stipek, 2001; Seefeldt, Galper & Denton, 1997) with the exception of one large scale investigation emanating from Australia, the Starting Schools Research Project (Dockett & Perry, 2007). These investigations bear out evidence that children have something to say about moving to new schools. Accordingly, their experiences can add to the depth to the knowledge that effective transition activities make positive differences for children experiencing the start of school. On the whole four themes seem to dominate children's talk about the start of school.

The first theme relates to the ways that children perceive differences between preschool and kindergarten. Their understanding and expectation is that going to school means getting bigger (Ledger, Smith & Rich, 1998). Getting bigger is also equated with an anticipated emphasis on academics, though children tend to be over confident about their academic skills and abilities (Seefeldt, Galper & Denton, 1997). Children expect an increase in school work and have a general idea of what types of work they will be doing. For instance they talk about reading, writing and math. Ultimately they clearly understand that the purpose of going to school is to learn (Dockett & Perry, 2007; Ledger, Smith & Rich, 1998).

Secondly children talk about control. They sense that going to school means giving up on personal choice and they are willing to accept the authority of their teacher. For instance they know that schools have rules which govern daily routines. Dockett and

Perry (2005) demonstrate that children are aware of places in schools where they are forbidden without adult invitation; spaces such as the teacher and staff areas or adult rest rooms. Children also recognize that kindergarten has different rules for classroom behavior than what they experience in preschool. For instance children talk about being confined to desks for extended periods of time and having long school days without nap time (Dockett & Perry, 2005, 2007; Peters, 2003; Ledger, Smith & Rich, 1998). A part of the control theme is that children recognize that they must do tasks they do not enjoy. For instance they mention that they will have to learn, copy things from the board or do what the teachers tells them to do (Dockett & Perry, 2007; Ledger, Smith & Rich, 1998).

The third theme documented in studies of children's talk about transition to kindergarten is the notion of losing play or recognizing that play will be different in school. This theme looms large among children's ideas about major changes. For instance they talk about losing the ability to play in the classroom. They notice that play spaces are not available when they visit kindergarten classrooms or that they will not be playing as freely with their friends at their new school (Dockett & Perry, 2007; Seefeldt, Gelper & Denton, 1997). In contrast they are both excited and anxious about the larger outdoors school spaces to play (Dockett & Perry, 2005, 2007; Ledger, Smith & Rich, 1998; Seefeldt, Gelper & Denton, 1997). They mention that there are spaces that are safe to play and are concerned for their peers if they risk playing outside of these spaces (Dockett & Perry, 2005, 2007).

Finally, the changing relations with friends are important in children's talk about kindergarten (Dockett & Perry, 2007, 2005; Peters, 2003; Valeski & Stipek, 2001; Ledger, Smith & Rich, 2000, 1998; Seefeldt, Gelper & Denton, 1997). For instance

children recognize that their friends are people that play, spending lunch time and after school time with them. Young children often have to rely on their parents to nurture friendships such as when they are invited to parties or at after school play times.

Because of their over reliance on parents to maintain contacts beyond the school day, their friendships seem to be fleeting. For instance while children may seek out certain peers in preschool; when there is a lapse in contact, such as during summer vacation; they may not reach out to the same peers in kindergarten or they become reticent to reestablish former preschool relationships (Ledger, Smith & Rich, 2000).

Friends are important to children's social and emotional development as a means of defining their self efficacy as competent students (Dockett & Perry, 2007; Peters, 2003; Ledger, Smith & Rick, 2000). When children are recognized as being liked by others they maintain positive attitudes about school. On the contrary they feel isolated and anxious when they do not have friends, especially on the playground (Valeski & Stipek, 2001; Ledger, Smith & Rich, 2000). As compensation for this felt loss, children who have older siblings in the same school will seek them out to play with their sibling's friends until they are able to make friends of their own (Ledger, Smith & Rick, 2000).

Administrator experiences. An extensive search of over 700 research studies on transition to kindergarten reveals no studies specifically addressing administrator roles during the transition to kindergarten. Only one study seeks out administrator's perceptions on the importance of ready schools, communities and families. This investigation (Wesley & Buysse, 2003) used a focus group methodology involving 118 participants of which 25 elementary school principals took part. Outcomes from these discussions emphasized principal's concern for the push down that may change preschool

practices from open ended, play based settings to more structured entities. They recognized that certain socioeconomic conditions place young children at risk for school failure. Most strikingly principals discussed the need for school facility improvements that make their schools ready for young children. These improvements encompass physical space and conditions, teacher preparation that results in certifications birth to kindergarten, creating welcoming school environments for families, and the need for more teacher assistants. Finally principals expressed a need for policy to address reliable, long term funding sources for such improvements.

Transition and Continuity

In summary a number of studies including those just reviewed have attempted to collect the perspectives and experiences of key stakeholders about transition; and what they perceive to be the effectiveness of transition programs. A key theme that seems to dominate these studies is the notion of continuity; which means the consistencies that are shared by schools and families through policy, programs and partnerships that ensure smooth transition experiences for all participants. Petriwskyj, Thorpe and Tayler (2005) have identified three parameters of continuity during transition periods. The first of these is communication linkages between stakeholders. Communication tensions are most apparent in the ways that preschools and kindergartens bridge programs and practices. For instance kindergarten teachers may visit preschool classrooms and vice versa to establish contact with children but more importantly to gain respect for one another's professional responsibilities. The second parameter is coherence of experiences. For instance schools may produce documents that explain kindergarten routines and experiences for parents to help them understand the similarities and differences they may

expect from preschool experiences. The third parameter is system coherences meaning how programs provide similar curricula goals or how subsequent curriculum is built upon prior learning outcomes. Mangione and Speth (1998) add to this list program differences and teacher credentials as mitigating factors that influence transition continuities. For instance teacher credentialing systems have historically been a part of separate licensing pathways for preschool and kindergarten teachers.

Most studies on key stakeholder perspectives have not addressed all of these kinds of continuities having mostly looked at communication linkages and coherence of experiences. What policy and practice studies suggest is that there are discontinuities which exist among the various contexts that seem to maintain barriers between the ways that relationships are maintained (for instance see Pianta, Cox & Snow, 2007; Pianta & Cox, 1999). These discontinuities can be viewed in the divergent settings, preschool and kindergarten, and as a result in the ways that families and teachers form relationships.

Contrasting perspectives between preschool and kindergarten. Preschools and kindergartens are inherently different; having historically separate goals and systems of operation. While the intention for preschool and kindergarten collaborations during transition periods is to create a balance of power that builds trust and respect among constituents (Dockett & Perry, 2007) divergent school structures have mostly prevented this from occurring. These discontinuities are most evident through teacher practices with children and families and through the licensing systems that shape the early learning teacher profession.

Kindergarten, on the one hand, has increasingly become the first formal academic experience for young children; with some kindergarten programs emphasizing cognitive skills over other developmental areas. Recent accountability pressures placed upon kindergarten teachers have undermined traditional developmental approaches to learning, replacing them instead with academic skills mastery in order to achieve prescribed state mandated learner outcomes (Goldstein, 2007; Wesley & Buysse, 2003). As a result kindergarten teachers are more interested in building literacy skills that support children's abilities as proficient readers, writers and thinkers. To achieve these goals children are expected to attend to and sustain engagements with academic tasks for long periods of time. Furthermore they are, more often now than at any other time in the history of kindergarten, engaged in formal academic oriented instruction in mathematics and science. As teachers feel pressured to supplant community engagements with academic goals, home-school connections are diminishing, and as a result parents are feeling less welcomed into kindergarten classrooms. (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 1999; La Paro, Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2003).

Traditionally separate teacher credentialing systems have existed in early education whereby preschool teachers may hold certificates or associate degree credentials, in contrast to kindergarten teachers whose credentials fall within the confines of state departments of education requirements. Public school kindergarten teachers typically hold bachelor degrees having prepared within elementary education teacher preparation programs. As a result discontinuities persist in the ways that preschool and kindergarten teachers build professional relationships, due, in part, to the assumption by kindergarten teachers that minimally licensed preschool teachers do not fully understand

kindergarten experiences. In an attempt to alleviate this discontinuity and to bring preschool teacher credentialing to higher quality levels, Mangione and Speth (1998) emphasize the benefits that proper teacher credentialing bring to all teachers of young children. This is primarily because they promote curriculum consistencies that emphasize shared understandings of young children's development.

More recent initiatives that address discontinuities caused by separate licensing systems assume that teachers, whether teaching in preschool or beyond, who hold teacher licenses such as the Preschool-3rd grade certificate, understand how to facilitate learning for young children. What is more they also understand children's growth and development sequences which inform academic, social and emotional goals across grade levels (Winter & Kelley, 2008; Howes, Burchinal, Pianta, Bryant, Early, Clifford & Barbarin, 2008). As a result similarly trained teachers of young children have extensive training in child development as well as delivering upon effective early learning pedagogies. The assumption among experts in early education is that P-3 licensed teachers have the understanding and knowledge to carry out informed conversations about effective transition activities.

While licensing consistencies have made progress toward balanced professional collaborations, transition policies that involve families have not yet bridged the gaps between school professionals and parents. For instance while many transition advisory committees on paper maintain that parents act as partners, actual practices do not demonstrate this balance of power. In point of reference Head Start transition advisory board guidelines require parent involvement however; fewer than 10% of over 31

participating Transition Demonstration schools across the nation have actually included parents on transition planning boards (Department of Health & Human Services, 2000).

Without strong policy guidelines and funding supports, transition initiatives are left to the whims of each group, typically designed and administered by school personnel. Complicating this matter are negotiated teacher contracts that discourage them from participating in transition programs, especially those held during the summer or after school hours. District practices that limit information between teachers such as shared children's records also seem to be problematic, fueled by the common practice of disseminating class rosters as late as at the start of the kindergarten year (Pianta, Cox, Taylor & Early, 1999; LaParo, Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2003).

Transition practices have traditionally been initiated by the schools. While this seems to be a logical starting point, for the most part these activities remain of low intensity. Low intensity transition activities are categorized by limited face-to-face engagements between teachers and families. Examples of low intensity transition activities include writing letters to families during late summer prior to the start of school, or hosting one shot meetings such as back to school nights. As an outcome these practices tend not to be individualized to specific child needs; nor are they personalized to the extent that teachers spend quality time with families (Pianta, Cox, Taylor & Early, 1999). The low levels of involvement inherent in these endeavors can be associated with two primary factors. First teachers are generally not trained to effectively plan and initiate transition activities. Therefore they do not value transition activities nor find them critical for readying themselves or their families for the start of school. Secondly persistent lack of administrative guidance creates barriers to effective transition experiences. For

instance schools typically lack transition plans assigning administrative personnel to oversee these experiences (Pianta, Cox, Taylor & Early, 1999). As a result any motivations teachers have to enact transition plans mostly come out of their own initiatives, within the value they derive from these activities. The following sections summarize key studies related to stakeholder perspectives on the value they hold for transition experiences and the involvement they give to these activities.

Family school relations. Contrasting beliefs among families and teachers influence their definition of readiness and the subsequent roles they assume in building positive relationships with one another during transition periods. Positive family school relations have been documented over a number of national and international studies as an essential readiness component that promotes effective transition experiences for young children (Dockett & Perry, 2007, 2008; Wesley & Buysee, 2003; Goldenberg, Gallimore, Reese & Garnier, 2001; Mangione & Speth, 1998). When families and teachers have positive relations they are more likely to initiate communications with one another, they have opportunities to meet through a variety of events in different settings, and their sustained partnerships promote mutual respect for one another.

On the whole positive family school relations promote continuities between school and home; but there are persistent relationship barriers that must be overcome to ensure effective transition experiences. More specifically teachers must appreciate that even though families vary in the ways that they prepare children for the start of school; their contributions benefit children during the transition process (Dockett & Perry, 2008; Christenson, 2004). The literature on this topic emphasizes that families build relationships with their children in decidedly different ways and that these relationships

affect the ways that children accept change such as when they transition to school (Rimm-Kaufman & Zhang, 2005; Early, Rimm-Kaufman, Cox, Saluja, Pianta Bradley & Payne, 2002; Pianta, Nimetz & Bennett, 1997). The means by which transition activities accomplish these goals is yet to be explored.

Secondly schools must revise the ways that they communicate with families; taking into consideration family working conditions (Chavkin & Williams, 2001); differences among cultural value systems (Sy, 2006; Kinlaw, Kurtz-Costes & Goldman-Fraser, 2001); and contrasting priorities between preschool and kindergarten (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2005). Family relationships with school personnel should begin long before children enter educational systems. Opportunities for schools and families to build positive relations can be facilitated by building family, school, and community partnerships that include support structures such as access to high quality early care facilities (Connell & Prinz, 2002); and access to health care for needy families (Brooks-Gunn, Rouse & McLanahan, 2007).

These differences imply that schools must provide opportunities for staff to communicate with family members in distinctly different ways. The process begins with the administrator's commitment to build positive family-teacher communications by providing the flexibility needed to enact qualitatively rich engagements. (McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGennaro & Widenger, 2007; Wesley & Buysse, 2003). For example it may mean that administrators must give teachers more time to engage with families beyond the one shot traditional approaches currently practiced such as Back to School night. Or it may mean that class rosters must be developed earlier than the start of the

school year, so teachers can reach out to parents more frequently and with more intensity.(Pianta & Cox, 1999).

Summary

In summary, a review of the literature on readiness and transition suggests that while these two constructs are intertwined with one another, solid understanding of what it means to be ready for school produces highly effective transition activities. There are however, many barriers that arise when enacting transition activities when readiness factors are either overlooked or misunderstood. These barriers are often the result of differing perspectives and actions of various stakeholders involved in transition events. In turn, stakeholder actions are also constrained or enabled by local policies and practices. As a consequence, instead of transition being a seamless process, discontinuities exist. Currently, most of the research examines the perspectives of key stakeholders on readiness and transition or it compares practices across programs. However, there is not a lot of research available that explores how barriers to effective transitions are negotiated or how stakeholders work to overcome discontinuities across communities and cultures. Nor is there research on the value key stakeholders, especially young children and families, derive from participating in transition activities. This case study will attempt to get at these issues by exploring transition as it is planned, enacted and evaluated by key stakeholders in two districts. In the next chapter I discuss the methodology that guides this study.

Chapter 3: Study Design

Introduction

As the purpose of this investigation is to describe the experiences of participants in districts as they enact and undergo a series of transition activities a case study design was employed. According to Merriam (1998) a case study is a bounded system that captures the processes and relationships among particular participants, events or other definable entities as they unfold. Case study investigations can be further enhanced when the design uses case comparisons revealing the uniqueness and commonness of each case that would otherwise be overlooked in a single case study method (Stake, 1995).

The cases for this study were two local districts, Hawthorn and Silverton (pseudonyms). I conducted an investigation into the ways that transition policy and practice were enacted and experienced by teachers, children, and families in these two districts. Over the course of four months I utilized a range of data collection techniques including observations, interviews, and artifact and document collection to describe and provide a portrait of each district's transition practices, within each case then looking across cases to think about what can be added to the body of literature on effective preparations to transition into kindergarten.

The research questions that guided this study were:

1. How do school districts prepare their children and families for transition into kindergarten?
2. What are key participants experiences and evaluations of these transition events?

3. What implications can be drawn from this investigation for stakeholders who are preparing children and their families to transition into kindergarten?

Table 3.1 summarizes how each of these questions was answered within this case study design. Each research question was addressed through at least two different kinds of data. As can be seen from the table, the first question focused on district philosophy and practices. I relied on administrator and teacher interviews to gain a sense of how participants believe the district philosophy on transition practices were demonstrated in practice. For instance teachers talked about the ways that preschool and kindergarten teachers were teamed together to build a transition program. Likewise administrators talked about the ways they facilitated teacher meetings that encouraged these collaborations. In question two I examined the ways that key participants experienced and evaluated transition activities. For instance preschool teachers and children shared thoughts about a planned visit to kindergarten. In question three I looked across the cases to make comparisons about transition activities, similarities and differences expressed, across participant. Therefore I looked at all data collection points by participant whether the contributions were made through interview, observation or artifact collection.

Table 3.1. Alignment of Research Questions to Data Collection Methods

	Data Collection Method		
Research Question	Interview	Observations Participant (P) Researcher (R)	Artifacts and documents

How do school districts prepare children and their families to transition into kindergarten?	X		X
How do key participants teacher, parents, and children perceive and participate in transition activities?	X	X (P,R)	X
What implications can be drawn from this investigation for stakeholders who are preparing children and their families to transition to kindergarten?	X	X	X

In what follows I outline these data collection procedures in more depth.

Case Setting and Sample

Two districts, Hawthorn and Silverton, were purposefully selected to enable me to gather participant insights on transition in two quite different settings. Because they operate under state funded mandates for early childhood education which includes full day preschool for three and four- year- olds, these districts must provide formal transition initiatives that are linked to the local community needs. By state standards their transition programs must include collaborations between preschools and kindergartens; communications about curriculum and individual children; and information to parents about kindergarten and district transition plans. The ways that the districts enacted these

mandates were decidedly quite different from one another and therefore offered insights into the ways transition varies from conceptualized plans to enacted practices.

As mentioned in the introduction to this study it may not be that every community needs or wants the same transition events. Therefore choosing two districts that differ in terms of the communities they serve and the way they offer transition events gave me deeper insights into this issue. Table 3.2 summarizes the demographic and early childhood program offerings of these two districts.

Table 3.2. Local District Demographic Comparisons

Demographics	Hawthorn	Silverton
Type of district	Abbott	ECPA
Preschool classrooms	35 (3 private, 32 public)	6 in primary school 2 in the middle school
Kindergarten classrooms	13	6
Average Class Size	15 maximum/	15 maximum/
preschool/kindergarten	18-19	18-19
Predominant languages spoken	English, Spanish, French 52% of children from dual language homes	English, Spanish 65% of children from dual language homes; 14% of preschool population in English Language Learner/ Bilingual program
Median household income	\$ 28,100	\$57,534

As can be seen in Table 3.2, both districts serve a range of families as indicated by socioeconomic status and languages spoken. Hawthorn was an Abbott district meaning that they served the lowest income families whose children, research indicates, are most at risk of not succeeding in school without quality transition programs. Silverton was designated an ECPA (Early Childhood Program Aide) district and was comprised of a wider range of family demographics from socioeconomic variability to a mix of family backgrounds with languages other than English spoken in the home. ECPA and Abbott preschool and kindergarten programs parallel one another with both offering a minimum of a 6 hour school day that operates from September to June. Both districts provided preschool programs in accordance with state mandates whether offered within district or in a combined process with private providers.

A second criterion guiding selection of these sites was convenience and access. Recognizing that there are potential risks associated with convenience sampling (Creswell, 1998), I selected Hawthorn and Silverton in part because they provided me with ease of access for data collection and analysis procedures. First, I was able to gain access to Hawthorn programs because I have maintained a long standing, mutually supportive relationship with the early childhood administrator. This level of trust and shared knowledge allowed the administrator to have informal conversations with me about district transition policy issues (Magolda, 2000). While my relationship with the administrators at Silverton was formed for the purposes of this investigation, this district was also in close physical proximity to my work and home. As a part of my professional role I have visited schools in this district from time to time over the course of several

years, serving on county and statewide committees with school personnel. In addition I have trained and worked alongside many of Silverton's district teachers and paraprofessionals. Choosing these two districts allowed me to remain in close contact with district personnel and parents which provided me time to create a deeper understanding of the ways that they experienced transition activities.

Study Sample

According to Merriam (1998) qualitative case study sample sizes are “determined by a number of factors relevant to the study's purpose” (p. 66). The total sample size for both cases were comprised of two district administrators which included a preschool administrator or director, two preschool teachers, two kindergarten teachers, volunteers among parents and their children. Table 3.3 presents a concise view of participant numbers per district among the various stakeholders.

Table 3.3. Sample Selection

District	Hawthorne	Silverton
Administrator	Supervisor of early childhood programs	Preschool administrator
Teacher	Preschool teacher (1) Kindergarten teacher (1)	Preschool teacher (1) Kindergarten teacher (1)
Family	Children (4) Parent (3) one parent was not able to complete the interview process due family situation.	Children (3) Parent (3), mother and father of one child, one parent was not able to

		complete the interview process due to work obligations
--	--	--

Participant selection for each case began by holding informal conversations with district administrators about how transition policies were implemented into their district's practices. Over the course of these conversations the district administrators appointed school personnel who would help me gain insights into transition activities. Letters of introduction to administrators and consent forms seeking their participation can be found in Appendix A.

Teacher participants were purposefully selected based on recommendations of the administrator. Once permission was granted by each district administrator, I approached each teacher to talk with them about the study. With the aim of getting at family's transition experiences, four children in each preschool classroom were purposefully selected for this study. Criteria guiding child selection included an informal assessment of their awareness of, and a willingness to talk freely about their impending move to kindergarten. For these criteria I used a holistic rubric scale (see Appendix G) to determine each child's level of kindergarten awareness. The rubric for child participant selection is derived from Dockett & Perry's (2007) work with children on transition to kindergarten. From a collection of studies on children's perspectives of transition; Dockett & Perry observed that children emphasize three notable themes in their conversations about starting school. These are friendships, work and play, and noting

rules and procedure changes. I created my rubric by borrowing these themes then placing them along a matrix of knowledge about kindergarten.

Borrowing from Ledger, Smith and Rich (2000), I used an informal conversation methodology to build impressions about potential children to focus on for this study. To do this, I spent two to three days per week over the course of one month in each classroom participating in small and large group activities during center time, when they did journal time or when they ate breakfast or lunch. I joined in on these activities during which time, when the opportunities arose, I casually talked about kindergarten. Once I introduced the topic I let the children take control of the conversation, though from time to time, I encouraged the conversation with questions or impressions about their discussion. When small group conversation about this topic subsided or when children transitioned into other activities I used these times to remove myself from the activity to rate my impressions of what each child contributed to this talk.

After gathering holistic impressions from all preschool children using the rubric ratings I selected at least 5 children per class whose holistic profiles achieved variation among the rubric factors. The preliminary list of children's names were then given to their teacher who made recommendations for which children to include in the study mostly based upon the teacher's impressions of likely family member participation. Final sample included four children in Hawthorn. and three children from Silverton.

One family member was selected for each child participant based upon several criteria. Selected parents were those whose primary responsibility is to care for his/her child, they were willing to dedicate time to be interviewed, and that they participated in at least two transition activities for this study. Three parents participated in Hawthorn. One

Hawthorn parent had to dismiss herself during the study due to family issues. Three parents participated in the study at Silverton, two parents in one family and a separate parent in the second family. The third Silverton parent had to dismiss herself from the study after consenting to join due to work scheduling conflicts. I approached each family member from the preliminary list either by phone or through casual encounters during the course of the school day; for instance when they dropped off or picked up their children. Almost immediately after our first encounter or within one to two days after making contact with parents I spent time with them having casual conversations about my study. Written parent permission was used to verify their ability to participate in the study and for their permission to allow me to interview their children (see Appendix A).

Data Collection

The purpose of this case study was to provide a rich contextual description of typical transition events using multiple methods of data collection (Creswell, 1998). Transition activities, similar to other district practices, are best understood and appreciated when the researcher is immersed in the culture over extended periods of time. Merriam (1998) suggests that by using thick descriptions such as documentation of events as they are revealed over time, quotes from actively engaged participants, and samples or artifacts the case study allows the reader to examine questions in contextually rich, concrete ways thus promoting a sense of being there.

The Pilot Study

Data collection procedures employed in this study were informed in part by a small pilot study I conducted in 2004 on how four young children talked about and experienced one transition activity (Latte, 2004). During the pilot study which took place over the

course of two months I shared space with these children in two preschool classrooms. I collected data in each preschool classroom utilizing a variety of methods including audio recorded interviews with four focal children during their daily classroom activities, observations and field note recordings as well as interviews with teachers and the administrator. I initiated the topic of going to kindergarten using informal conversations with children during independent free activity time, such as when they were eating breakfast. I also observed teacher conversations with children when they talked about kindergarten. Based upon these experiences I selected four children to follow more carefully.

The second phase of the pilot study began with individual informal interviews with the focal children using a book prompt that told the story of a boy's first visit to kindergarten. I talked with the children about the young boy's experiences as a means to get at their impressions about kindergarten, including their anticipations and trepidations. Next I accompanied the children on their preschool class trip to a kindergarten classroom in their neighborhood. During the visit I remained a distant observer noting teacher-child interactions in general, and where possible with specific attention to the ways that the four children participated in this experience within the kindergarten setting with their preschool teacher present. I also positioned myself among the four participants during the ride to and from the school quietly noting their conversations and impressions using field notations.

Immediately after we arrived back at the preschool I met with the four children in this study within an informal group interview session. We talked about their impressions of the visit and what they observed about the kindergarten classroom. Following this

session which lasted about 20 minutes I observed the preschool teacher have conversation with the entire class about their visit. I used audio recording and field notes where appropriate to preserve data from these sessions.

From this study I learned several techniques that informed my current investigation. First, it was necessary for me to get into the setting early enough to form relationships with the children and staff, and to gain a sense of the daily habits and routines of the preschool classroom. Secondly this study provided me with methodological insight into working with children. For instance I discovered that I gained the most information from children when they participated in reflective conversations about their transition experience with a familiar adult, like the preschool teacher. Finally I learned that parent participation is best sought out with the support of the center director as their positive rapport facilitated the trust in and willingness that was needed for parents to allow me access to their children.

Data Collection Procedures

In keeping with case study methodology and what I learned from the pilot study, I used a variety of data collection methods in this study. These included observations, interviews, and artifact and document collection. The focused transition activities are often preceded by anticipation for the event, and periods of reflection after the activity. Therefore this study considered stakeholder descriptions of transition events prior to, during, and after experiencing them.

Field observation and notes. Focused observations (Marshall & Rossman, 1999) are “used to discover complex interactions in natural social settings” (p. 107). They rely on the researcher to be able to maintain a “relatively unobtrusive role” (p. 107) focusing

on details while gathering the “big picture” (p. 108) of the event switching from “wide angle to a narrow angle lens... focusing on a specific person, interaction, or activity, while mentally blocking out all the others”(Merriam, 1998, p.105). These were the strategies I primarily employed during the data collection period as participant observer.

Conversations and actions of participants in transition events within each setting were captured through field notes and audio recordings in the contexts in which these events occurred. Field notes were recorded in a notebook that I kept beside me during observations. Notebook entries recorded general impressions about what was observed, such as setting contexts, physical space arrangements and other contextual information that supported participant experiences, including my own. Audio recordings were used to capture the details of classroom conversations, when possible. For instance large group transition discussions between teachers and children were collected using these techniques.

Conversations about transition experiences and events often begin as impromptu conversations at circle or meet-and-greet times or they were planned teacher directed conversations before or during transition events. Regardless of the ways that the events were initiated I formatted field notes in a consistent manner guided by Brown and Dowling's (1998) suggested organizational methods. My field notes were divided into two columns with one side recording interactions and conversations; while the second column documented my impressions utilizing anecdotal notations for clarity and later reference. At the end of each day or at my earliest convenience, I transferred all field notes onto a computer file and then filled in these field notes by transcribing the audio

taped classroom conversation for that day. The compiled field note files and transcribed audio recordings were organized by date, time, and location ready for later analysis.

Interviews. Rimm Kaufman, Pianta & Cox, (2000) describe important relationships that form among parents, children and teachers in school settings during transition periods. Capturing information regarding these relationships may be best accessed through interviews with key participants. This case study used semiformal and informal conversational interview methods (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990) to access participant's meanings and perceptions of various transition events.

All interviews with school personnel participants took place either in the preschool or kindergarten classroom or at the administrator's office. Administrators were interviewed at least one time. Teachers were interviewed first to initiate conversations about themselves and their roles in transition planning and enactment. Teachers were then interviewed before and after each transition activity. Interview sessions lasted anywhere from 30 minutes to over an hour depending upon teacher and administrator schedules. Interviews with parents took place in their homes. Two interview sessions took place with each parent; one before parents experienced transition events then after they attended the event. Where possible these sessions were held at the same time as children interviews. All interviews were audio recorded with brief field notes taken during the course of the sessions, with the aim of maintaining a conversational format without distractions from field note recording. In the next few paragraphs I discuss the purpose and procedures I used to collect interview data for each group of participants: administrators, teachers and parents.

Administrator interview. Utilizing a semi structured protocol the purpose of the administrator interview was to get a sense of her perceptions about how the district approached transition in order to answer the first research question state question here. In keeping with Patton's (1990) idea of using a combination of question types this protocol included experiential questions, opinion and impression questions, as well as procedural questions of how they planned for and facilitated transition events.

The first set of questions gave me a point of reference as to how the administrator perceived his or her role within transition program and organizational structures. Second and third sets of questions sought out information about the administrator's intentions for the transition activity planning process, participation in actual activities and values derived from these events. Finally the last set of questions asked the administrators to reveal how they evaluated transition events, for instance to report back to higher levels of authority or to assess program quality that may inform future practices. By using a combination of question types, I hoped to gain administrative insight to respond to research questions that addressed the value the administrator obtained from enacting transition plans and the implications that were revealed from transition program assessment outcomes.

Teacher interview. I conducted two separate interview sessions with each teacher participant. The first interview took place before each transition activity planning session. These interviews used the semi structured format which included asking teachers about their professional experiences with transition as well as questions that attempted to get a sense of their professional backgrounds. These questions were followed by probes that sought out teacher intentions for transition activities; what they hoped to gain out of these

experiences, in particular how they believed the planned activities benefitted children and other participants.

The second interview occurred after the preschool and kindergarten teachers completed the various transition activities. I again used a semi structured protocol with the intention that this type of questioning approach provided teacher insights into the value they received from participating in the transition activity. Questions about the kinds of information they derived from the activity were followed by whether they believed the transition activity yielded intended outcomes and what they hoped for their children when they enter kindergarten. I ended each interview with an open ended question to allow the teacher opportunity to talk about what interested them or what I missed with my questions.

Parent interview. Parent interviews took place in their homes as this was the most convenient place for them to spend time with me. I met with the parents first before engaging their children in conversation and participation. Interviews followed a semi structured protocol that allowed for maximum focus on participant experiences of transition activities. Parent interview questions were separated into two general categories. The first category of questions were intended to establish a friendly rapport with the parent, while at the same time to gather information on family background and topics that informed me about how many and what kinds of transition to school experiences parents participated in. The second phase of the interview occurred after the parent participated in all transition events. These questions focused on the value parents derived from participating in these transition activities and the benefit they felt they and their children derived from these experiences. The final question was an open ended

format asking for additional information about their transition experience or comments they would like to contribute which I may have overlooked during the course of the interview.

Conversational interview with children. Dockett and Perry (2007) have documented the advantages of capturing children's transition experiences. Taking Dockett and Perry's (2007) lead in this case study I sought out children's unique experiences as expressed in their own words or through drawings they made while participating in at least two conversational interview sessions (see Appendix F).

While children can be trusted to talk about what impresses them most when starting school, including them as reliable informants has its challenges. For instance adult-child relationships encapsulate an inherent power difference especially in classroom settings (Cook-Sather, 2002). Giving children their own sense of empowerment within the classroom setting can be accomplished if the children believe that what they say is "taken seriously and tended to as knowledgeable participant in important conversations" (Cook-Sather, 2002). Taking a perspective that children have a right to be heard implies that they must be included in studies that require their perspective.

There are special considerations when including children as participants that should be made while conducting informal interview sessions (Dockett & Perry, 2007; Graue & Walsh, 1998). For instance, Dockett and Perry (2007) suggest that informal interviews with children take place in familiar settings using conversation that is "maintained and directed by the children" (Dockett & Perry, 2007, p. 57). This is one way to ensure balanced power while gathering information on what matters to them about starting school. Taking the lead from these studies, this case study used multiple informal

interview methodologies to gain access into children's expectations and interpretations of at least two transition events.

Establishing casual conversations with children about their expectations for kindergarten were vital first steps during the interview process that balanced power between the children participating in this case study and me, as primary researcher. In my attempt to make my presence commonplace as well as to establish friendly relations with children in non threatening, non authoritative tones; I visited their classrooms on a regular basis, two to three times a week for over four months, March to June. I established myself as an active adult participant in classroom routines. During this time period I participated in informal conversations with children; for instance at play based situations or during start of the day independent activities. My intentions at first were to place myself alongside children in non threatening ways. Later I used these sessions to listen in when conversations arose among children about kindergarten or anticipated transition events. I captured the essence of these discussions utilizing post conversation interpretive researcher field notes rather than audio recordings to avoid distracting the flow of events.

In addition to casual encounters during daily routines Dockett and Perry (2007) suggest that props such as story books about kindergarten may elicit children's conversations about their own impending change. After I established myself in friendly relations with the children in the classroom I introduced a storybook about kindergarten to each participating child asking their permission to join me in reading the story during their independent or free time activities (MacNaughton, Smith & Davis, 2007). My intention was to use the storybook character's experiences to draw out children's

implications about kindergarten. I audio recorded the storybook sessions being careful not to disrupt the informal nature of these experiences.

Document collection. Documents do not replace actual transition experiences rather they enhance and expand upon transition policy and goals. They provide a visual and policy context to help make sense of the transition experiences that take place in districts and classrooms. Documents are written materials, photographs, electronically retrieved resources and other material or data that are readily available to participants (Merriam, 1998). For these case studies I collected documents both at the kindergarten and preschool sites. Pertinent materials, both primary and secondary (Merriam, 1998) were provided by district administrators, center directors and participants during the study. Primary source documents were those that were currently used for transition planning and event activity while secondary sources enriched my understanding of the transition program but were not currently important to the school, classroom teacher, parent or children to inform them about transition program activities or outcomes. For instance primary source documents I collected were director reports as well as transition plans, teacher packets that were prepared for families in general and more specifically about particular transition events. I collected scheduling tools that addressed transition activities and district wide information presented to parents about what to expect in kindergarten. In addition, I took note of books about the start of kindergarten on preschool library shelves. For example I used audio recordings when teachers read story books about kindergarten. Secondary sources included outdated transition policy guides and booklets presented during prior year transition experiences that gave me insight into the transformations transition activities have taken over time in each district. I also

collected sample materials including but not limited to correspondences from school to families and planning process resources, for instance past transition plans.

All documents were preserved in document collection folders clearly marked for date of collection, source, prescribed purpose and reference to audio recording where appropriate. (Hatch, 2002). Where possible document resources were analyzed for duplicative and unique evidence of how transition activities were planned, supported and carried out.

Parent-child artifact. Dockett and Perry (2007) state that there are important relationships shared between parents and their children during school transition periods. These relationships are influenced by parents own experiences as well as “expectations and perceptions as they negotiate their role as an educator of their own children and as a participant in their children’s school education” (p. 77). As a way to access parent and child conceptions of the meaning of transition each parent-child pair was asked to create a transition book drawn by the child but facilitated by his/her parent.

Each child and parent took part in this artifact creation activity closer to the end of the study. I met with families in their homes where I invited the parent and their preschool child to draw out parts of the transition experiences they recalled. These drawings were typically led by the children while the parent asked questions or suggested elaborations to add to their drawings that captured what the children recalled about their visit to kindergarten.

The purposes for this activity were twofold. I wanted to capture the co-constructed meanings children and parents took away from their transition experiences, for instance what salient features they recalled from these experiences, and how these

experiences informed them about the move to kindergarten. Precedence for this approach has been used in research studies conducted by Dockett and Perry (2005, 2007, 2008). Secondly, this approach for data collection was intended to help children feel more comfortable about expressing their viewpoints utilizing both conversation and drawings which allowed them to focus on creating something for someone else rather than talking about themselves. While the parent-child team was creating this artifact I collected data using audio recordings and field notes gathering any informal conversations they engaged in talk about transition to kindergarten

Timeline for Data Collection and Researcher Role

As the primary researcher for this study I collected data through three phases of investigation (see Table 3.4). The preliminary data collection period occurred from the point when access was gained into the school through the end of March or when actual transition activities began. During this time period I attempted to establish relationships with potential participants, became acquainted with district policy, the people and sites where I performed this study. While I was establishing rapport and trust among potential participants I noted information about the physical space, professional organization and structure of the classrooms, as well as administrator, teacher, child and family interactions relevant to transition goals. Table 4 below outlines the course of events and schedules I followed for data collection at each site location.

Table 3.4. Data Collection Schedule

Participant	February	March	April	May	June
	Preliminary data	Formal data collection			→

	collection				
Child		Informal interviews	Transition events	Creative activity	→
Parent	Participant selection	Interview Transition event observation		Creative activity	→
Teacher	Participant selection	Transition event observation Interview			→
School Administrator	Participant selection	Interviews			

The formal data collection period began early March. The timeframe for this level of investigation was anticipated to begin with transition activity planning. Hawthorn used a committee approach to planning which extended over the course of the transition period beginning in mid March then extending over the course of the school year through monthly meetings. Silverton administrators held interviews with me at their convenience March through May.

During intensive periods of transition activity towards the end of the school year data collection increased in complexity as I spent time with all stakeholders within the school as well as with parents and their children in their homes. During these times I took extensive field notes, collected and cataloged documents, conducted extensive interviews and participated in transition activities utilizing field notes and audio recording where possible during direct observation periods. The second phase of the data collection period lasted into mid June at Silverton. Hawthorn's transition activities ended primarily in June as well except for one post transition period activity which occurred in September of the kindergarten year. The third phase of the study took place after transition events occurred. During this phase I met with parent-child teams to create the artifact drawing books as well as conducted the second levels of interviews with teachers and parents. This phase of the data collection period extended well into June for parents and children in both cases. Hawthorn's fall event extended teacher, children and parent interview into early September just before the start of the kindergarten year.

Role of the researcher. I participated both as an adult guest in the classroom, transition participant, and observer over the course of this case study. During the study I remained as unobtrusive as possible, becoming directly involved in activities at times, shifting from wide angle to narrow angle lens; at times focusing on individuals while at other times gathering information through the expanse of activities (Merriam, 1998). At times I became actively engaged with participants in classroom and transition activities. At other times I placed myself out of the action as the distant observer in an attempt to gain a holistic portrait of the events as they unfolded. In this way I made myself aware of how participant's talk and activity characterized the importance of transition events. I

became sensitive to their contrasting perspectives gathering a sense of timing to judge when to probe deeper into the meanings stakeholders derived from activities or when to pull back to allow the sequence of events to unfold as they naturally occurred (Merriam, 1998).

I performed a dual role relying, in part, upon the redundancies and specificity I built into the study design as well as upon participant perceptions and experiences I observed, whether self reported through interviews or recorded during actual events. In these ways my role was best described as “researcher participant” (Merriam, 1998, p. 102). Merriam describes this unique role as one who participates in the daily activities and actions among participants but who is only partially involved to provide opportunities at times to pull away from these events to become the researcher.

Data management and preliminary analysis. Preliminary analysis occurred simultaneously with data collection. Data was collected, transcribed and analyzed while I continued through the data collection period. Preliminary analysis decisions were used to answer questions such as how do I catalog and store information? What information do I focus on when collecting data and what information do I either choose to ignore or find incidental to my research questions? My responses to these questions along with the preconceived notions I held about each case adapted over the course of the study as new evidence or unexpected responses occurred.

I made judgments about the data during preliminary transcriptions and readings by the ways that I grouped, cataloged and organized the data. For instance although I separated each contribution by numbered lines of data, specifically marking sources to differentiate parent from children impressions; to the extent that one informs the other, I

stored the same data sets in multiple places. By generating multiple copies of the same data sets by participant then placing them within different folders, I attempted to view the data from the various lenses that seemed to arise by transition activity as well as by each participant across event. In addition I preserved one set of data as primary resource keeping it pristine. In this way I attempted to use this document as a reference point during the formal analysis period. To the extent that I was aware of how my data collection decisions influence preliminary and formal analysis I kept track of my impressions and reactions along with tentative interpretations of observations through my field notes and within my researcher journal.

My data collection period ended at the close of all transition activity experiences for each case. The Hawthorn case ended in September of the kindergarten year. Silverton case ended in June of the preschool year. At this point all data folders, summary sheets, documents and artifacts were organized in two separate stacks one for each district. Each data source was clearly marked for easy access back to the original data collection set. Each participant interview was denoted by date, location and name. In addition I formulated a visual distinction for each case, with all data collected for Hawthorn earmarked by green paper dividers, while Silverton data was earmarked by blue paper dividers. This allowed for quick reference back to the master copy when the need arose. I made multiple copies of each district's data record, both in hard copy and electronic versions, ready for the formal analytic phase.

Data Analysis

The process of the case study analysis involves pulling the data record apart then putting the data back together to make meaning out of incidents and perceptions

(Creswell, 1998). While often described as a messy, cumbersome inductive and creative process qualitative data analysis is actually a systematic search for meaning (Hatch, 2002). To analyze the data record, I followed a process that involve making sense of transition in each district from the perspectives of participants first, before then looking across both cases for points of convergence and divergence. I took four actions to analyze and synthesize the data. First I organized cases by research questions one and two. I chunked data together by participant to form relationships then by theoretical constructs to form themes. I then created generalizations for each case in the form of summary statements. Finally I created cross case comparisons using matrices to synthesize data to answer research question three.

Therefore, data analysis began by reading through all of the data organized in each case and sorting it by research question. I then concentrated on the data compiled for research question one in one district. This involved reading through all the data with specific typologies in mind. For instance my first sort focused on how transition was described by each participant. I read through interviews, sifted through documents and observation data by administrators and then by teachers within each district. As I read the data I sorted the data into typologies based on concepts derived from the literature, for example, I looked for data pertaining to partnerships, communication, school readiness and the like. I then transferred specific information that followed a particular idea or typology to an electronic data collection chart labeled for that relationship. According to Hatch (2002) what I attempted to do at this point of analysis was to chunk the data into large bits of information within each participant's experience as to how these experiences

informed the district's perceived transition policy and philosophy as well as to understand how each participant valued and evaluated each activity.

After I had thoroughly exhausted the data for question one I created a summary sheet for each participant's experience in response to the first research question. I stored all summaries, charts and information electronically by question clearly marking the source by page number, participant and case. An example of a code used was H.Adm.Int.p26, ln 30, interpreted as Hawthorn, administrator interview, data source page 26, line 30.

I continued in the same manner for research question two for the first district sorting through the data, grouping large chunks of information into sections that separated that data by relationships to the research question. When all relationships were exhausted, I began searching deeper into each case taking apart that data for further analysis, while leaving extraneous data for later reads that informed semantic relations or became part of other domains. I continued to pull apart and reorganize the data in this way using theoretical constructs about relationships, community and cultural variations to guide data analysis. During data sorting I began preliminary summaries for each question.

I began a more intense level of analysis by first referring back to the summary sheets to look for anticipated patterns as a deductive process based upon theoretical constructs that informed this study. For instance theory suggests that transition events should inform participants about changes in daily routines that may be demonstrated by physical space differences observed from preschool to kindergarten. When data captured the differences between settings from participant perspectives, parents, children and teachers I used the same codes to indicate similar observations. I then dug deeper into the

transcriptions to read and reread each participant's experiences looking across all contributing participants for similarities in the ways they talked about physical space changes that they noticed or anticipated. After sorting out similarities I again read through data to pull apart and analyze participant observations or comments for ways that they shared commonalities or identified alternate views, marking specific data points that inductively emerged from one participant as well as among participants. Once all the data sources for this information were coded and sorted I wrote preliminary analyses about how participant talk informed their perceptions of, for instance, physical space changes. I continued analysis in this way until I described the data organized by code and participant for each research question.

Hatch (2002) suggests that after patterns have been collected the researcher step back from the data to make generalizations about each pattern. I formulated general comments about each case and then after looking across categories pulled the study together to arrive at generalized statements about research questions one and two by district. I then refined preliminary writings to present a portrait of how each district prepared children, families and teachers for transition experiences.

The third phase of formal analysis was to derive meanings among participants and experiences that addressed question three: what implications can be drawn from this investigation for those who are preparing children and families to transition into kindergarten. I subjected data to a cross case comparison for this task. Quotations and observations that shared similar codes, case to case, were charted using visual matrices that presented cross case similarities in concise format. For instance I looked across the cases for all teacher comments and codes that were relevant to how they described

relationships with one another across grade level. Where all teachers shared similarities or all preschool teachers shared similar perceptions or experiences I referred back to the literature and data sources connecting theoretical understandings to experiences. By laying out the data to this heightened level of awareness the cross case similarities evoked generalized categories that presented possible connections to literature. In turn this level of analysis developed “more sophisticated descriptions and more powerful explanations” (Merriam, 1998, p. 195) of transition activities shared by key stakeholders that informed implications and future research.

Throughout the formal analysis period of investigation I kept research journal notes on irregularities I encountered, and personal impressions I received from the data along with other ancillary notes to help me interpret and understand thematic impressions. Hatch (2002) suggests that this strategy is necessary for beginning researchers as it forced me to think about the whole study, to recognize when analysis was complete, then to inform the writing process.

Study Credibility and Validity

Validity in qualitative research is defined as the use of research and knowledge that demonstrates credibility (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Creswell (2000) identifies nine different kinds of validity checks that can be present when using qualitative data, and he recommends the use of at least three. In keeping with Creswell’s recommendation this case study employed the following validity checks; spending extended amounts of time in the setting that presented opportunities to create thick descriptions of participant talk and transition experiences, and triangulation methods that used multiple data sources. Finally I kept a research journal to capture my personal impressions during the study, as well to

provide a space for me where I made candid comments that spoke to my biases or where I noted areas for further investigation.

Triangulation

Triangulation is a validity procedure where the researcher sorts data to find common categories among multiple sources that can be verified through multiple points rather than relying on only one incident or one participant (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Stake (1995) identifies triangulation practices as a means to derive credence from the interpretations and assumptions made during qualitative study. Triangulation can be achieved through study methodologies as well as in the ways that researcher interpretations are evidenced across data sources (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Methodological triangulation was achieved in this case study by analyzing data using multiple data collection methods. By using various data collection methods such as observations, field notes, interviews and document collection common data outcomes were validated rather than relying on only one data source to substantiate findings. Triangulation was achieved within the case study design by attempting to describe transition activities by participant across time and event. It isn't enough to say that patterns exist because they are simply observed or documented; rather it is essential to verify trustworthiness through the multiple lenses that participants use to express these patterns in the various ways that they are involved in transition events. Moreover, this case study relied not only on various participants' experiences and interpretations within each case but also on how participant experiences compared across case. In this manner trustworthiness was addressed by triangulating the patterns that emerged from multiple participant data sources across case to shed light on the findings in this investigation.

Thick Rich Descriptions

Gaining access to participant talk about their experiences meant that I spent extended time in their environments, experiencing and being a part of their daily routines. I spent several mornings per week in each setting often arriving before the children were dropped off by their parents. My presence continued throughout the school year from the first day I gained access into the district to the end of the year, then beyond into the fall at Hawthorn, when the kindergarten teacher held a transition activity for the focus participants.

Using extended time in research sites as a part of my methodology I was available to capture actual quotations from participants throughout all phases of the study as they naturally occur through typical engagements, whether in the classroom or during transition activities. Detailed descriptions of the settings, participants and events provided evidence that supported or disconfirmed interpretations at particular data points as well as across cases.

Research Journal

The research journal is a place where the researcher records personal impressions and biases about her experiences. Qualitative investigations often require researcher sensitivity to the issues at hand. Since I participated in transition events as well as observed other's experiences, I used the research journal to reflect upon these activities and as a means to openly talk about my biases. As the primary researcher I relied on myself to create a balance between participation and observation. The research journal was used to maintain this balance.

In summary I utilized rigorous methodologies to frame this study around the literature and in the ways that practices and perceptions inform understandings of transition experiences. I collected data on two cases to better inform my findings using a variety of data analyses techniques to maintain internal validity structures in order to build upon study credibility. Finally I considered the confidential nature of scientific investigation securing all data to protect participant and district identities. In the next chapter I report the findings for each case in relation to each research questions.

Chapter 4

Experiencing Transition Activity in Two School Districts

Entering kindergarten is considered a significant moment in a child's life.

Research on transitioning to school reveals that first experiences in kindergarten involve complex sets of understandings and expectations among all participants. For instance while children may believe that kindergarten is a time for learning new skills they rely heavily on support from family and friends to make this a positive experience (Dockett & Perry, 2007, 2005). Likewise, parents, especially those who are for first time experiencing transition to school with their children, are often overwhelmed by anticipated changes within their children and to their family routines. As a result they seek out school personnel such as teachers and administrators to shed light on their transition concerns (LaParo, Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2003; McInyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGennaro & Wildenger, 2007). At the same time kindergarten and preschool teachers often have different beliefs about the ways children making their way into school (Piortkowski, Botsko & Matthews, 2000). To address the differing concerns and expectations held by parents and teachers about children's entry into kindergarten, transition activities between kindergarten and preschool have become common practice.

The purpose of this chapter is to describe transition activities as they are enacted and experienced by participants in two local school districts. I begin with Hawthorn a small bayside community with a firmly established indigenous population which has recently been infiltrated by limited English proficient immigrant populations. The second case, Silverton, is a small urban area nestled between wealthier suburban communities. It too has a strong indigenous community which has most recently experienced unparalleled

growth among limited English speaking immigrants, many who move in and out of the district throughout the school year. I first describe how each district plans for and implements transition experiences. Then I detail how families, teachers and administrators experience and evaluate these events.

Hawthorn: Partnering for Transition

The research base suggests that effective transition from preschool to kindergarten happens in part because every stakeholder is at the table. When there is a partnership between and among stakeholders including parents, teachers, local administrators and to an extent those who make policy about programs, young children tend to have seamless transitions from one educational setting to another (Pianta, 2007; Ramey & Ramey, et. al 2000; Dockett & Perry, 2007). Hawthorn embodies this notion of collaboration and partnership in its philosophy and transition practices. As a participant and an observer in this district I heard people talk about partnering for transition on many different occasions. For example the early childhood director, Mrs. Gates, talks about how important it is to involve all participants in transition experiences.

I think that the one thing that's important to do is to think about all the aspects. To think about the child's transition, the parent's transition, the teacher's feelings and that of the administrators who are going to take part in it (interview, 2009, April 27, lines 169-171)

The preschool and the kindergarten teachers echo similar sentiments about a partnership model.

Mrs. Walters: (preschool teacher talking about the transition committee): the co-chairs will have conversations then go over everything with the director. We bounce ideas back and forth with the kindergarten teachers, what might work. (interview, 2009 June 7, line 28, 32)

Mrs. C (kindergarten teacher): I notice that the teachers, director of special education and the administrators all seem to be involved in the transition process. (interview, 2009 June 8, line 65).

Hawthorn enacted this partnership in two ways. First, the district administration created opportunities for kindergarten and preschool teachers to work together to ensure consistency between programs. Secondly and most importantly, the district partnered for transition through its transition plan.

Laying the Foundations for Transition

Research on effective transition programs, especially among schools that serve higher populations of students from low income families, suggests that continuities need to exist between programs (Kagan & Neuman, 1998). According to Petriwskyj, Thorpe and Tayler (2005) continuities can be framed by communication linkages, coherence of experiences and system coherence. The Hawthorn administrators of both the preschool and primary school embrace coherence as a way to build continuity between programs. They enact their shared vision first by building similarities between settings which they believe lay the foundation for their transition practices. The process of creating similarities begins with an examination of both sets of program standards to identify how common goals might be emphasized during transition experiences.

Ms. Gates (Preschool administrator): What we were trying to accomplish was that [the preschool and kindergarten teachers] could see that there is continuity and seamlessness in the [preschool] expectations over to the kindergarten core content standards. We wanted them to see that there is a seamless thread that ran through what the DOE saw as realistic in terms of growth and development. That there is a seamless transition. (interview, 2009, April 24, lines 53-57)

Another way the district administrators ensure similarities between programs is that they require both the preschool and kindergarten teachers to use a plan-do-review approach.

Mrs. Gates, the preschool director explains why replicating minor details in both settings is important to continuity.

Ms. Gates: The preschool children look at the [kindergarten] learning environment and see that their classrooms look very similar. [Their preschool] icons are placed in the kindergarten to show them that they have some of the same things in kindergarten that they have in their preschool room. (interview, 2009 April 24, lines 82-92)

The preschool and primary school administrators also create continuity through workshops and committee memberships that are crafted as shared experiences for both their preschool and kindergarten staff. Preschool teachers are asked to serve on committees with kindergarten staff such as HighScope COR, parent partnership, recruitment, community services and the transition committee. Currently there are two preschool teachers who serve as co-chairs to the transition committee.

Ms. Gates: The standing committees meet every month. The transition committee meets to talk about what does [transition] look like in terms of how are the children doing? Where do they tend to be struggling? What are their strengths coming into kindergarten? (interview, 2009, April 24, lines 35-39)

Conversations and perceptions that are sparked by the committee meetings are built upon the continuities which were developed during collaborative workshops and professional staff meetings. For instance when the primary school and preschool administrators were made aware of weaknesses in the ways that teachers conceptualized and applied the plan-do-review process used in the preschool program they decided to host a full day workshop on this method. Another continuity piece that spun off of the workshop event required teachers from both the preschool and kindergarten to visit one another's classroom. Both of the focal teachers I interviewed talked about the continuity opportunities they recognized by participating in these reciprocal visits.

Mrs. C (kindergarten teacher): I go and sit in a classroom and see their circle time, see their planning time and witness that first hand. I see how it is different. So for the preschool teacher to see that [children] have to transition into structure maybe they will start to structure the children a little bit more in the spring. And for us to see how unstructured they are [in preschool] we maybe will build that structure through four to six weeks instead of just expecting structure on day one. Or hoping that it will fall into place on day one, is good. (interview, 2009, June 8, lines 16 and 48)

Mrs. Walters (preschool teacher): As far as the physical environment they [the kindergarten classrooms] have a block area, they have a smaller house area and they have a lot of manipulatives. There are similarities but there are differences. Obviously it's much more structured. Their work time, plan-do-review is shorter. So that's the nature of kindergarten. (interview, 2009, May 19, line 43)

Each teacher noticed obvious similarities and differences between programs but this experience presented an added dimension towards establishing a shared foundation for transition experiences. The continuities that developed from each teacher's observation of one another's program influenced the ways that they perceived their contributions to the transition process.

Digging deeper into Hawthorn's transition programs and practices I became cognizant of the many ways that partnerships are maintained through coordinated efforts and teacher visitations. For instance by investing in shared preschool kindergarten teacher training sessions the district hopes to promote communication between the two levels. Shared experiences such as classroom visits, collaborative workshops and committee work lay the foundation for the implementation of the district's transition plan.

The Hawthorn Transition Plan

As Hawthorn is a high needs poverty district it is required by the state to ensure that there is a transition plan in place. According to the preschool director "there is a plan that [the transition committee] implements that has threads for administrators, child study team members, teachers, children and families" (interview, 2009, April 24 line 72). The

transition plan is a set of actions spanning across the course of the school year. It reaches into the preschool and kindergarten classrooms and extends beyond the school to embrace the families whose children will be entering kindergarten. It is authored by the preschool administrator who gains direction and insights for its details from the transition committee. The document charts out three main categories required by the state: the activity, the intended audiences and a timeline for enacting each activity. These categories are further classified under separate clusters that emphasize child activities, teacher activities, family activities, child study team activities and administration responsibilities (Transitioning from Preschool to Kindergarten Plan, 2009).

Although I was not party to the meetings where the transition plan was constructed the transition committee co-chair, Mrs. Walters, told me that the committee has worked on the plan each year for at least the past six years that she has served on the committee. She explained that this committee is made up of preschool and kindergarten teachers, the child study coordinator, the preschool director and the primary school principal. The main task for the committee is to come together to create a set of activities aimed at helping children and their families understand the move from preschool to kindergarten.

Mrs. Walters: We come up with the ideas and then it gets put into the plan. We plan the activities for the year and even for the following year, the early childhood plan and the dates and everything else. (interview, 2009, May 19, line 21)

According to Mrs. Walters the driving force behind enacting the plan rests squarely on the shoulders of the transition committee. In turn the committee reaches out to the primary school principal, the kindergarten teachers and the special education director for support when they activate the plan. There is a sense from both the committee

and the preschool administrator that the plan is a living document because it derives its descriptions from the actions and activities that are conducted by preschool, kindergarten and special education personnel.

From Plan to Practice

The plan encompasses several key activities which I observed and participated in over the course of four months. These activities are a visit to kindergarten, Bump Up Night and the Meet and Greet. Each transition activity happens at different times of the day. The first event kicks off late in May then subsequent events extend just before the start of the kindergarten year. While the visit to kindergarten is a typical transition activity duplicated across multiple settings the Bump Up Night and the Meet and Greet are distinctive events within Hawthorn's cultural contexts. In the next sections I will describe these events from the vantage point of participant observer. I entered into this role after spending time with the transition committee during the planning phase which gave me the advantage of being an informed observer.

The Visit to Kindergarten.

Visiting kindergarten for the first time is an exhilarating experience. I sensed the importance children and their teacher placed on this transition activity from the first day I was invited into their preschool classroom. It was quite apparent that the preschool teacher made a distinction between those who "were" and those who were "not ready" for kindergarten. For example the teacher would mention specific behaviors as "looking like a kindergartener" (field notes, 2009, May 26) when she noticed children following her directions or when children raised their hand to contribute to conversations. Likewise the children expressed awe amongst one another about beginning their preparations for

kindergarten as this three and four-year-old group often talked about kindergarten during morning meeting sessions and in casual conversations with one another.

Mrs. Walters (just before the visit to kindergarten trip): What do you like about kindergarten?

Andrew: I like the playground.

Mia: Me too. That is where my sister goes.

Alex: We're going to do art and math in kindergarten.

Gay: I like everything about kindergarten. (audio recorded conversation, 2009, May 26, lines 1-6)

Sharing stories about kindergarten, however, are nowhere as rich as actually visiting the school building where it is housed. Mrs. Walters explains the importance of the visit to kindergarten.

We loop them [in preschool] so they are very comfortable with their teachers and the classroom. It can be very different in kindergarten. They do have a lot of anxiety so visiting the school, getting to meet the principal and then the nurse and librarian can be very comforting to them. (interview 2009, May 19, line 10)

The visitation day is planned well in advance with the transition committee detailing the schedule of activities. According to the plan the kindergarten visit is organized to allow children both opportunities to experience the routines of the primary school and to help them feel comfortable with their new surroundings. The visit does this by giving the children a first-hand look at the primary school. Additionally the preschool teacher uses this visit to teach the children the rules of etiquette they have to live by in the school such as how to eat cafeteria style or use public bathrooms. The visit to kindergarten takes place in two segments: preparing for the visit and then going on the actual visit to the school.

Preparing the children for the visit to kindergarten. Around the middle of May there is a palpable air about the preschool classroom which piques curiosities and questions from the children that changes are on the horizon.

Alex: Guess what? Tomorrow I'm going to kindergarten!

Researcher: You are?

Alex: Yes!

Researcher: Can I come?

Alex: No, you're too tall to come to kindergarten. You have to be small like me.

(audio recorded conversation, 2009, May 26).

In accordance with the transition plan Mrs. Walters has strategically placed artifacts such as home grown picture books about kindergarten around the preschool classroom to give children a peek into what kindergarten might be like. These resources are placed on the reading library shelf as well as in cozy, quiet areas such as the "hide out" corner which is frequented by children during center activity time. Mrs. Walters uses group meeting opportunities as teachable moments when she shares insights about what to expect in kindergarten. She begins this type of talk towards the end of the year when the day to visit kindergarten is approaching and the four-year-olds become cognizant of impending changes they will soon experience. For instance, when the children were sitting together for snack time she suggested, "snack in kindergarten is not like here where we get our snack off the table. It's going to be in the BIG cafeteria" (field notes, 2009, May 27). These provocations and conversations served as important reminders of the main event that was to occur in a few days, visiting the primary school. Mrs. Walters explained that she has to be timely with these types of comments to support children's curiosities while at the same time suspending any anxieties they might have about making the transition to primary school (field notes, 2009).

On the morning of the trip Mrs. Walters takes time to talk to the children about their expectations for the kindergarten visit. The preschool children are sitting among one another at the common morning meeting area, Mrs. Walters draws a picture of the bus on the message board:

Mrs. Walters: Let's talk about what we're going to do in kindergarten. We're going to the big school and have a snack in the cafeteria. It's going to be a big cafeteria. You will carry your tray across the big cafeteria.

Lori: I want to sit next to my brother.

Mrs. Walters: You won't see your brother. (She continues to describe the visit) We're going on the playground if it's not raining.

Anthony: Are we going to have work time there?

Mike: We're going to do math. We're going to do art and math.

Mrs. Walters: Maybe. We're going to visit the classroom.

Mike: I want to go to my brother's classroom.

Mrs. Walters: We're going to visit the library.

Diasha: I went to the library. They have yummy food at the library. And water fountains.

Chorus of children: Yeah

Anthony: (in an anxious tone) it's going to be a big school. It's even bigger than our school.

Mrs. Walters: We're going on a big bus.

Gail: My brother and sister are at the kindergarten.

(audio recordings and field notes, 2009, May 27)

As can be discerned from this conversation the children are aware that having older siblings in the primary school makes Gail and Mike special in some way. For other children, such as Anthony, the enormous size of the building seems daunting compared to his preschool surroundings. Still other children remain enthusiastic about their visit, using their preschool cultural capital to envision what they believe kindergarten and the

primary school to be like (Dockett & Perry, 2007). This knowledge seems to give the preschool children a sense of familiarity or, at the very least, an attachment to the primary school. Preparing children for the visit to kindergarten with conversations about the visit, images of kindergarten classrooms and expectations for appropriate kindergarten behavior provide a frame of reference for the children to take with them on their first visit to the primary school.

Going on the visit. The children and their preschool teacher disembark from the bus in the front of the primary school building on a drizzly morning in May. When the children enter the school their comments such as “This is awesome!” or “This is amazing!” (field notes, 2009) are examples of how enthralled they are to be able to take this visit. Mrs. Walters is equally committed to making these experiences informative as she provides commentary to the lay of the land and to new sets of rules and routines.

Mrs. Walters: This is the hallway, this is the kindergarten hallway, here is the water fountain... (field notes, 2009, May 27)

Chatter continues for some as the children take in their surroundings making their way to the first phase of the visit, eating cafeteria style. Once inside the cafeteria the teacher lines the children up towards the food counter where they learn to collect snacks among choices of chips and drinks, then she escorts them to the long cafeteria tables and benches where they sit among their peers to eat. Every moment is a teachable moment for Mrs. Walters. For instance when one child tries to get up to discard his paper Mrs. Walters uses this part of the visit as a way to guide the children into acceptable primary school cafeteria eating habits.

Mrs. Walters: The rule in the cafeteria is that you choose a place and sit. You can't walk around. When you are done you get up and throw everything away at one time. In kindergarten when you're done eating

lunch you sit at the table and talk to your friend. (field notes, 2009, May 27).

During the second phase of the visit the children are given a tour of other school places that they will use on a daily basis. They learn where the main office is and where the nurse resides. They are also able to visit the library, one of their favorite parts of the tour. When they enter the library media center the children scurry about the room commenting on special places and objects:

Gail: Awesome.

Anthony: Wow these are high ceilings.

Diasha: Ohhh look magazines!

Mike: Look there's a fish tank!

Some children take magazines and books off the shelves for closer inspection. Another child notices the rocking chair and pillows at the cozy reading center. They gather there to meet the librarian, Mrs. Taylor. (audio recordings and field notes, 2009, May 27)

After the librarian enacts a storybook tale with the children they line up to make their way to the final phase of the visit, a look inside a kindergarten classroom. On the children's journey to the classroom Mrs. Walters highlights different aspects of the building, for instance she points out bulletin board displays. Mrs. Walters seems thrilled to be given the opportunity to introduce her preschool children to the kindergarten wing and other new spaces. For example she says "What do you see on the walls? Do you see student's work?" (field notes, 2009, May 27). Although not a scheduled part of the visit to kindergarten experience Mrs. Walters takes it upon herself to find primary school siblings for her preschool children giving them the opportunity to greet one another, thus reinforcing important relationships that might carry her students through the first few days of school. She also uses this time to have the children meet key people in the building. For instance prior to going to the kindergarten classroom she has the children stop off at the principal's office. The principal greets them with enthusiasm.

Mrs. Granger (primary school principal): Are you excited to come next year?

Preschool children (in chorus): No!

Mrs. Granger: Are you scared?

Preschool children: No! (audio recording, 2009, May 27)

Creating acquaintances with the primary school and its inhabitants are just one leg of this transition experience. The final phase, visiting a kindergarten classroom, is the culminating event to this special day. This part of the visit gives the children time to get to know what a typical kindergarten class will be like. Mrs. Walters and her children countdown kindergarten and grade one room numbers on their way to Room 14. When they enter the classroom they are greeted by the kindergarten teacher, Mrs. C, and her students. I get a sense from the first moment that we walk in the room that the kindergarten children are just as excited about the visit as the preschool children by the way they respond to Mrs. C.

Mrs. C (the kindergarten teacher): We have a lot of friends visiting us today. If you are a friend who is going to read and put on a surprise I want you to stand up and go by Mrs. C's table. Now we have lots of props... friends, friends, way too loud. My friends look at how many students are coming to kindergarten next year. How are we going to fit you all in the big school? How many are you?

Robert (a kindergarten child): Nine

Mrs. C: Don't forget we show the preschool children how we've changed. Now when we have something to say we raise our hands to talk in kindergarten (reminding her students about what it means to be in kindergarten). (She directs the preschool children to the carpet) Sit down criss-cross applesauce. Do you know how to do that? Oh my goodness you already know the hardest thing. You are going to be great in kindergarten. Kindergartener's where should you be? You're role models now. Wow look at you guys, (she compliments the preschool children). (field notes, 2009, May 27)

Mrs. C sets the tone for the expectations she hopes to communicate about kindergarten to the visiting preschool students. She finds it equally important to allow

children time to explore a typical kindergarten classroom. For instance she allows time for the preschool children to visit the various centers: small toys, play kitchen, math and reading corners, cubbies and other spaces, and the playground. The children explore the classroom noticing the words and pictures on the walls. The teacher's assistant reads some of the words for them then explains what a red letter word is and how children write their letters in the sand.

Mrs. Zambro (the kindergarten aide): This is something you get to do in kindergarten when you learn how to write your letters.

Alex: I want to try! (Mrs. Zambro allows Alex and other children time to trace out their names in the sand. She then moves on to the next object on the shelf.)

Mrs. Zambro: This is our compliment jar. Every time the class gets a compliment from another teacher or the Principal they get to fill the jar. Then we have a special party. Our next party is a bowling party right here in class. This is our fifth jar this year! (field notes, 2009, May 27)

The visit to the kindergarten ends with the children and Mrs. C having a conversation back at the meeting carpet about salient features they noticed while on their tour of the kindergarten classroom. While the entire visit lasted only about an hour and a half I felt that we had experienced so much and that the children would be able to share rich conversations when they returned to their preschool classroom about the day they first visited kindergarten.

Bump Up Night

Bump Up Night is an evening event that gives the parents of preschool children a first look at the kindergarten classroom and curriculum. Parents tour the primary school, ask questions about kindergarten and learn about its curriculum. It is also a time for the children to revisit the school, meet all the kindergarten teachers and visit a kindergarten classroom with their parents. The transition plan describes this event in several sections.

For instance in the teacher section it mentions “ask preschool teachers and kindergarten teacher to attend ‘Bump Up Night’ parents and children return to school in the evening for an activity in the kindergarten classes”. In another section the plan refers to children and families “ Invite parents to attend Bump Up Night” and “create a scrapbook of Bump Up Night for the classroom; entertain dialogue [with children] about going to kindergarten” (Transition from Preschool to Kindergarten Plan for Children with Special Needs and Typically Developing Children, retrieved 2009, April 7, page 2).

Bump up Night has two distinct parts. In the first part of the night both children and their parents are given an overview of the school but each presentation is tailored to its distinct audience. While the parents attend a Power Point presentation on kindergarten hosted by the principal and vice principal, the children are introduced to the kindergarten staff in less formal ways. The second part of the evening is designed to give families a closer look inside a kindergarten classroom. In what follows I describe the evening through its separate phases.

When the doors open the families are greeted by the two preschool teachers who serve as transition committee chairs. They sit front and center checking attendance rosters then presenting families with folders and giving directions of where to go for the start of Bump Up Night. (Welcome to Preschool Bump Up Night handout, 2009, June 9)

Mrs. Jacobs: He’s going to the library by himself?

Mrs. Walters: He’ll be fine. He has a tag that indicates his parents and the path he will take to the kindergarten room.

Mrs. Jacobs: You have to be a big boy now. Make me proud. (field notes, 2009, June 9)

During the first part of the evening the children are escorted to the library where they have a social experience with their peers. This includes musical entertainment, a slide presentation of primary school personnel, and a snack.

The children are escorted to the library by preschool teachers and aides. There they are greeted by live music. The kindergarten teachers are situated along the periphery of a large open floor space where the children are directed to sit on the carpet among their peers. The children chat and eat while the kindergarten teachers begin a slide presentation of a typical day in kindergarten. Later in a picture slide presentation the children are introduced to staff members including the nurse, the people in the main office and kindergarten teachers. It is a bit loud and chaotic at this portion of the presentation as some children are drawn to the visuals and vocal accompaniment while other children quickly lose interest. Instead they turn towards their peers, sit in small circles, eat and chat with one another. I also notice that some children are welcomed by their classmates and readily engage in conversations. Other children are more reticent to jump into the fray, instead they sit apart from the group. I especially take note of one young child who appears to be distraught, crying and rocking. His preschool teacher takes it upon herself to sit with him, consoling and holding him. He sighs, "I don't want to go to kindergarten." (field notes 2009, June 9)

Contrary to this particular child's experience the general tenor of this portion of the evening is uplifting for most of the children who are delighted to take part in the entertainment and snacks.

While the children are involved in snack and conversations, their parents are in the cafeteria receiving a more formal presentation.

When I enter the cafeteria parents are seated in rows watching a Power Point presentation of the kindergarten curriculum. The vice principal is referring to the presentation as he explains literacy and math expectations as well as kindergarten curriculum goals. After the presentation the parents ask questions about the program such as What are specials? and How is Everyday Math different from when I learned math? (field notes, 2009, June 9)

The information-giving portion of the evening lasts about half an hour after which parents and their children are reunited in an assigned kindergarten classroom. During the

second part of the evening I enter one kindergarten classroom to find parents sitting at low round tables awaiting the kindergarten teacher and their children. When the children enter they scan across the room locating and reuniting with their families. This is a joyful time as they embrace one another and share warm conversations about their prior activity (field notes 2009, June 9). One parent of twins commented about how this portion of the evening went for her boys. “Andy sat in the circle. He can read a little so he caught on. Alex did not sit in the circle. He was on my lap with his face covered.” (interview, 2009, June 14, line 52)

Next the families participate in a scavenger hunt to become familiar with the classroom layout and materials. They are given a paper labeled “Find the Areas of the Classroom”. The children are to indicate that they found these areas by making a check mark on the paper. When all areas have been located they present their recording sheet to the teacher who rewards them with a sticker.

The kindergarten teacher takes advantage of her time to interact with families during the scavenger hunt; striking up conversation with individuals or making positive comments to the children encouraging them on with their tasks, “If you find everything you get to keep your pencil” (field notes, 2009, June 9). Mrs. C comforts parents with kind words of assurance. For example I overhear one parent expressing the challenges she will face when her child enters kindergarten “I think it’s going to be harder for me when he goes to school. I don’t think I’m ready.” Mrs. C. responds: “It will be fine. We will invite you to drop your child at the back door for the first day of school. It will be less confusing for you and your child” (field notes, 2009, June 9).

Bump Up Night is a special time for partnerships to develop. It provides families an opportunity to explore new surroundings with knowledgeable staff who are available to guide them through these experiences. It also serves as a point of continuity for the preschool and kindergarten teachers who are paired up with one another in the kindergarten classroom and in the library.

Mrs. C: Every preschool teacher comes into the [kindergarten] classroom. It was one k teacher and one preschool teacher. [The preschool teacher] is familiar with the children. It was interesting because I'll get comments [from the preschool teacher] like this one you have to keep your eye on or I hope you get this one next year. Mrs. D [the preschool teacher] who was with me said 'oh this was fun!' (interview, 2009, June 10, lines 18-21)

Meet and Greet

A final kindergarten visit takes place just before the start of the kindergarten year after the teachers receive their final rosters. The transition plan does not specifically mention the Meet and Greet as it is a time when the primary school takes possession of transition activities. The Meet and Greet is not as well attended as Bump up Night, but the goal of this day; to reach a level of comfort for all participants, is achieved with an informal visit between kindergarten teachers, their new kindergarten children and their families. The kindergarten teacher, Mrs. C. talks about this day.

Mrs. C: When the kids get their assignment they're told two days before school starts. They do not have to visit, a lot of parents do though. And they come in sporadically so you have the time to talk to each child individually for about five or ten minutes and then they can go and play. And the parents at that point want to talk to you about whatever they think is going to happen throughout the year (interview, 2009, June 8, lines 28, 36)

The Meet and Greet is the first time that the parents will meet their child's assigned kindergarten teacher before Back to School Night. This particular Meet and Greet is held on a warm September day about mid afternoon just days before the start of

the school year. Mrs. C, the focal kindergarten teacher, is in the process of setting up her classroom for the year.

Mrs. C: I want the parents to understand the community that they're joining. That it's a place where your kids are going to learn so much and they're going to have so much fun and they're going to do things that you're not going to believe (interview 2009, June 8, line 72).

When I enter the classroom there is a sense that Mrs. C planned for meeting her new class. For instance the hall door to the classroom has the names of her new students decoratively displayed around its perimeter. She has a few materials on display at a small table as the families enter the room. There are name tags, yet to be written on at another table along with fun stickers set out for use. Mrs. C also has some folders on display opened and labeled with her student's names along with the tags "homework" and "school work" affixed to each folder pocket. The teacher is casually dressed ready to greet her new students and their families as they walk in. In the following excerpt I follow one family's Meet and Greet experience.

Anna's parents extend casual greetings with Mrs. C when they enter the kindergarten classroom. Their daughter is peeking out from behind her mother's back. Mrs. C gets down to Anna's level and gives her a sticker. She takes it while remaining partially hidden behind her parent. When Mrs. C asks her name she does not immediately respond so she asks Anna to write her name on the name card. At this point the newly assigned classroom aide joins in the conversation. Mrs. C introduces her with confidence expressing the fact that they have worked together over several years and that she is delighted to have Mrs. Villa as an aide. In the process of this conversation Anna interjects, "Why are all these other names here?" Mrs. C explains, "Because they will be in your class." Anna smiles and then grabs her name tag. (field notes, 2009, Sept. 1)

Throughout the Meet and Greet, Mrs. C attempts to leave positive impressions with the children, engaging them with her warm smile and countenance. She intentionally leaves materials and charts in conspicuous places to give families the opportunity to

explore daily routines, such as story time, independent play, small group and computer time. She moves about the room interacting with children and their families in a casual manner.

Anna's parents take interest in the classroom features while Anna gravitates to the kitchen activity area where she finds a doll and begins dressing her. After a time, Mrs. C walks over to Anna's parents where she explains some of the daily schedule and other salient features of her room. The parents ask questions about her expectations for the start of kindergarten such as what will happen on the first day of school? Mrs. C explains that the children are to be brought to the kindergarten door at the side of the school for the first day. She suggests that the parents stay a few minutes but not to prolong their goodbyes for the sake of their children's emotional stability. She emphasizes that this is a one-time occurrence and thereafter they will be dropped off at the front of the school. While Mrs. C. is explaining the day Anna's father is encouraging Anna to talk to her new teacher. He asks Anna about the school, "Did you see the playground?" Mrs. C. takes his hint initiating a conversation with Anna about the fun she will have on the playground, but Anna is reluctant to respond directly to Mrs. C's probes, instead she talks through her father.

After some time exploring the different areas of the room Anna and her parents are ready to leave. They walk over to Mrs. C. extending a handshake as they thank her for her hospitality. She bends down to Anna gesturing, "Give me five!" Once again Anna is partially hiding behind her father's leg. He interjects "Could you give Mrs. C. five?" Anna complies. (field notes, 2009, September 1)

Anna's hesitations are apparent throughout the visit. She seems apprehensive about coming into kindergarten by the ways that she interacts with her new teacher. Mrs. C senses Anna's apprehension so she reaches out to her in a special way by offering Anna a memento from the visit that she can take home. As this is a borrowed item, Mrs. C is providing Anna with a tangible reason to return on the first day of school.

Mrs. C: [Giving Anna her lunch number and a calculator] Practice your lunch number on the calculator. Be sure to bring it with you when you come back to school (field notes, 2009, Sept. 1).

These excerpts illustrate Mrs. C's commitment that building positive rapport with visiting families is a valuable transition activity because it sets the tone for the types of

relationships she hopes to maintain with her students and their families throughout the year. Mrs. C explains “They’re welcome anytime. I always say if you want to come...come. I have an open door policy. You can come and talk to me anytime” (interview, Sept. 1, 2009, line 49).

In summary there are a variety of transition activities at the Hawthorn school district. As a result of careful planning by the transition committee the district is able to bring about several opportunities for partnerships to develop. These transition activities aim to form continuities for teachers, and transitioning children and their parents. While on paper the transition plan seems to model what research says effective transition activities should look like, the lived experiences and evaluations of these activities by teachers, parents and children would suggest that the transition activities in practice do not always achieve the stated goals of the district transition plan. In what follows the participant perceptions of these transition activities are described.

Key Participant Perspectives on Transition to Kindergarten Experiences

While on paper transition activities such as Bump Up Night and a visit to kindergarten appear commonsense, making the transition plan a reality is a result of how key actors participate in, and evaluate these activities. The key actors in Hawthorn are the transition committee which is made up of a representative group of district professionals. The committee is comprised of two preschool teachers who co-chair the committee, two kindergarten teachers, and the special education administrator. Other participants who enact the transition plan are the teachers from both the preschool and the kindergarten programs and the parents and children; the target audience for the transition plan.

In what follows I examine key participants' roles and experiences in the transition events and what their perspectives are of these events in achieving particular goals for children. In examining these perspectives I will argue that while Hawthorn looks very much like a partnership model, there are also some tensions that threaten this ideal. To understand these tensions, I first present a description of how two focal teachers perceive their roles throughout the transition process. I then construct the family point of view from the data I collected on three focal parents and their preschool children.

Teacher perspectives of transition experiences. Among all participants teachers seem to be at the hub of transition activities. Because preschool teachers know their children best they are the most reasonable choice to facilitate the move into kindergarten. It is logical to also assume that if kindergarten teachers are deeply invested in positive transition experiences their efforts will reap benefits for the children to acclimate quickly into their classrooms. I begin by describing how Mrs. Walters, the preschool teacher and transition committee co chair, experienced and spoke about transition activity. I then focus on how Mrs. C, the kindergarten teacher, experienced and assessed transition experiences. While these two teachers have a partnership with one another Mrs. Walters and Mrs. C represent two somewhat opposing ideas of what transition events are about.

Mrs. Walters prepares for transition from a developmental perspective. A teacher in the district for the past six years Mrs. Walters structured her classroom and interacted with children in what might be called a developmental perspective. The developmental perspective assumes that teachers focus on who and where the children are developmentally. Working from a developmental perspective a teacher makes curricular decisions based upon observations and documentation of what the children are capable of

doing at particular points in time during their development. She then uses this information to guide her practice. Mrs. Walters made careful consideration of her children's developmental abilities in many ways. She promoted this perspective by the ways that she planned for and utilized space and activity in her classroom.

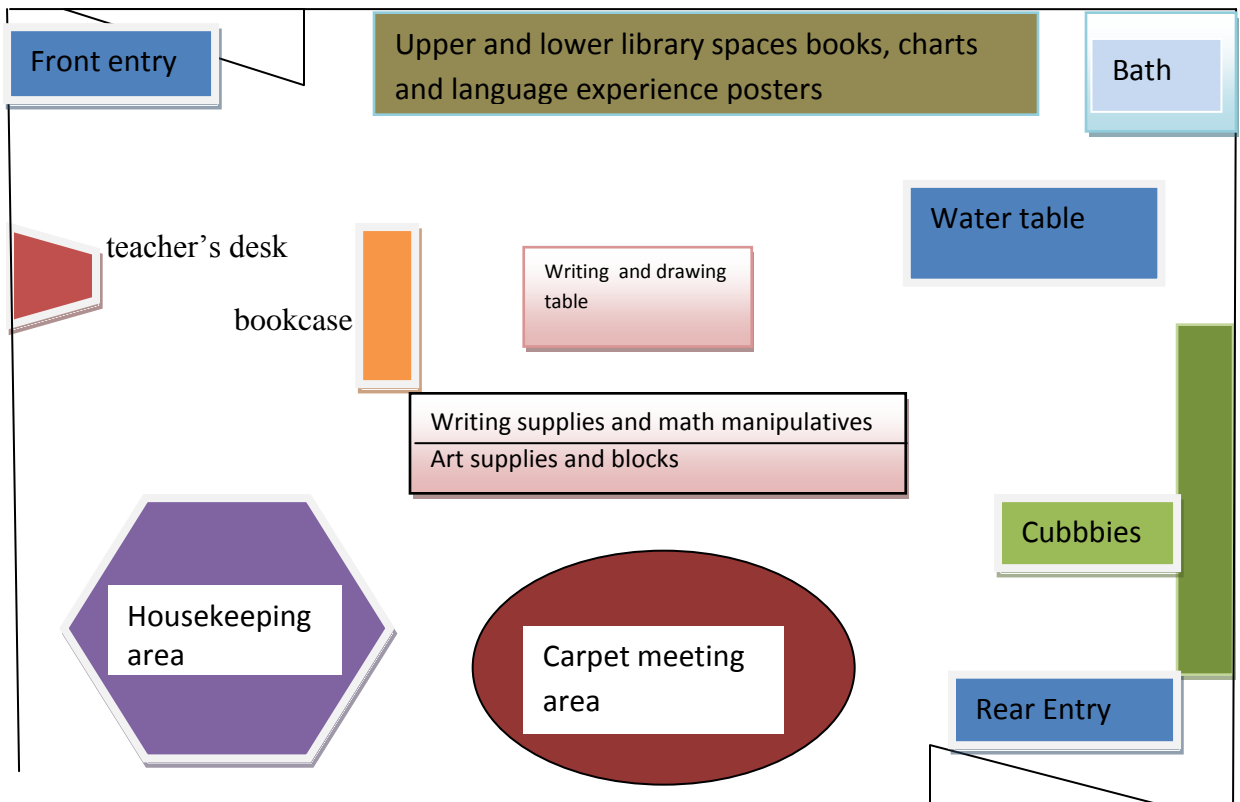
First, Mrs. Walters supported developmental differences among her children by the ways she could be heard making comment about particular children based on their individual developmental needs. On several occasions I observed how she used wait time to allow for developmental differences. For instance when one of her four-year-old children struggled with a response, as he often did, she would give him time to collect his thoughts rather than abandoning him to call on another child who would be able to answer for him. She seemed to be patient with his need to express what he was thinking as her comment was "he needs time to think about what he wants to say". She made allowances for children's developmental abilities as well. When, for instance, a young three-year-old girl's impulsive behaviors interrupted sharing time Mrs. Walters acknowledged, "she is just learning how to sit still in group" (field notes, April 2009).

Secondly Mrs. Walters was keenly aware that children develop at different paces. She demonstrated this in the ways she designed her classroom. Although neatly arranged, the bulletin board display of the children's work outside of Mrs. Walters' classroom was the first indication I had about how she embraced a developmental perspective. My first impression of this space was that it did not have a uniform look about it as one might expect from a typical display of children's best work. Instead I thought it captured how her children were emerging as writers, with each child's rendition of a visit to the park being quite different from the next. For instance where one child drew and colored

detailed images of the activities of the day another child had more primitive graphic representations of playground equipment. Still other children used words or single letter representations for words to label their drawings, and even though every child had their name on their drawing each was positioned differently. There did not seem to be one model that represented what the drawings should be like, rather Mrs. Walters allowed her children to express themselves according to their developmental level.

I gained insights into the ways Mrs. Walters enacted her developmental perspective, as well, by how she designed her classroom spaces. Upon entering the classroom I noticed that it was designed for play based activity and movement instead of being arranged by rows of desks or work tables often seen in classroom settings. Mrs. Walters achieved this by creatively cordoning off specially designated areas of the room into various centers. For instance her housekeeping area was under a big canopy at one end of the classroom just to the left of the rear entry door. Inside this space she had dress up costumes, child level kitchen equipment often found in preschool classrooms, a center table and chairs, and materials such as puzzles, writing equipment, menus and other items that the children could utilize in various ways. In another part of the room she made a two tiered space. In the risen area accessed by a few stairs she set up a child-sized cozy couch, book shelves that displayed both publisher and children's created texts. Mrs. Walters had hanging colorful posters to engage conversation and charts with open spaces to encourage writing. In the lower level she sectioned off a quiet space where pairs or an individual child could fit. She nestled a beanbag chair in one corner of this space, a full length mirror on the side wall and sheer curtains hanging over a portion of the space giving the impression of an intimate and private place for quiet, reflective activity.

Figure 4.1. Mrs. Walters' Classroom Space



Finally I believe Mrs. Walters demonstrated a developmental perspective by the ways she framed transition within a readiness model for getting children and parents ready for kindergarten and by getting kindergarten teachers ready for her families. I often saw Mrs. Walters make detailed documentation on where children were developmentally as she observed them work on particular skills during center time activities. For instance at one center activity she was watching, recording and questioning children as they counted out plastic counting bears. When one child counted in sequence she asked about position concepts such as where is the first bear? Or point to the second bear? Then she recorded what she observed in the child's words and actions. During the same center time activity

she watched another child using the bears to make groups that represented cardinal value such as a group of five or a group of three. She asked that child to count out groups of six, seven and ten. She then immediately recorded what she observed as the child worked.

When I asked Mrs. Walters why she took time to document particular children's skills and learning habits she mentioned that she used this information to gain insight into each child's developmental path. Although I did not record the exact words Mrs. Walters used at the time my field notes indicate that she felt documentation was important because it helped her present snapshots of the course of development for each child. As she took them through the HighScope program's key developmental indicators these documents helped her generate reports that eventually found their place in each child's preschool portfolio (field notes, 2009). It seemed that Mrs. Walters wanted to give children as many opportunities as she could to help them to regulate their own learning and to develop at their own pace; gently guiding these advances as they moved towards proficiency.

Her developmental perspective also extended into the ways that she framed transition to kindergarten to ready her children for change. The developmental perspective of ready families, ready schools and ready teachers describes kindergarten readiness as a multi dimensional process where children's needs take precedence and planned activities are enacted in supportive environments to enrich their experiences (Wesley & Buysse, 2003). Because feeling comfortable is as much about social and emotional experiences as it is academic, Mrs. Walters finds it necessary to maintain this comfort level to help children make the shift into primary school as orderly as possible.

As a result she carefully planned out and facilitated transition experiences such as the visit to kindergarten to give her students a first glimpse into what a primary school experience would entail. It was important for Mrs. Walters to use transition activities to talk about kindergarten rather than, for instance, just reading about kindergarten from a book or hearing about it from others. She believed that by taking time for transition experiences she was preparing her children in the best ways possible.

Mrs. Walters took an active role in her children's first exposures to kindergarten. She often talked about what it meant to be in kindergarten when curiosities arose in class discussions; making sure to include both her three and four-year-olds in these conversations. During their visit Mrs. Walters served as a guide for her children, leading them down long hallways while pointing out salient features of the primary school that she thought might be necessary for to her children to notice. She shared their excitement for the changes that were ahead of them by introducing them to new spaces like the cafeteria or the media center. Mrs. Walters explains why she spent time showing children these spaces:

[Visiting] the cafeteria seems not too relevant but for four-year-olds carrying their own food across the big, noisy, distracting lunch room [is overwhelming]. [Practicing this] is helpful for them. (interview, 2009, May 19, line 11)

Mrs. Walters tailored each part of the visit to her children's needs. For instance when they participated in a tour of the kindergarten classroom she made sure they noticed similarities to their preschool room. She pointed out that besides the shared bathroom they inspected down the hall, there was a semi-private bathroom within their classroom, just like in preschool. Mrs. Walters also pointed out classroom routines that the children might find familiar such as that cubbies were available in kindergarten and that the

children meet at the carpet. By drawing parallels between her children's kindergarten observations during the kindergarten visit and their preschool she was making connections between what they already know and can do to how they will be expected to behave as kindergarteners. Mrs. Walters talks about this as one goal of the kindergarten visit. "The children get to see an actual [kindergarten] classroom and peek around to see that it isn't too different from preschool" (interview, 2009, May 19, line 11).

According to Dockett and Perry (2007) a readiness perspective engages teachers and schools to become ready for children by providing supportive environments that appropriately engage children in activities to support their development and by promoting teacher's professional understanding of developmental processes. As a part of her belief in the importance of effective transition activities Mrs. Walters has served as co-chair to the transition committee for almost as long as she has worked in the district. In this leadership role she advanced her belief in continuity between programs as well as her belief in strong partnerships among transition participants. For instance she insisted that both preschool and kindergarten teachers be present at Bump Up Night with preschool teachers present with the children during the first part of the evening and representative preschool teachers positioned in kindergarten classrooms during the second phase of the transition event.

Mrs. Walters: On Bump Up Night there's a kindergarten teacher and a preschool teacher in each classroom. Bump Up Night is great because parents get to come and ask questions about kindergarten. All kindergarten teachers are present (transcribed interview, 2009, May 19, lines 11,15)

Research by LoCasale-Crouch, Mashburn, Dowener & Pianta (2008) draws attention to the notion that teachers and parents are "interconnected and interdependent throughout the transition period, aligned in ways that support children's adjustment to

early schooling” (p. 125). Because Mrs. Walters has a strong belief that ready parents help to ready their children for school she spent considerable time building positive relations with parents. I could tell that Mrs. Walters wanted to make parents ready for school by the ways that she met parents at their level of investment. For instance some parents were at the back door of Mrs. Walter’s classroom each day, taking time to talk with her about their child and to engage with her about what was going on in the classroom. Mrs. Walters stretched her boundaries beyond the school to engage other parents by joining in community events, inviting them to picnics, having a second cup of coffee with them or attending evening activities (field notes, April, 2009).

Mrs. Walter’s commitment to ready parents was an important impetus for including them in transition activities. I was deeply impressed by the ways she represented how important parents were in the transition process. For instance at one transition committee meeting Mrs. Walters promoted the need for parents to make contribution to their children’s portfolio; which eventually became a vital document for the kindergarten teachers to become acquainted with the children. This report typically contained parent selected artifacts that described the demographics of their family, events or activities that the family participated in which might be talked about at school, as well as photos the parents wanted to share of their family adventures (field notes, 2009, April 27). As co chair to the district transition committee Mrs. Walters explains the benefits families derived from this event and considerations she will make to Bump Up Night in the coming year.

Some parents were a little reluctant to separate from their children. By the end of the night they all realized it was good for the child and for them. The children got to do some fun things. (interview, 2009, June 10, lines 6-14)

Although Bump Up Night experienced some glitches, Mrs. Walters valued the support parents provided for their children as well as the benefits they themselves received by attending the event.

They were able to have question and answer session. Then they were happy to meet [their children] in the end then to see what the kindergarten classrooms look like. I thought this year went pretty smoothly. We had good turnout, weather cooperated. (interview, 2009, June 10, lines 2 & 12)

It seems that Mrs. Walter's developmental perspective served her children well on their first journey to the primary school. To provide continuities for her children she planned for and participated in events that she knew were necessary to promote their development. She garnered the support of parents, kindergarten teachers and administrators by serving as co-chair on the transition planning committee. Finally Mrs. Walters advocated for her children whenever the need arose making sure that a portrait of who they were at the end of their preschool experiences was clearly communicated to the kindergarten teachers they would soon come to know. Any one of these experiences are necessary for her children to gain familiarity with primary school, but for Mrs. Walters the transition events and conversations were primarily built around the preschool children's developmental needs within broader contextual perspectives of ready parents and a ready school.

Mrs. C building structure and conformity. Mrs. C has been teaching kindergarten for three years; prior to that she was a preschool paraprofessional in the district. In contrast to the developmental beliefs Mrs. Walters operates by, Mrs. C is empathetic to that philosophy but believes that kindergarten is a primary school experience, one that promotes academics and behavioral expectations for children as students. As Mrs. C puts it:

The difference between kindergarten and preschool is so vast. I feel preschool is teaching [children] how to be kids, like how to talk, how to express yourself, how to say what you want to do, building vocabulary to say what you would like to do. And all that is very important but it's so different than being a student. Kindergarten is about helping [children] grow from babies into students. It's two schools of thought. (interview, 2009, June 8, line 54)

Clearly, Mrs. C believes that the purposes of kindergarten are very different than preschool. It is a new culture for the children, an academic culture, that relies on competencies marked by standards and assessments (Goldstein, 2006). Mrs. C's investments in the goals from these events were directed mostly towards communicating the message that kindergarten will be fun but it will be quite different from preschool.

Mrs. C: I think that transition activities are definitely important because the kids are coming in and they're seeing the classroom. That kind of puts them at ease. I think that we're all scared of new things. My main goal is to make the kids assigned to me ...the kids and their parents that this is going to be good for them. I just tell them what is expected. [I want them] to start to feel comfortable with the classroom. (interview, 2009, June 8, lines 27 & 48)

Both Mrs. C and Mrs. Walters are invested in making school an enjoyable place for the children and their families, but Mrs. C emphasizes academic goals and structure over nurturance and partnerships.

Visiting her classroom I noticed that Mrs. C struggled to maintain some similarities to the preschool, and that her academic beliefs overshadowed her attempts towards continuity between programs. Similar to the preschool environment there were learning centers such as housekeeping, small toys and block areas that the children can enjoy and explore, but unlike the preschool children, the kindergarten children were directed to use these spaces in ways that promoted academic goals. For instance when the children were in the small toy area they first had mathematics packets to complete. These were specific activities that Mrs. C designed for the children to use manipulatives such as

counting chips to advance their understanding of number value, place value, or simple mathematical operations. Sand was located in another center but rather than playing with the sand as an exploratory activity the children were taught to trace out their names or other word spellings practicing writing in tactile and kinesthetic ways (field notes, 2009, June 8).

Mrs. C's push for academic goals was also apparent by the ways she managed her student's time and movements. For instance the daily schedule delineated specified tasks to be done at specific times of the day, such as 8:30-8:50 shared reading, 8:50-9 phonemic awareness, 9-9:15 phonics, 9:15-10 guided reading. When the children worked in centers Mrs. C had specific rules posted that described how children were to behave.

When one group of children began playing with the materials at the writing center that Mrs. C arranged for a specific communication task she intervened. 'Give me rule five.' The children put aside their game, whispering to one another, 'What are we supposed to be doing?' 'We have to tell each other a part of the story. Then we have to match the pictures on the folder to how the story happened.' The children immediately resumed the tasks Mrs. Walters had assigned (field notes, 2009, June 8).

The kindergarten space was much more structured than the preschool classroom. For instance the central area of the kindergarten room was arranged with low, circular tables where students were assigned to specific seats. Mrs. C demanded that her children remain at their seats where they were expected to work quietly most of the day. For Mrs. C, the focus of kindergarten was much more serious than preschool, less time could be devoted to student choice making if the children were to succeed as she explains:

[In preschool] Where you have kids that are playing in plan-do-review for a couple of hours and they can go play here and there they're not really answering to anybody. Now comes September and all of a sudden we're doing shared reading. 'You may not be over in the kitchen area. That's not what we're doing now. We're over here'. It's that hard for the children in

a lot of ways to transition to that kind of structure. (interview, 2009, June 8, line 48)

During small group activity, or center time, the children were expected to remain at their assigned locations until Mrs. C signaled movement with a bell. Similarly Mrs. C controlled behavior when children worked with peers with a self regulation game she called “You and Me”. This game was a way for one child to check that their partner remained on task. If either child needed help they were expected to consult one another as the first point of contact before eliciting help from either the aide or Mrs. C (field notes, 2009, June 8).

Unlike Mrs. Walters who believes in transition events as opportunities to ready children for school in a developmentally appropriate way, Mrs. C expects transition experiences to demonstrate the strict academic and behavioral expectations emphasized in primary school. When I asked about why her perspective on transition is so different she clarifies what she wants children to gain from these activities.

Mrs. C: I think that if the preschoolers were able to come here more often in the last six weeks of school they would see that at the end [of kindergarten] serious stuff [happens]. The difference would be so great compared to what they see in September that they might look around and say, ‘Hey they do mean business. They’re not kidding’. (interview, 2009, June 8, line 98)

She communicated this view to the preschool children when they took a tour of her classroom.

Mrs. C [directing attention back to the preschool children]: Mrs. C’s class is a lot of fun because you learn so many new things. My class knows how to read now. So I thought they will read the book now because you learn how to read in kindergarten. (field notes, 2009, June 9)

As revealed in the above comments academic and behavioral expectations for kindergarten are of paramount importance to Mrs. C, whether each child is either able,

willing or ready to conform. In fact Mrs. C goes one step further with her belief that kindergarten is a primary school experience, as she aligns kindergarten expectations with first grade over that of preschool.

I think that first grade and kindergarten are more of a match. They're doing the same sorts of things [that we do in kindergarten]. I always say teaching kindergarten is teaching children how to be students. (interview, 2009, June 8, line 98)

Mrs. C does not assume a developmental perspective about children. Instead she expects children to conform to kindergarten expectations, to get up to speed quickly if they are going to meet academic and behavior standards. Moreover she does not invest much energy in readying parents for the kindergarten experience. Unlike Mrs. Walters who embraced parents as partners on numerous occasions; Mrs. C remained rather detached from her parents. I noticed this shift in attitude almost immediately beginning with the start of the school day. Upon entering the school Mrs. C was expected to meet her children at the front of the school alongside other teachers. This was very different than at the preschool where the teachers greeted parents and their children individually at the rear entrance to each of their classrooms.

Mrs. C clearly created a different set of relationships with parents on other occasions as well. For instance at Bump Up Night, the first time parents were officially invited into the primary school to meet staff and kindergarten teachers, I noticed that as parents began conversations with Mrs. C about their children, she prefaced her responses with a confession that she would not have her class roster until two days before the start of the new school year, "So I always explain to them at first that I am not necessarily their teacher because they immediately start talking about what is going on with their kid" (interview, Mrs. C, 2009, June 8, line 72). Mrs. C's response seemed to stem, in

part, from the principal's requirement that "any event is to be school wide rather than specific to a particular grade level" (audio recording, 2009, April 17, line 117). She further explains why the principal believes this separation is necessary.

Mrs. C: In the beginning of the year [the parents] get to come to the door of the classroom but later they have to leave their child at the front of the school. They love coming in when they help. I feel I don't see them. We do have evening activities but they are not just for kindergarten. The principal wants whole school activities not just kindergarten. We can invite parents only for special times. If they look to come in during academic times we can't do that. It would interrupt the lessons. (audio recording, 2009, April 17, lines 114-116)

Mrs. C believes that transition experiences are important functions because they allow her time to focus more specifically on kindergarten patterns of behavior and daily routines within the primary school experience. As Mrs. C points out, "it's serious business in kindergarten and the sooner the parents and children get the message the better" (interview, 2009, June 8, line 98). In contrast, the preschool teacher, Mrs. Walters, shares long term relationships with families, nurturing partnerships that support children's development. For her transition experiences are part of the developmental perspective that supports children as they move from a setting that focuses on emerging skills and capabilities in developmentally appropriate ways to the rigors of an academic setting.

Parents repositioning themselves in primary school. Research on parent participation in transition activities is sparse. What little is known about how parents perceive this shift comes mainly from survey responses, while actual observations of how parents participate in transition events is rare.

Located in a tight community that spans a mile in any one direction most parents at Hawthorn become intimately connected to the preschool partly because the director

hosts many events both during and after school hours. Parents are also able to talk to the preschool teacher when they drop off and pick up their children each day as the district does not provide bus service at this level. This is not the case for the primary school, interestingly enough. Even though one of the preschools is adjacent to the primary school bus service is only provided for the primary school children. While Hawthorn can be described as a low income community it is not as ethnically diverse as one might assume. The three parents I met with were Caucasian, predominantly blue collar families. Two of the parents had a set of twins in preschool each placed in different classrooms. Mrs. Karamanus had twins, a girl and a boy, experiencing kindergarten for the first time, but this was not her first experience of the public school as the twins have an older sibling. Mrs. Andrews, the second parent I met with, has twin boys, Alex and his brother Aaron, who are her only children. Her boys had been in preschool for three years instead of the usual two, having recently transitioned into an inclusion classroom from a self contained setting. Mrs. Jay, the third parent I spoke with, was new to the community transferring with her child, Andrew, into the district in January, just months before the start of the transition period.

To begin our conversations I wanted to gain an understanding of how parents conceptualized their beliefs about school based on the experiences they had with their children in preschool. From these discussions I noticed that the focal parents generally held positive attitudes about the school district. Mrs. Karamanus was most familiar with both the preschool and kindergarten program. She expressed her view from this perspective.

They have a really nice [preschool] program. They do a lot with the kids. We are invited to a lot of stuff. They have family fun nights every two

months. They try to keep families connected. They also have a social worker who talks with the parents. The teachers watch the children and the parents talk about what's challenging them. (interview, 2009, June 11, lines 113-121)

Mrs. Jay echoed the same sentiments about the supportive and caring nature of the preschool. She too spoke about how the staff extends itself to families beyond the school day.

The school district is wonderful. I'm just so happy that he would be in the same district, you know prek and kindergarten. They do so much for the families here, extra things at night. They do a lot to get parents involved. (interview, 2009, June 5, line 20)

Mrs. Andrews has a deeper relationship with the preschool as she worked intimately with a variety of people because of the special education needs her boys presented. She shares her feelings about the preschool experience.

They go to prek with me bringing them in the morning. I was able to get to know the teachers. They have an open door policy. You can talk to them anytime. I never have a problem with [the teachers] and Ms. Gates [the preschool director] is great. They're wonderful. [My children] were speech delayed. But they did good [in preschool]. I am positive about this transition because they've come a long way. Their language, their character... they're easier [to manage], independent. (interview, 2009, June 14, line 60)

Talking with the parents after they attended Bump Up Night I noticed a shift in their attitude about school. Even though they might have sensed changes were on the horizon for their children from what they've heard or read prior to the Bump Up Night experience, both Mrs. Jay and Mrs. Karamanus seemed a bit disillusioned by what they observed there and how they were treated.

Mrs. Jay: It's kind of confusing. He'll be reading?...reading paragraphs? I'm like I don't know what is expected of me. How much will he be doing? What will we be doing with him after school? What am I supposed to do? How much is he expected to know? He's like this little boy. I just worry about that. I got this book. It's about the transition to school and

how the schools are so advanced now. The children are at such a young stage. It's going to be hard for little boys who are so physical. (interview, 2009, June 10, lines 16, 39-40)

Mrs. Karamanus: I didn't like it very much. We don't know what they are talking about [referring to the parent presentation on kindergarten standards and curriculum] If this is your first child going to school you don't know what's going on even if you listen [to the presentation]. You [are given] a piece of paper that doesn't say much [to me] (referring to the handouts parents receive). I have to see it in action. (interview, 2009, June 11, line 36)

Both parents seemed confused by the shift to an academic setting from the play based preschool program, commenting that they really weren't sure if their children could handle the change. It would seem that these two parents found the information portion of the evening unsettling because they did not know how standards transferred into classroom practices. While Mrs. Andrews tried to grab hold of how talk about kindergarten can be connected to her children's preschool experiences she too expressed concern for the changing academic climate.

Mrs. Andrews: (talking about what she observed in the kindergarten classroom at Bump Up Night) There was a calendar there. I said ok they [my children] are familiar with the calendar. We can talk about what's going on each day. I guess they do more writing and reading. It just looked different. There's more to know and more to do. Not the prek stuff. No cots for napping! (interview, 2009, June 14, line 39)

While the first part of the Bump Up Night evening mostly focused on academic shifts the parents were also able to observe how their children handled the evening from both social and emotional aspects. Mrs. Andrews talks about how Alex, one of her twins, could not accept the social challenges of being in a new place with strangers.

Mrs. Andrews: I went to Bump Up Night. It was fine except Alex started crying. At first when we were on line we were getting our stickers. He started crying before he went to the library. I took him out to the parking lot and talked to him about that this was information about kindergarten. So he kind of said oh I'll try it. I guess it was overwhelming for him[in the kindergarten room]. (interview, June 14, lines 20-23)

In a later part of the evening Mrs. Andrews still notices the emotional stress experienced by Alex.

Alex did not sit in the circle [for the story]. He was on my lap with his face covered. Then during the scavenger hunt we went around the room looking for stuff. It was a little crowded. I felt bad for Alex. He wouldn't budge [from the tables]. (interview, 2009 June 14, lines 52-54)

When parents spoke specifically about Bump Up Night they noticed how their children did not easily adapt to the new surroundings. At times during our conversations they took this observation to a higher level making assumptions about how their children's reactions might translate into broader issues. For instance Mrs. Karamanus found that the emotional and social changes that came with starting kindergarten were quite daunting for her son.

To me, I don't think my son is ready for kindergarten. He isn't as interested in it. For him to go to kindergarten and be on a schedule, you know do this here and this here, and there is no break! I think he's going to have a harder time. [At Bump Up Night] he wasn't too interested in the story but he was interested in the scavenger hunt. He saw the broom and the iron [in the kitchen]. He said Ohhh! This is cool. I said Honey, you have to put that down we're going to the carpet. That's when he started...I'm not going to the carpet. (interview, 2009, June 11, lines 91-93)

Mrs. Jay is equally concerned for her son's adjustment to the new setting again elaborating on social and emotional supports that extend beyond the academic shifts he will encounter.

I don't know how much they do in kindergarten. But that Bump Up night I just don't know what teacher he will be getting. I just worry when he goes to kindergarten that he'll be ok. You know I want him to enjoy kindergarten. (interview, June 10, lines 4-6, line 12)

Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) report that the nature of interactions between parents and their child's school changes between preschool and kindergarten, with more formalized, less frequent contact between kindergarten teachers and parents. This seems

to hold true for the parents at Hawthorn district as well. The parents I spoke to sensed that the loss they are feeling about leaving the people and place they called school was never really addressed in any transition activity. Perhaps this gap may exist because teachers take it for granted that separating from parents is a natural part of development. Mrs. Gates the preschool director addresses this concern and is sensitive to the change in relations parents will experience with teachers as their children transition into the primary school.

We have had feedback from families, informally, and they feel as if the door has closed. They feel as if they don't have access. For example they can bring their children to the door here. But down there (at the primary school) they can for the first three days and then the child has to go to through the front door. Things like that. We have a number of classroom activities for them to participate in but (at the primary school) there is not that abundance and they (the parents) kind of feel that loss at the kindergarten. (interview, 2009, April 24, lines 138-145)

Mrs. Andrews talked about the cultural shift between settings in more specific ways. She finds it may take time to get used to the larger building both for her children and for herself.

The [primary] school is much bigger. I would like to meet [the teacher] but I won't be able to walk down the hall to see the teacher. When the first school day [at preschool] arrived Alex had a meltdown. He worked himself up that school was coming... school was coming. So I don't know [what to do] if it happens again. I'm expecting that from him the first day of kindergarten, but he might surprise me. (interview, 2009, June 11, line 60)

While Mrs. Karamanus is not new to the primary school program she expresses concern for the lack of flexibility she believes her son will experience while he adjusts to the new school setting. Mrs. Karamanus expresses this as a lack of understanding about her child's needs.

Mrs. Karamanus: The kids don't have much time for themselves in the [kindergarten] classroom. They are taking that free time away, no nap time or computer time. They hardly have that in kindergarten. I still say they are little kids. (interview, 2009, June 11, lines 85-87)

The three parents who participated in the Hawthorn transition experience addressed three main points when they evaluated its potential. First they became increasingly aware of how quickly academics becomes the focal point of schooling. This shift and the fact that they and their children are having to adjust both socially and emotionally as they move from the intimate setting of preschool to a larger school makes the transition to kindergarten less seamless. Another prevalent concern voiced by parents in this study is that they want their children to have the best possible first impression about kindergarten, one that they will enjoy. For at least two of the parents summer camp was a solid transformation time for this to occur because the camp is held on the primary school campus. Finally, the parents believe that there are great gaps between the primary school and the preschool that make a smooth transition into kindergarten challenging to achieve. The parents I spoke to may not be clear about why these gaps exist, but they are sensitive to the variations in development they observe when they compare their children's abilities to other children of the same age. They have come to recognize that kindergarten is more about academics and standards rather than the developmental perspective they and their children experienced in preschool.

Children gaining a sense of the kindergarten experience. Part of my study design was to gain insight into the ways that focal children constructed their knowledge about kindergarten from their transition experiences. When Mrs. Walters talked to her children about their visit to kindergarten the children's first impressions seemed to echo the same

sentiments. Once again they are most curious about the lay of the land and who they might find at the primary school.

Mrs. Walters (talking to children after their visit to kindergarten): What was your favorite part?

Andy: looking at the playground

Gay: I like the hallway

Alex: I loved the snacks

Gay: That is where my sister goes

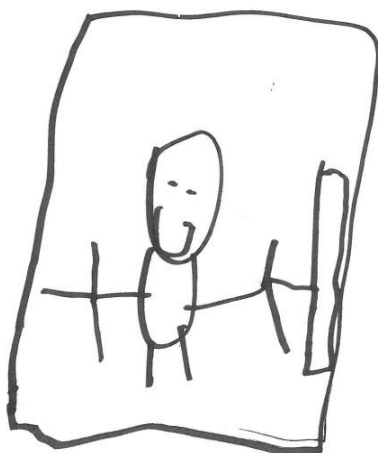
Mrs. Walters: We got to see your sister. That was a cool part of the trip.

Joseph: and we didn't even get to see my brother.

(field notes, 2009, May 27, lines 1-13)

Borrowing a data collection approach used by Dockett and Perry (2005) I visited children and their parents in their homes to have children create individual books reflecting their memories of kindergarten transition experiences. Looking across the data collected parent-child conversations and the children's renditions of their transition experiences I noticed similarities between their current situations and their perception of kindergarten. For instance, the children created detailed descriptions of the physical space in the school and the kindergarten classroom that were similar to spaces found in the preschool. In the figure below Alex drew a detailed depiction of the cubby spaces in which he included hooks and book bags all framed within the confines of the cubby space.

Figure 4.2. Alex's Cubby Space



Gay also drew details of the cubby spaces in similar ways: hooks, defined spaces and bags.

Figure 4.3. Gay's Cubby Space

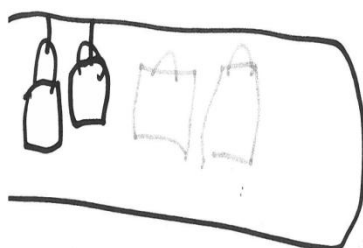


Figure 4.4. Andrew Hanging His Backpack in the Kindergarten Cubby



Andrew adds his rendition of the kindergarten classroom with his first task, to hang his backpack in the cubby.

While the children seemed to notice continuities in spaces and places between settings they also paid close attention to new spaces. These included the nurse's office, the library and bathrooms. Their drawings included such details as table legs and bench seats in the cafeteria.

Figure 4.5. Alex Sitting at the Primary School Cafeteria Table



Andrew: (drawing a cafeteria table) this is the table in the cafeteria, table
and chairs. I had a snack, goldfish. It was raining that day. It was a
big school in the cafeteria.

Figure 4.6. Andrew Sitting at the Primary School Cafeteria Table



Mom: What did you do in the kindergarten classroom?

Andrew: there was a book in kindergarten.

Mom: Is the teacher a girl or a boy?

Andrew: She's a teacher.. it's a girl. We're on the carpet (draws himself
on the carpet). We sat on the carpet. I sat on H.

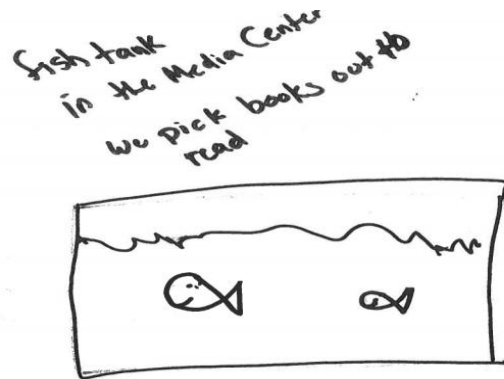
(audio recorded conversation, 2009, June 10, lines 50-61)



Figure 4.7. Andrew Sitting on the Carpet in the Kindergarten Classroom. He is sitting on his letter.

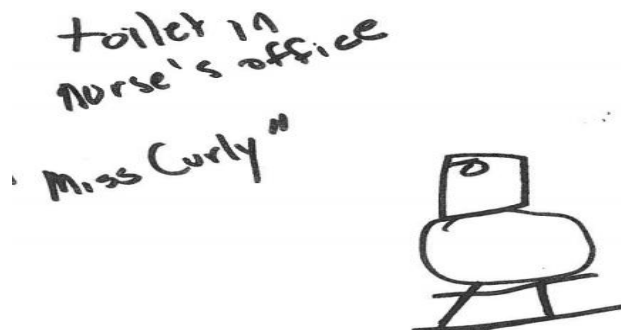
Gay noticed the fish tank in the media center. It became a topic of lengthy discussion while on the visit. It is interesting to note the details she adds to the picture. This rendition is drawn from memory about two weeks after her visit to kindergarten.

Figure 4.8. Gay Recalls the Library Fish Tank



Gay was equally interested and recalled the semi-private bathroom she discovered between two kindergarten classrooms. It was adjoined by entries from either room. While she talked about the mural of a rainbow she discovered on that bathroom wall she combined it with her memory of the bathroom she noticed during the tour of the nurse's office.

Figure 4.9. Gay Recalls the Toilet in the Nurse's Office



Gay: I'm going to make a rainbow.

Mom: They have rainbow in kindergarten?

Gay: They have pictures like that in the bathroom.

Mom: Did you meet the nurse?

Gay: yes... Ms. Curly hair (transcribed conversation, 2009, June 11, lines 122-136)

The children's drawings and recollections seem to provide evidence for the goals

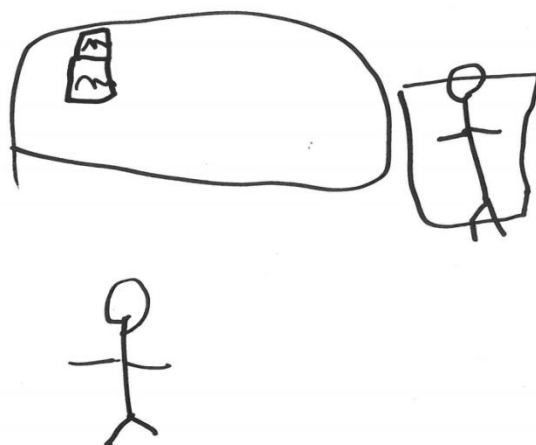
Mrs. Gates has about transition experiences.

Ms. Gates (preschool administrator): The children actually go to the other building on a class trip. They walk through the kindergarten hallway. They go into a kindergarten classroom and they get to look at the learning environment. They see our classrooms look very similar. They see little icons that are familiar to them in their classroom. (interview, 2009, April 24, lines 79-84)

While children's main focus is on gaining information about the lay of the land while on their visit to the primary school they also depict special events that they attach to the start of kindergarten. For instance the children talked about how they wanted their current relationships with peers to persist in the primary school. Alex and Gay talked and drew pictures that included their family and their friends.

Alex: [the classroom] will look like my friend's class. [talks as he draws the school] I will make a whole school. I am going to room 9. Well my brother will be in room 6. I have some new friends like this friend in kindergarten. My teacher will be a girl. Maybe she had a good day... the end. (audio conversation, 2009, September 9, lines 6-19; lines 55-57)

Figure 4.10. Alex and His Twin Going to Kindergarten



Gay also captures her first day of kindergarten making sure that her friend Mitchell and her family will all be there.

Gay: (draws a picture of the first day of school) Mommy, daddy, Mitchell (her best friend in preschool) he has black hair. He has green eyes. I don't know how to make his fancy tee shirt. (audio conversation, 2009, June 13, lines 90-100)

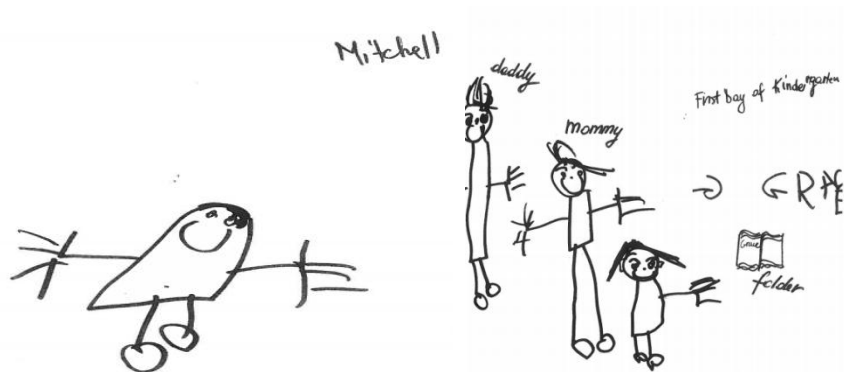


Figure 4.11. Gay's friend Mitchell Figure 4.12. Gay's family on the First Day of Kindergarten

It seems evident by the ways that the children express what they gain from their transition activities that the most they take away from these first experiences are impressions about what the school looks like. From their discussions it would seem that one time transition experiences such as a visit to kindergarten or Bump Up Night reveal very little about kindergarten experiences to the parents and children who participate in these activities.

Summary of the Hawthorn Transition Experience

Hawthorn takes great pride in the ways that its preschool coordinates and facilitates the transition experience for its children and their families. The primary school principal works hand in hand with the preschool administrator to provide opportunities for all staff including faculty, aides and support personnel to have opportunity to weigh in

on the partnership approach to transition. This collaborative process is integral to Hawthorn's belief that transition to kindergarten must be addressed in meaningful ways as an important component of overall school success. As a result of Hawthorn's planning efforts families experience two transition activities, the "Bump Up Night" and the "Meet and Greet". These unique transition experiences are especially designed to give parents and their children a first look at the primary school and kindergarten. While these opportunities enable parents and their children to begin to construct realistic perspectives on what to expect in kindergarten there are some concerns that seem to surface from all who participate in the transition process.

One most pressing issue that arose from conversations, interviews and observations I made at Hawthorn seems to center on the rift between a developmental environment to an academic setting. As a consequence of this gap teachers from each setting do not often see eye to eye about what to expect from transition activities. Developmental issues also arise with parents when they talk about expectations that they have for their children as they transition into kindergarten. Likewise it seems that even though the children enjoyed the opportunities to visit the primary school and engage in kindergarten exploration the transition to kindergarten activities did not bridge the gap that exists between preschool and kindergarten expectations and cultures. Instead these activities provided a chance for the children to gain a sense of the physical space; a lay of the land. As a result although Hawthorn is on a positive track towards building strong partnerships in transition, it has yet to adequately address the support structures needed to fully engage all participants in the process of change.

Silverton: Constructing a Systematic Model for Transition

Silverton, a small urban district surrounded by wealthier suburban communities, is extremely diverse. In the 2008-2009 school year 63% of its children were Hispanic with 25% African American, 11-12 % white and less than 1% of Asian origin. Due to its large numbers of children from Hispanic backgrounds, there is a great emphasis in the Silverton schools to provide for the Spanish speaking population. As a matter of course parents are likely to receive flyers, handouts and other communications from the district in both languages. Translators are available as full time staff at the main office, in assemblies and during community meetings to provide Spanish translations to those populations. Moreover Silverton's prekindergarten and kindergarten programs are offered in both English and Spanish with 14 % of children in either preschool or kindergarten English Language Learner (ELL), bilingual classrooms.

In 2009 New Jersey began a preschool expansion program that provided funds for districts serving large numbers of low income families that could show evidence of having invested in early education and that serve low income families. Silverton was selected as one of the five districts statewide to participate in this expansion. The upper administration used the funds to offer full day three and four-year-old preschool in two locations. Five of the seven preschool classrooms and all of the kindergarten through grade four classrooms are located in the primary school which is situated on the west side of town. About three miles east of the primary school, the middle school houses one three and one four-year-old classroom. In addition to the local public program there is a small federally funded Head Start preschool program situated just around the corner from the

primary school. The Silverton administrators maintain an informal relationship with the director and teachers at this site mostly for transition to kindergarten purposes.

Research indicates that young children transition to kindergarten effectively when a school district is led by administrators who understand child development, professional staff who are dedicated to bringing research based early education curriculum to life, and support personnel who are highly trained and approachable (Rous, Hallam, McCormick & Cox, 2008). Silverton embraces these levels of commitment, and has been recognized within the county, across the state and among research institutions as a model program for effective early education. For instance, the superintendent, Mrs. Garcia was recently the key note speaker at the annual conference of the National Association for the Education of Young Children. Similarly, Silverton's preschool program has been the focus of research studies conducted by researchers from New York University, the University of Pennsylvania and Columbia University. Mrs. Garcia shared that researchers from these institutions are particularly interested in the Silverton prekindergarten program for its emphasis on emergent literacy and the development of self regulation within play based activities.

Defining Transition: A Top Down Perspective

Since Mrs. Garcia came to Silverton about five years ago she has built a solid reputation for her dedication to and passion for early childhood education. Over the course of her tenure the district has committed to improving early childhood education transition with their use of the Tools of the Mind curriculum model, their adherence to standards, and their application for expansion. To implement her vision of high quality

early education Mrs. Garcia has implemented a formal top down model of supervision of early education programs including transition programs. This top down perspective is enacted through an administrative structure that begins with decisions made by the upper administrators which are then carried out by the preschool coordinator who Mrs. Garcia describes as “a resource teacher, a master teacher” (field notes).

Mrs. Daniels, the newly hired preschool coordinator, is assigned with the primary duty to develop and facilitate transition activities. While transition activities at Silverton engage key participants such as teachers, parents and children; these individuals do not take on responsibilities for the planning process. For instance Mrs. Daniels plans transition events around teachers’ schedules, leaving them little say about what these activities should be and how the transition plan will be enacted.

Mrs. Daniels: I facilitate the prek to k transition. We’re trying out activities that we think might be helpful [for transition]. I’m pretty much the person who is responsible. I come up with the ideas and then I present them to the administration. They have the final say. (interview, 2009, May 7, line 18)

The top down approach to transition activity is carried out by Mrs. Daniels in systematic ways. She views her role as moving top administrative decisions and plans to teacher enactments.

Because many of the children who live in Silverton attend the public preschool Mrs. Daniels pays particular attention to in-house activities that lend themselves as transition events. As much as there is a strong commitment to in- house transition events, interestingly enough, little attention is paid to the children outside of the Silverton site. Mrs. Daniels did explain however, that she manages one exception to this stance; that is when she works with the local Head Start administrator.

We do have a little transition with Head Start. I think there will be five or six students coming into kindergarten. The children and their teacher are coming for a tour at the end of May. It's really for the children to see the classroom, to see the teacher so that it's not a strange place. Back in April we had one of our kindergarten teachers go over and meet with their prek teacher. Just a discussion about Head Start. The Head Start administrator wanted her prek teachers to become familiar with the kindergarten program so that they could introduce concepts that the children would need for kindergarten because they don't have the same curriculum. (interview, 2009. May 7, lines 202-204)

Silverton administrators invest in the in-house transition program in three essential ways. First the district uses a highly regarded research based curriculum model, Tools of the Mind, for both its preschool and kindergarten programs. Secondly the administrator's top down model allows them to pay particular attention to professional support structures to maintain consistencies between the preschool and kindergarten programs. Moreover, because the Silverton personnel are sensitive to the facts that many families do not speak English as their first language and that most families live in low socioeconomic conditions, they are continually seeking out ways to support their families' needs; for example, by providing translators as full time staff and offering programs such full day bilingual preschool classes for their non English speaking children.

The Transition Programs

Mrs. Daniels has created a three pronged approach to begin to address the gaps that may cause concern for children when they transition from prekindergarten into kindergarten. The first prong brings teachers together in conversation with one another to build deeper understandings about their separate programs. The second prong engages kindergarten and preschool children in meaningful activities which are promoted through

the Tools of the Mind curriculum. The third endeavor is to address parent concerns about transition experiences by hosting family visits to kindergarten.

Building consistencies between prekindergarten and kindergarten programs.

Mrs. Daniels builds consistencies between the prekindergarten and kindergarten program in two important ways. First the two programs share the same curriculum model which readily translates into similar classroom designs and daily routines. The two focal classrooms I observed are both large spaces which enable the teachers to develop a number of similar themes. Likewise both teachers use similar materials typically found in early childhood classrooms. For instance the math centers in both classrooms held a number of manipulatives including rulers, counting chips and assorted measured cubes, weights and scales, number cards, counting prompts, graph paper, and games engaging children in mathematical applications. Schedules and daily activities were also very similar to one another in both the prekindergarten and kindergarten classrooms I visited. As a result the kindergarten teachers were able to pick up from where the prekindergarten teachers leave off with the curriculum. For instance the children I observed in the prekindergarten class worked on counting such as with a one-to-one correspondence game. Then in kindergarten the children were asked to count by two, threes, fives and tens with the assistance of a color coded counting line. The focal prekindergarten teacher, Mrs. Strong, commented on how children are brought into increasingly more complex tasks after they've become comfortable with the kindergarten environment and staff.

Those kindergarten teachers will do what we're doing now for a little while. Their focus is a little bit like the prek style. Then they kind of bridge them [the children] into the more academic areas. (interview, 2009, May 22, line 9)

Other consistencies existed with similar tasks across grade level as well, providing children with a sense of continuity in areas such as game rules, familiar patterns of game movements and behaviors, and game goals. Mrs. Manning, the focal kindergarten teacher, comments on how another activity indigenous to Tools of the Mind, play planning, provides consistency points which can smooth transition into kindergarten.

We have Tools of the Mind so all of the implements we've been incorporating into our day, they've already had in preschool. They've had play planning, writing and if they've come from our preschool they know how to do the lines, the letters and write their play plan. The transition is easy. It's very easy, not scary because they already know what they are doing. (interview, 2009, June 3, line 6)

A second way Mrs. Daniels ensures consistencies between prekindergarten and kindergarten is through teacher observations. Mrs. Daniels organizes for kindergarten and prekindergarten teachers to visit one another's classrooms so that they can gain a sense of what occurs in each setting. These visits allow the teachers better understandings of how the Tools of the Mind curriculum model develops concepts and skills that build from fundamental to increasingly more complex constructs. Mrs. Daniels explains.

Even though we use the same curriculum [the preschool and kindergarten teachers] haven't been trained with each other's curriculum. They don't really know where the overlaps are and where new materials are introduced. (interview, 2009, May 7, line 68)

Mrs. Daniels also sets aside time for the teachers to meet with one another, once in January and a second time in June, to provide opportunity for the teachers to have conversation about their observations; their expectations for curricular experiences and learner outcome goals. While I did not witness these observation visits or shared meetings Mrs. Daniels provided me with the agenda and action plan she produced as an

outcome from these events. The agenda for the June meeting emphasized responses from kindergarten teachers who had had an opportunity to visit the preschool settings.

After a thorough discussion of the “overall level that pre-k students are working at in play planning, make believe play, literacy/math activities as well as self-regulation” the teachers talked about what students are expected to be able to do when they enter kindergarten the following year. The teachers discussed; ‘activities that transition into phase 1 of the kindergarten curriculum from preschool’ then considered how these activities promote consistencies between programs. Finally the teachers and Mrs. Daniels discussed the ‘next steps in the transition process which set goals for transition activities for the 2010-2011 year’(2009, June 5, Red Bank Primary School Pre-K/Kindergarten Transition Meeting Agenda).

Mrs. Daniels called this meeting “dynamic” in a memo she shared with me soon after the meeting was held. I present portions of her report to summarize some of the key ideas that were discussed along with items to be acted upon.

Now that kindergarten teachers are aware of what pre-K students are doing at the end of the school year they realize that they have been ‘reteaching’ skills that students were already consistently demonstrating in Pre-K. Kindergarten teachers also want to emphasize common language [with Pre-k practices] so the students ‘remember’ activities and skills they used in Pre-K (i.e. calling initial phonemes and graphemes ‘initial sounds’ v. ‘beginning sounds’). (personal communication, 2009, June 5, Mrs. Daniels)

Coordinating this endeavor can be challenging because as Mrs. Daniels explains “a minimum of six people [substitutes] have to be called in to help with the logistics of getting teachers into one another’s classroom” (2009, June 5, line 164). Mrs. Daniels believes, however, that the benefits for hosting this type of faculty meeting outweigh the challenges because teachers gain a tremendous amount of understanding about what occurs in the preschool classroom as well as acknowledging how much children gain from the Tools of the Mind program before they enter kindergarten.

The teachers I spoke with believe that the observations and coordinated faculty meetings benefit them because they are able to gain a sense of the sequencing that occurs within the Tools curriculum model.

Mrs. Manning (kindergarten teacher): We share the same program which is a very specific program. We voiced some concern that the children were focusing on sounds rather than calling out the letters [during play planning]. Then the prek teachers changed and now they do a combination of sounds and letters. So a lot of the articulation that we've had has resulted in good changes. (interview, 2009, June 3, line 12)

Transition events for children. There are primarily two transition events for prekindergarten children. They are eating in the cafeteria and Buddy Reading. Both events are coordinated by Mrs. Daniels but this was not always the case. Mrs. Daniels explains.

Well this is our first year really doing anything that's grade level wide. In the past it's been up to the teacher. If the teacher wanted to pair up with another k teacher and do any kind of activity it was primarily on their own. With my new position it is actually one of my responsibilities to facilitate the prek to k transition. We're trying out activities that we think might be helpful.(interview, 2009, May 7, line18)

Some support structures are offered in less formal ways for prekindergarten children as they prepare for kindergarten experiences. One such activity is when the children are invited to lunch with others in the cafeteria. The prekindergarten children are required to have lunch family style with their teachers in the classroom. So visiting the cafeteria is a practical transition activity to give the children a lay of the land and allow them to practice lunchroom routines. The cafeteria experience occurs over the course of at least five visits late in the prek school year. This activity is guided by the prek teacher aide. Typically the aide takes them through the lunch line then sits with small groups of prek children as they eat at cafeteria tables with their peers.

Mrs. Parson (prek teacher aide): I will be able to help the children get used to eating in the cafeteria. I love to help them get acclimated to the cafeteria. We take them in a few times, practice eating with others. We just want them to get used to the noise level.(interview,2009,May 22, line 5)

A more formalized attempt at bringing prekindergarten children into the kindergarten classrooms is when the two groups share Buddy Reading sessions. Even though the prekindergarten and kindergarten classrooms are primarily housed in the same building most prekindergarten classrooms are located off a different hallway from the kindergarten spaces. Mrs. Daniels explains that “the children are never together so now we’ve started to bring them together through the Buddy Reading” (interview, 2009,May 7, lines 97, 100).

Mrs. Daniels: We just started it [Buddy Reading] in March. It’s once a month until the end of the year. The prek classes go into the kindergarten classrooms. Each month they visit a different kindergarten room. The goal is for the children to see at least four different kindergarten rooms. When they go into the kindergarten classroom they meet the teacher. That way it’s not a brand new experience for them. (interview, 2009, May 7, line 102)

The Tools of the Mind model makes Buddy Reading practice an integral part of its program. According to the Tools of the Mind manual “Buddy Reading is a self-regulation activity that covers a variety of literacy concepts such as handling books, comprehending and remembering stories, acting like a reader, looking at print, listening and talking” (Tools of the Mind handout retrieved from superintendent’s office, 2009, January). At Silverton the children participate in Buddy Reading as a part of their daily reading routine which begins in kindergarten. Its process starts with the children selecting a book that they choose to share with their partner. One partner is given a card with lips drawn on it while the other partner has the card with an ear drawn on it. The intentions

behind the cue cards are to prompt the roles the children will assume during the Buddy Reading process. When I first learned of the Buddy Reading practice I was a bit confused as to how it could be transformed into a transition activity. Mrs. Daniels explains.

They work with the kindergarten children as they are paired up together. It usually is about two kindergarten children with one prek child because the kindergarten has more children than ours. The children seem to like it. The kindergarten children feel important because they get a chance to practice reading. The prek children don't read but they look at the pictures or they remember the story so they can retell it. (interview, 2009, May 7, line 102)

The goal for the prekindergarten children is to visit each kindergarten classroom at least once during the shared Buddy Reading experience making a total of four possible visits, and I had the opportunity to witness Buddy Reading on two of these occasions. The first scheduled event was held with Mrs. Manning and her kindergarten group who invited two prek groups to her classroom. One group was a special education self contained prek and the second was a typically developing prek group. Mrs. Manning explains what should happen during the Buddy Reading transition event.

They come into my room just to do Buddy Reading. They don't get a tour of the classroom. They just see the room, meet me and they see the kindergarten children. So it's not really daunting coming down the hall. (interview 2009, June 3, line 14)

This particular activity happened late one afternoon in early June. Mrs. Manning began the event by welcoming the prek children into her classroom. She directed the four children from the self contained classroom to sit at tables with their kindergarten partners; while she instructed the rest of the prek children to scatter themselves on the floor wherever there was space to squeeze in with their kindergarten partners. Once settled some partners began the Buddy Reading process by chatting with one another while others sat quietly waiting for further instruction from their teachers. Since there

were so many children in the room both the kindergarten and prek teacher were quite busy monitoring pairs, prompting children with questions when they observed children using the Buddy Reading activity inappropriately, while keeping the two groups engaged in the activity.

Mrs. Vashall (a prek teacher): Do you remember what questions to ask? You can ask, 'what did you like about...' When you are done reading and listening trade ears and lips then read the next book. (field notes, 2009, June 5)

I sat next to two children as they carried out Buddy Reading. The kindergarten child began reading his story first while the prek child listened in. When the kindergartner finished his story they traded prompt cards and then it was time for the prek child to read. He told his story in a few minutes turning pages while 'reading' through picture prompts. I did not witness any conversation or questions between the focal children I observed. In fact they completed the paired task very quickly, not asking questions or having conversations with one another. They then waited quietly for further direction from their teacher. When all children appeared done with the task the teacher made an announcement.

Mrs. Vashall: If you are done collect your lips and ears and line up. Be sure to say thank you and goodbye.

Mrs. Manning: I would like my boys and girls to sit down. What do we say?

Children (in unison): Thank you, good bye. (field notes, 2009, June 5)

When the children returned to their classroom they did not have discussion about kindergarten or the Buddy Reading session. Instead the teacher resumed the daily routine by preparing the children to go home for the day.

The second time I witnessed Buddy Reading was with Mrs. Strong, a focal prekindergarten teacher, and Mrs. Beverly, a kindergarten teacher who inhabits the classroom right next door.

Mrs. Strong: The kindergarten teacher next to me is big on Buddy Reading. She invites us over from time to time. So my kids just happen to get a little bit of a nice transition because we probably did about five visits to her room. It really is a nice thing. (interview, 2009, June 10, line7)

This was not part of the planned Buddy Reading sessions that Mrs. Daniels orchestrates.

Mrs. Strong took it upon herself to host this session because she wanted me to witness “a truer version”(field notes, 2009) of the experience since the first experience included two prekindergarten groups and was a bit hectic.

While much of this session resembled the first observation there were some subtle differences that seemed to make this experience more enjoyable and focused. One difference was that it happened between two classes rather than three. This seemed to make the children more deeply engaged with their kindergarten peers and made the space feel less crowded. Secondly because both classes are in close proximity to each another I got the impression that the children frequently met and interacted with their kindergarten peers and teacher.

When we entered the room some of the prek children casually approached the kindergarten teacher and held informal conversations with her. The kindergarten teacher acknowledged them by name, mentioning incidentals about how they were growing and asking what they have been up to since they were last together. She then mentioned that they knew where to sit and with whom to Buddy Read. The children seemed to be comfortable with the process of Buddy Reading as they immediately engaged with one another. It seemed that they knew the purpose for the task at hand, and that they engaged in the task in authentic ways. For instance I noticed that some of the children I observed asked questions to one another while they read their stories.(field notes, 2009, June 10)

Mrs. Strong shared why these observations were accurate.

You're supposed to go around and help children who are having a little difficulty, but as the year progresses we don't need to do that as much. Sometimes we have to cue the conversation like asking 'what do you see in the picture?' and that kind of thing. That's the design.(interview, 2009, June 10, line 4)

Buddy Reading though not initially designed in the Tools curriculum model as a transition activity serves that purpose well in the minds and enactments of how the preschool coordinator and teachers utilize it. Mrs. Strong explains.

It's a transition activity in that ... well it's better than other transition activities because there is limited contact between prek and kindergarten. I mean we really don't transition. My kids feel so grown up when we do Buddy Reading. It eliminates the fear factor. It makes it a little less like 'where are we going?' I think that's a good connection. I think Buddy Reading works well. (interview, 2009, June 10, line 10)

Parent visit to kindergarten. The parent visit to kindergarten is orchestrated by the Silverton administration. It begins with Mrs. Daniels who arranges the event by setting the schedule, creating and distributing invitations to the community of prospective kindergarten families and facilitating a morning and afternoon session for the visits to the kindergarten classrooms. These meetings are offered over three days in May to give parents choices for when they can attend the event. Mrs. Daniels explains.

We've always had parent visits throughout the year where parents have just come in and said my kid is registering for prek I want to see prek or my kid is registering for k and I want to see k. Then in August we always had a prek orientation for the kids and their parents but the k orientation is new. We've offered it to parents whose children haven't been in our prek program but now I opened it up to all parents whose children will be in kindergarten. I've [also] given parents personal tours depending on when they register for kindergarten (interview, 2009, May 7, lines 128, 187).

The visit to the kindergarten is divided into three phases. First the parents meet the administrator in the cafeteria to gain an overview of the event and the kindergarten

program. Next the parents are divided into small groups, and escorted into the kindergarten classrooms where they can see the classroom in action, though their children may not eventually be assigned to that particular kindergarten room. At the conclusion of the classroom tour the parents are escorted back to the cafeteria for a debriefing of what they observed. Time is also given to answer any questions parents might have about the program. The entire visit takes about two hours from start to finish.

Since Mrs. Daniels was called out to a meeting on the morning I attended the kindergarten visit, Mrs. Garcia, the superintendent of schools, conducted the session. About seven families met in the cafeteria for the morning session. Some families were represented by one parent, others by two parents, and still others by parents and presumed siblings. Mrs. Garcia began the session by welcoming the parents first in English and then in Spanish. Even though she is fluent in Spanish she brought with her an interpreter, Mrs. Lopez, who is a full time staff member at Silverton. Mrs. Lopez served as a reliable resource for the Spanish speaking families because she knows the school and the kindergarten program quite well. She is most likely the first point of contact for these families should they visit the front office.

Mrs. Garcia continued the session with an overview of the program that included a discussion on the Tools of the Mind curriculum. She talked about some of her goals for kindergarten

Kindergarten will make your children more independent and mature. It is during this time that their personalities emerge as students. They will learn to read and write. They also learn sound symbol recognition and advance their understanding of reading comprehension. (field notes, 2009, May 18)

Mrs. Garcia followed this short introduction with a story about one child's experience as he moved into kindergarten. She wove research into the conversation mentioning a John Hopkins study and the fact that New York University is quite interested in their prekindergarten program. She followed this with a conversation of how the kindergarten children want to please their teachers by meeting goals and expectation. "Kindergarten is an amazing year because your children will learn quickly. It's amazing how well they will learn to write and converse." (field notes, Mrs. Garcia, 2009, May 18). After responding to a few parental questions Mrs. Garcia separated the group into smaller numbers then invited them into each of the six kindergarten classrooms which were in session. I took the tour in Mrs. Dane's room with two parents; Molly and Bette; along with their toddler.

When we entered the classroom Mrs. Dane had just finished the morning meeting time. She was in the process of transitioning the children into center activities. Her aide, Mrs. Paterson, met us at the door. She spoke in whispers as she conducted a tour of the classroom spaces. Mrs. Patterson explains.

It's a great program but this is a continuation of the Tools program from prek. When the children come in September they will be familiar with the spaces. We let them get acquainted with the kindergarten routines. For instance there is no nap time.

Molly: I don't think Tom will need it.

Mrs. Paterson: Let me tell you that when they come in the first month they get tired. Lunch is usually at 11:50 they go outside then come back in at 12:45. So that's a nice stretch of time. When they come back in the teacher works with them on science. I come back into the classroom at 2 then take them to specials until about 3:00. This schedule really steps up in January. It becomes much more academic. We need to get them ready for that. (audio recording, 2009, May 18)

As we move around the room children are working in centers that the kindergarten teacher has arranged. These are opportunities for the children to interact with one another on literacy, mathematics and science related topics.

Bette: (as we move around the room watching the children in center activities): This is a sensory overload. Are they working with butterflies?

Mrs. Paterson: Yes, that center is called Science Eyes. They write all the time, even in science. Some are reading independently. May is an amazing month because the children who we thought weren't getting it start to learn more sight words, and improve their penmanship. [she shares a sample journal one child was writing]

Molly: What's Jack and Annie?

Mrs. Paterson: Jack and Annie is a series we read throughout the school. We read two chapters then the next day we review. It's great for going back and then predicting what will happen next.

Bette: I know Tom loves his centers.

Mrs. Paterson: We have six centers a literacy center, sound center, book making center, science center, math center and story center. Jack and Annie is part of the story center. It's giving them a higher thinking skill because they are learning to sequence the story events. Some of the children get stressed but I tell them you can't be wrong. (audio recording, 2009, May 18)

Mrs. Paterson continues the tour of the classroom in this manner pointing out special places like the African display that Mrs. Dane created after she spent a summer in the continent as an exchange teacher. It was by happenstance that the Jack and Annie story took them to Africa as well. The children were learning Swahili, and other cultural habits. They were also communicating with their African peers as electronic pen pals. Molly and Bette seemed impressed by the opportunities that awaited their son, Tom. I could hear them exclaiming about the number of centers their child would engage in such as Jack and Annie and building a butterfly garden. They were also impressed that their son would take part in specials. This included gym, music, art, Spanish and computers.

Likewise they seemed enthused that their son would be eating in the cafeteria (field notes). About twenty minutes into the visit all the parents returned to the cafeteria for a debriefing conducted by Mrs. Garcia.

During the debriefing phase of the parent visit to kindergarten the tenor of the follow up conversation seemed to get into the nuts and bolts of the transition process. Mrs. Garcia addressed particular issues parents were having with kindergarten expectations and their children's first experiences in an academic setting. Some issues dealt with questions about teacher quality and expectations.

Bette: I would like to meet the kindergarten teachers.

Mrs. Garcia: The teachers are just equally creative and talented and do an amazing job. We are moving some of the teachers from prek to kindergarten because of their solid experience with the curriculum, amazing skills in kindergarten. You can certainly come back and see them anytime. That is not a problem. They plan together, they cover the same curriculum. There's room for creativity. Their personality comes through. The prek and kindergarten teachers come together and they make decisions. The main goal is to have high quality teachers in every classroom and to have a viable curriculum whether the children go to teacher A,B or C. (audio recording, 2009, May 18)

Other questions focused on particular concerns parents held regarding the school's recognition and support of community needs, such as supporting the Spanish and English speaking neighborhoods. For example Mrs. Garcia talked about how the prekindergarten program is offered in both traditional and bilingual classroom settings.

Mrs. Santiago (a parent): What do you mean by bilingual?

Mrs. Garcia: That is a good question. The children are not ready to use English 100% of the time. What we are doing is that the teacher is using Spanish in the morning teaching and learning instruction. In the afternoon they will teach the same concepts and skills in English. You're not delaying their learning. You're using their native language. As they progress they phase out of that program into a monolingual class. In the

kindergarten or the prek is when the decision will be made for them to be part of the mainstream. When they come into the program very young they stay one or two years. The older they come in the longer they stay. 50% were ready to go into kindergarten without any intervention at all. We want to mainstream them as soon as possible.(audio recording, 2009, May 18, lines 42-43)

Finally Mrs. Garcia attempted to impress upon the parents that the children who experience strong early childhood program models such as the Tools of the Mind are better prepared for kindergarten rigors.

Molly: How do you help my child get ready for kindergarten?

Mrs. Garcia: The classroom teachers are equipped with the tools and knowledge. We use the Tools of the Mind curriculum. The researchers were here to witness two children interacting with one another in a conflict resolution event. They are just amazing, they are truly developing. The State Department of Education came up with guidelines for what kindergarten should look like. Well our children are so advanced that when the state began to pay attention to the prek to kindergarten transition, we didn't have to worry about that because we are beyond that; the guidelines that were released by the Department of Education.

Molly: Overall it [kindergarten] seems to be a stimulating experience.

Mrs. Garcia: We are very proud of the progress the children continue to make and the level of maturity as well as independence they have made and their level of capability in terms of attention. They can work without any intervention for an extended period of time. They know what they are supposed to do. It is a very complex curriculum and the kids are responding beautifully. (field notes and audio recording, 2009, May 18, lines 37, 46-52)

At this point in the visit to kindergarten Mrs. Garcia switched entirely into Spanish as she directed questions and responses to that group of parents. The English only speaking parents began to disburse. They mingled with one another for a short time then left the building. The event lasted one and a half hours from start to finish.

Mrs. Garcia was sensitive to the fact that parents had to be addressed in their first language during their visit to kindergarten. While I visited one kindergarten classroom

with the English speaking families she brought the Spanish speaking families to the bilingual kindergarten. Moreover when Mrs. Garcia conducted the pre and post visit meetings she did so in both languages. Dockett and Perry (2007) suggest that parents whose children do not speak English want to be assured that their children will not be judged harshly when they do not meet teacher expectations. As Mrs. Garcia explains this is not an issue at Silverton because her goal is to build positive experiences for all the children in systematic ways that begin at the top and permeate throughout its school structure and programs.

Research indicates that parents want information about the academic expectations in kindergarten and desire opportunities to meet kindergarten teachers in more personal and intimate ways (Dockett & Perry, 2007; McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGennaro & Wildenger, 2007). Silverton administrators seem to be sensitive to these concerns as the visit to kindergarten gave parents opportunities to talk with school personnel and to visit kindergarten classrooms while they were in session.

Summary of transition events. The Silverton district believes that the transition experience must start with a systematic, top down approach that is ongoing throughout the course of the four year old prekindergarten experience. As most of the prekindergarten classrooms are housed in the same building as the rest of the primary school, opportunities arise for the children to participate in school wide activities in a range of ways. While the transition activities for children are somewhat informal and organic, those for the adults -- parents and teachers-- are more formalized events such as information sessions and planning meetings.

Evaluating Transition Experiences

Silverton has a prescribed set of transition experiences for the children and parents that are orchestrated by the administration and choreographed by the coordinator. At first glance there doesn't seem to be a lot of contention about the transition plan however on closer inspection of the data some concerns were raised. In my conversations with the prekindergarten coordinator, Mrs. Daniels explained that even though the prekindergarten and kindergarten share the same primary school space they operate as two separate worlds.

Kindergarten and preschool have such different ideologies about the classroom in general. [At] preschool we're very play based and we're all going to get there on their own time, you scaffold each [child] individually. In kindergarten it's much different. They stress that kids need to be ready for first grade. Whereas the preschool teachers don't feel that stress, well we do from time to time, but nowhere near how kindergarten feels about getting ready for first grade. (interview, 2009, May 7, line 82)

Mrs. Daniels believes that these separate ideologies are created in part by the ways that teachers enact curricula and programs in their separate grades. She also revealed that differences exist due to the ways that the prek children are isolated from the rest of their peers. For instance I observed that while the preschool children ride the same buses with their siblings and peers, they enter the school immediately upon arrival rather than playing outside with others and when they have outside activities during the day they play on separate playground spaces from the rest of the school population.(field notes) Mrs. Daniels is in the process of convincing the administrators, her principal and the superintendent, of this concern.

I am just trying to explain to the [administration] that just because we have the same curriculum doesn't mean that we don't need transition activities. Our school is actually great about kindergarten to one and one to two, but

sometimes prek gets forgotten if they don't have an advocate to say, 'Yeah everything is fine but I think that we definitely need a little bit more'.
(interview, 2009, May 7, lines 72, 78)

Teacher evaluations. Mrs. Strong, the prekindergarten teacher, and Mrs. Manning, the kindergarten teacher, are veteran professionals. Their combined experience as early childhood educators exceeds 35 years, both having a variety of classroom experiences at Silverton and in other local school districts. For the most part these two teachers are willing participants in transition activities because they believe that the experiences are meaningful to the children and the activities do not demand too much change from the daily routines their children experience.

Mrs. Strong: This is a very comfortable school. So I don't think it's much of a mystery. And the fact that there are two kindergarten classrooms in our wing the children are used to seeing bigger kids, different teachers, so I don't think it's this big [change]. It's also very helpful that our prekindergarten has specials and that's a really wonderful thing that I don't think most preks offer. So they're used to behaving more like the upper kids. They go in the hall, they go to other classrooms, they're used to other teachers, they see bigger students. So they're not so isolated.(interview,2009, May 22, line 19-20)

While some children may gain information about what it means to be in kindergarten through activities such as Buddy Reading, the crux of transition activity success seems to fall on the teacher's shoulders in the ways the teachers enact, facilitate and support these activities. Both Mrs. Manning and Mrs. Strong seem to concur on this point.

Mrs. Manning: It depends on the attitude of the prek teacher, whether they value it [the transition activity]. I've seen that difference too. I've seen the teacher come in and [feel] it's just a wonderful idea. They are very warm about the way they have the children pair up with each other. But with others its...ok its quick and we're done and they're very disengaged... then they're gone. (interview, 2009, May 11, line 60)

Mrs. Strong: I was talking with a kindergarten teacher the other day. She really misses our visits [now that she moved to another wing in the school]. There is a new kindergarten teacher next to me but she and I

didn't connect. I talk to my kids about going to kindergarten from time to time. We talk about how things are going to be a little different. So that's kind of something I do on my own. And if we are doing a challenging activity I try to use big words to make the bridge to kindergarten easier. (interview, 2009, May 22, line 7)

The teachers seem to uphold the belief that a shared curriculum which focuses on literacy development and self regulation are important elements to help prepare children for the transition from a play based environment into more traditional academic settings. They also like to take advantage of the close proximity they share with one another by being able to visit one another with little preplanning or minimal interference between daily schedules. There are, however, some concerns teachers shared about how transition events are experienced.

There were a few concerns aired by Mrs. Manning the kindergarten teacher in particular, about the effectiveness of buddy readings as a transition event. For instance she felt that her children were more advanced in reading so, as a result, they potentially gained more from the task than the prek children.

Most of my children are very excited about [Buddy Reading] with the prek children because they will help the children turn into readers. So from the kindergarten perspective I think it's great but I don't know from the prek, how they are led into the activity. Most of them seem excited to share their books. They seem to enjoy it. They come in with one book but my children are used to sharing multiple books and they can actually read.(interview, 2009, May 11, line 44)

She also commented on the amount of time dedicated to Buddy Reading. The frustration she feels about using Buddy Reading as a transition experience is brought out in her next set of comments.

There really isn't enough time during the activity to get to know the classroom. That's the problem because they can only come in at the end of the school day. That's a small block of time and if they come in a little late

they may stay for only ten minutes. I think it might be more meaningful if I were able to show them around, to share with them and do different things with them, show them the centers. Perhaps not only for Buddy Reading. Just to have a walk through and have them play in the centers with the children in the morning. I think that it would be more powerful if my kids mingled with the prek kids and I read a story to them. (interview, 2009, May 11, line 46)

Moreover Mrs. Manning felt that there should be more involvement from the curriculum coordinator area so that strategic planning can make the transition experiences more meaningful.

The principal, math and literacy coaches should be involved. So that we all know what's going on. I think that the day you saw Buddy Reading it was really chaotic. I didn't know all those children were coming in. I also think on some level some of the children were gaining nothing from [being] here [referring to the special needs children]. That's my opinion. Not that you want to exclude certain groups of children but if it doesn't have meaning then...what are they getting out of the experience? (interview, 2009, June 3, lines 20, June 11, line 52)

Aside from these concerns Mrs. Manning found classroom visits enlightening and teacher meetings helpful.

Mrs. Manning: I think my expectations were met. Some of us were seeing each classroom a little different. We were able to share what we have seen in each room. I think that was kind of valuable.(interview, 2009, May 11, line 145)

Parent perspective. While parents seem genuinely thrilled by the programs being offered as transition experiences there were some concerns that arose which perhaps exemplifies the diversity seen in this district. The two focal parents I was able to speak with have divergent beliefs about their transition experiences. Mr. and Mrs. Carry have already experienced transition fears with their first son, Peter, who is now in second grade. When we talked they were about ready to take this journey once again with their second son, James, whom I met during my stay in Mrs. Strong's prekindergarten

classroom. Unlike Mr. and Mrs. Carry's seasoned exposure into the academic world of kindergarten, Mrs. Andrea has recently arrived in the United States from her Spanish speaking country with little understanding of what school is like in the United States. She has one son, Jesus, also a student in Mrs. Strong's prekindergarten classroom. I spoke to her through an interpreter and as a result much of what was communicated was limited by the translation process. I begin their stories with a look at Mr. and Mrs. Carry's evaluations of transition into kindergarten experiences.

Mr. and Mrs. Carry are very involved in their children's learning experiences. It was quite evident early on in our conversation that they follow their children's academic endeavors and after school activities with deep investments in their children's success in order to promote their ability to form positive attitudes towards school. For instance Mr. Carry serves as a coach to the community baseball teams both at the school and intramural levels. In the same vein they remain committed to promoting school initiatives as they often attend evening activities at the primary school, though they did speak about how frustrated they have become because of the language barriers that persist which often makes them feel like outsiders as Mrs. Carry explains.

To be honest it's difficult because when we go to school functions a lot of the parents don't speak English. It feels almost separated. The children all speak English and they all get along. Yet it's very difficult for me to communicate with a lot of parents. And when I can they seem to be white [as opposed to African American or Latino/Latina], so it's like segregated. It's kind of a shame. The children are all running around together but I can't really talk to anyone. (interview, 2009, June 20, lines 52, 56)

Mr. and Mrs. Carry follow their children's school work very closely; for instance they deal with homework every evening, and on the weekends. Mr. Carry expresses his

exasperation with this school requirement for their older son and mentions how Mrs. Strong helps James understand what homework will be like.

Peter has homework every day, even on the weekends. And even during vacation. We'll turn off the tv and say ok Peter and James you have homework to do. I'll pull out paper and tell James, 'You've got to color this by the time Peter is done. He'll do that. Mrs. Strong gave us some homework too, little sheets to practice writing. That's a great transition activity for him because when it comes to the grueling every day task we don't know how he [James] will do. (2009, June 20, lines 97-106)

Even though both parents are very involved with their children's school experiences they were at a loss when we talked about planned transition experiences. For instance when I asked them whether they attended transition activities they weren't aware they had an opportunity to do so. Likewise when we talked about Buddy Reading as a transition activity it was the first they heard of it being used for that goal. Nor have they heard that there was a prekindergarten coordinator whose job it was to create and manage transition activities (field notes). It seems that at least for James's parents, they put their trust in the school with transition from prekindergarten to kindergarten. Mr. Carry explains.

It's difficult for both of us to go to the school for activities during the day because we both work. And we're not planning to do much over the summer. Just get them backpacks and school supplies and things like that. But we do that every year. Actually the school does a good job with them when they get there, like explaining what they are going to do. We really like the Tools of the Mind program. (interview, 2009, June 20, lines 74-81)

Instead of worrying about transition to kindergarten Mr. Carry has concern for other points in transition such as when the children experience the shift from a play based learning environment to an academic environment about midway through the kindergarten year. He expresses these concerns very specifically.

I remember Mrs. V (Peter's kindergarten teacher) said it was going to get harder in January and it did get harder for him. There was more of a goal to get him to read or somewhat read. He was upset that they used to go to centers in prekindergarten and then they didn't have that anymore. More focus on academics. In September the kindergarten started the Tools of the Mind. The teacher told us that it was going to get harder. Peter told us that it is so much harder in school now. We don't do this... we don't do that... It almost seems like it is a different school year. But he was up for it. We're not sure James will be as ready. James is more social and seems to be more theatrical. So I guess I am a little concerned about if he's going to be focused on academics. (interview, 2009, June 20, line 95)

Mr. Carry believes that positive transition experiences weigh heavily on how the teacher handles situations.

Mr. Carry: I really believe teacher enthusiasm is an important thing. The summer before Peter got to kindergarten I was in Staples and this lady was copying stuff and getting ready for school in June and July. It was his kindergarten teacher. We could just pick up on her energy. Even though it was getting harder in January Peter was up for it... you know he bought into it. If James gets a person like that he'll buy into it too. (2009, June 20, line 140)

Mr. and Mrs. Carry seem quite confident that transitioning into kindergarten is not an issue. For them the more significant transitions occur when children are moving from home to school or from play based to academic based environments. At least for these children their parents feel that the Silverton school district pays close attention to the latter; while their older son's experiences helped them to better prepare James for the move into preschool.

The second parent I was able to interview had a very different experience as she comes from a different culture and does not speak English; but she too acknowledged the potential support structures available for her son, Jesus.

Ms. Andrea has been living in the United States for a short time residing with her son, Jesus, in one side of a house where they share two rooms, a bedroom/ living room

and a kitchen. She is employed as a housekeeper so her job takes her away from home most of the day. While Ms. Andrea and Jesus share minimal resources they make their home a loving environment. This level of support and care was quite evident to me in the ways that she communicated with her son and by how gracious she was to invite my translator and me into her home, both strangers to her. Although Ms. Andrea and I had never met before the interview session, Jesus became quite familiar with me as I spent two months with him for at least two days a week in his preschool classroom. We often interacted with one another during center time, when Jesus created his play plans and individually during Buddy Reading when he and I read to one another. When I visited his home he was quite surprised to see me but he was a gracious host. He interrupted his outdoor play with friends to participate in the interview, often speaking in both English to me and Spanish to his mother.

During the first part of the interview Mrs. Andrea explained that she went to preschool and kindergarten in her home country and that she graduated from college; though she was not specific about her training. She mentioned that enrolling Jesus in school has been a rewarding experience for both her and her son. Part of her enthusiasm for the Silverton program is due to the level of services he is receiving both in Spanish and English, as well as with speech and language therapy that is provided to him.

Ms. Andrea was very positive when she spoke about Jesus' experiences in school. Learning English is a goal for Ms. Andrea but improving his Spanish is quite an accomplishment which she credited to the services provided by and respect she held for Silverton teachers and programs.

When he [Jesus] started school he barely spoke English, just a few words. So his time in preschool has been very lucrative. He's learned everything in school, the vocabulary, he learned bit by bit with the help of his teachers and his classmates. He learned more about his native language, Spanish. His Spanish has really improved. (interview, 2009, May 27, lines 4-27)

While Ms. Andrea did not go into detail about her visit to kindergarten, she was aware that Jesus would not necessarily have the same teacher she met during her visit. She was also aware that Jesus had visited kindergarten on a number of occasions and that when he takes violin lessons it is during the school day with children from across grade levels (field notes). When asked about her experiences with transition activities she was quite positive about Silverton's support structures as well. She explains.

I have talked to the prekindergarten teacher about kindergarten because I am worried that Jesus will continue to have speech and language services. The teacher assures me that will be so. She said we are going to be invited to a meeting about kindergarten. I visited the kindergarten when they gave us the papers to register our children for kindergarten. They told us what the children will be learning and where the children's classrooms will be. (2009, May 27, lines 37-41)

She continued to talk about how impressed she was with the support she received during her visit. For instance she showed me the paperwork the parents received in Spanish.

Sometimes I tell Jesus we are going to study because now you are going to have homework in kindergarten. And he says, 'Oh, a lot of homework?' And I tell him, 'Yes.' We study numbers and letters and I read to him. Sometimes he asks me when he can go out and play. I tell him 'oh no, you are going to have a lot of homework and then after you can play.' He asks me, 'Are the children outside playing done with their homework?' So he knows what kindergarten experience will be like. (2009, 27 May, lines 76-79, 96)

Ms. Andrea expressed her delight with Jesus' attitude about kindergarten as he often exclaims that he is about to enter kindergarten. She captures his sentiment in a short

phrase, “whenever I mention that he’s going to start another school year he says, ‘No, I’m going to kindergarten!’ (2009, 27, May, line 89). She is also excited about Jesus’ prospects for kindergarten.

I want him to be successful, and that he makes friends. Most importantly I want him to feel that he is doing well and that he feels good about himself. (interview, 2009, 27 May, line 118).

The focal parents who participated in this study are very optimistic about their children’s transition to kindergarten. They have high expectations for success mainly because of the opportunities that have been afforded their children in prekindergarten and the warm encounters they had with staff, as well as the professional services they have received in the Silverton district.

Children’s talk about Buddy Reading in kindergarten. Three focal children from Mrs. Strong’s prekindergarten class were included in this study; Jesus, James and a third young boy, Ethan. I spent about two months with them in the prekindergarten classroom working and playing with them and their peers, sharing their Buddy Reading transition experiences, and visiting with Jesus and James at their homes. Unfortunately I was not able to visit Ethan’s home as his mother and I were never able to make contact. Overall two themes seem to capture what the children experienced from the conversations and observations I made of their transition activities. They focus on growing and gaining privileges; secondly that they perceive themselves as being ready for kindergarten.

All three children enjoyed talking to me about kindergarten when we shared a storybook about a young boy visiting kindergarten for the first time, although they were unsure about what kindergarten would be like for themselves. They were most interested

in first impressions of the school instead of details they recalled about their visits to kindergarten classrooms. Although these children did not provide detailed drawings about their transition activity memories, they spoke in detail about their experience in the cafeteria and the kindergarten classroom and, most especially, why they believe they are ready for kindergarten.

Dockett and Perry (2007) mention that children talk and recognize transition activities as rites of passage; signs that they are growing up and gaining more independence. Jesus, James and Ethan shared their feelings about kindergarten in this way by measuring their vision of kindergarten against their prekindergarten experiences. For instance Jesus recognizes that playing the violin, being able to count to 40 and being able to read when he participates in Buddy Reading and play planning make him ready for kindergarten (field notes). Moreover Jesus measures his readiness by physical growth. “My legs are getting bigger. They will get bigger in kindergarten. I am bigger than Jessica!” Ethan measures his readiness for kindergarten in similar ways. “I can write my name E-t-h-a-n” (field notes). He explains.

When I am in kindergarten I will make letters and do math... and learn about fruits and vegetables... and make sure that I don't lose anything for school. (interview, 2009, June 1, line 80)

James also measures his prekindergarten successes as markers for kindergarten readiness.

I read with my friend for Buddy Reading. It's a dinosaur book. We read in kindergarten. We sat in the back. I was sitting next to the farm. (interview, 2009, June 20, lines 25-36)

He seems to be impressed not only by his skills but also by the fact that he will be going to school with his younger brother, Harry, next year. He explains this experience as a privilege of age.

Harry is going to school with me. I am going to keep an eye on him but he never listens to me. He says I'm not the boss because he's bigger now. I'm older than him. I tell him not to get into fights but he still fights. He will get sad faces if he fights in school. I never get sad faces. (interview, 2009, June 20 lines 40-53)

Ethan talks about some privileges he will inherit when he moves into kindergarten

Sometimes when we go outside I can go in the courtyard like my brother. We draw on the ground. When I go to kindergarten I will go on the courtyard. (interview, 2009, June 1, lines 106-121)

Ethan also mentioned the expanded opportunities he will enjoy in specials.

I go to gym now. When we go to the computer room the teacher lets the kindergarten, first and second grades use the hotdog. I can't use the hotdog now. It's just for kindergarten. (interview, 2009, June 1, line 122)

One of the few times the children talked about the value they got out of planned transition activities was when I followed the prekindergarten children as they walked back to their room after one particular Buddy Reading event. On the way down the hall I overheard them talking about the experience. In spite of the limited conversations I observed in the classroom I was surprised to hear that the children were quite interested in their new surroundings. Their conversation brought out physical characteristics of the kindergarten room they just visited.

Mason: They read 'Jack and Annie' like we do!

Carla: I sat on the carpet.

Pat: I saw the barn [a toy] like we have. (field notes)

While the children spoke minimally about each transition activity they did, talk more often about expanding opportunities once they go to kindergarten. This type of talk also comes from transition experiences but it holds a uniquely different perspective than talk about the transition activity itself, in that it focuses on how the activity is associated

with the practical nature of the event, that is the skill of eating in the cafeteria, for instance. James talks about how he learned to eat cafeteria style during this series of transition activities. "The teacher is in the cafeteria. Then the teacher will stand up. We sit at long tables. I sit with my friends." (interview, 2009, June 20, lines 176-182)

Jesus also recalls his transition visits to the cafeteria in detail.

I ate in the cafeteria two times. First you take your card and you need to give your card to the person and then you can sit down and eat your food. You go in line to do that. I sit down next to Miguel. (interview, 2009, June 1, lines 167-174)

The children at Silverton experience transition activities through a gradual process of engaging in school wide activities and by being invited to share experiences with their kindergarten peers. At least for these three focal students, kindergarten is about growing up; increasing responsibilities, advancing skills and gaining access such as extending special classroom privileges and using the cafeteria. They don't seem to fear the changes they are about to experience perhaps due to the fact that their routines will not change significantly or that they believe they are ready for kindergarten. As James' parents suggest they will still be attending full day, riding the bus and participating in school wide activities.

Mr. Carry: I really think that the prek four program does transition naturally even without having a transition activity. I think just waking up with the other kids, getting on the bus with the other kids, going to school and getting off the bus with the other kids is a transition activity. If James were in a private prek class he wouldn't have these activities. He wouldn't be ready. The prek four helped James get transitioned into kindergarten more naturally. Now Harry is in the prek three program. He'll have that advantage when he goes to kindergarten. It's not like day care. It's education play based learning. (interview, 2009, June 20, line 152)

The children at Silverton seem to be getting the message that the administrators are hoping to communicate through transition activities. For instance they are able to participate in kindergarten activities in natural ways. Evidence that this transition experience is working the way it should can be implied by the ways that the children talk about themselves after participating in activities such as Buddy Reading and the visit to the cafeteria. They recall specific activities as rites of passage, indicators that they are growing. Even though these are naturally occurring events they do pick up on the distinctive nature of kindergarten over their prekindergarten activities.

Summary of Participant Evaluations of Transition Experiences

The cases of Hawthorn and Silverton illustrate how transition is a socially constructed process. Despite being in the same state and in close proximity to one another the transition purposes, events and experiences of participants in each of these districts were quite different. For Hawthorn, transition was a district wide planned and mandated process. In Silverton, despite an administrator charged with planning for children's transition to kindergarten, the experiences enacted were less structured. In summary, the enactment of events for transition at both Hawthorn and Silverton can be described generally as activities organized to allow children to move smoothly from preschool to kindergarten. Silverton and Hawthorn school districts seemed to enact these experiences in similar and yet different ways, at the same time tensions seemed to persist despite best efforts for organization and continuity. In chapter five I examine these tensions more deeply in relation to the literature and to the research questions guiding this study.

Chapter 5

Summary and Conclusions

Transition to kindergarten remains a hot policy topic in spite of the fact that it has been studied, talked about, and acted upon for well over two decades. The changing nature of the early education landscape as evidenced by state early learning councils aimed at creating seamless early childhood systems as well as the expansion of state funded preschool programs has brought renewed attention to what transition is and how it can support children's early academic success. The purpose of this study was to try to get closer to the experiences of three important transition stakeholders: parents, children and their teachers, as they lived out transition experiences in two separate districts. This chapter looks across the study's findings in relation to the research literature; with the aim of discussing the implications of this study for practitioners, administrators and policy makers about effective transition practices. To begin, I sketch out the research design I used to look at how transition to kindergarten is experienced and evaluated by key stakeholders in two districts. I then examine my findings in relation to my research questions and current research on early childhood transition practices before then moving into implications for practice. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of this study and considerations for future research directions.

Research Design

Most studies of preschool transition (Pianta & Cox 2007; Dockett & Perry 2007; Ramey, Ramey, Phillips, Lanzi, Brezaussek, Katholi, & Snyder, 2000) have been predominantly large scale quantitative surveys of practices and programs. This study

sought to provide a more in depth descriptive portrait of transition in action in two districts. In order to get at this depth of investigation three research questions were designed that looked at policies, practices and perceptions of the transition experiences as they were enacted and experienced by key stakeholders in these districts. Question one looked at the ways that these two school districts designed and implemented transition experiences through policy and practice. The second question asked how transition activities were experienced and evaluated by key participants. Lastly the third question focused on the implications that can be drawn from these experiences to inform future research, policy and practice.

As I was interested in participant perceptions on enacted district policy decisions I selected a qualitative case study design. A case study methodology looks closely within a bounded system at the ways that participants experience activity over the naturally occurring course of events (Merriam, 1998). The researcher takes on the role of participant/observer to gather data first close in then with a wide angle lens that positions the researcher at times in the activity while at other times as observer. In these ways the case study design lent itself particularly well to my research investigation because I was able to capture the dynamics both in the ways that key stakeholders participated in and talked about transition activities. Stake (1995) suggests that case comparisons provide opportunities for analysis that might be otherwise overlooked in a single case design. Based upon this suggestion this study was designed to include two cases so that I could look within each case and then across cases to make comparisons.

I conducted this investigation by positioning myself in each district two to three days per week over a four month period of time when traditional transition activities heat

up. I used a variety of data collection techniques which included observations, semi structured and conversational interview techniques, as well as extensive collection of documents to inform my interpretations of transition activities. I audio recorded classroom talk and action, used field notes to capture activity and record my impressions, and kept a researcher journal to record my methodological decision making. Collected data was then transcribed and preserved electronically to be able to reflect upon each stakeholder's experience and my own perceptions as participant observer in both preschool and kindergarten classrooms. In all I transcribed and organized over 180 pages of data.

Hatch (2002) describes data analysis as a systematic search for meaning. This proved to be the case in my study as I began preliminary data analysis during the transcription period. Immediately after the data collection period ended my data analysis became more formalized in order to gain deeper understandings of what the data was telling me. I first separated the transcribed data by case, then within case by participant. I conducted analyses of each participant's experiences and talk first by subjecting the data to multiple read throughs. I then coded the data first deductively based upon concepts presented in the literature, then as an inductive process identifying ideas or perceptions from the data. I organized and reorganized codes during this period, going back to the data to make sense of the ways that I developed codes in relation to what was being expressed by focus participants and according to the research questions. The coded data were then subjected to several reexaminations where I went back into the data to identify particular instances that could be identified by each code. Where codes were similar I grouped them together in a sense to reduce the breadth of codes in order to produce a

more concise understanding of what the data was saying. What I was doing in this stage of analysis was chunking the data together into larger bits of information (Hatch, 2002). I then organized data that was represented by isolated coding structures into separate categories then set these coded structures aside in order to preserve that data for later inspection. I conducted these series of analyses repeatedly until I reached the point where I exhausted all data within and across coding structures for each research question. In some cases data was represented with single codes and remained so after several analyses, while other data was represented across several coding structures depending on how these codes fit the data.

In an attempt to get a closer examination of the data I then grouped codes within particular patterns that later facilitated my ability to construct case summaries and make generalized statements first about each question within district and then across district by theme. From these analyses, rich descriptions were constructed that defined and described stakeholder's experiences; their interpretations and value of particular transition events. I then described in detail the transition events for each district using direct quotations wherever possible to provide evidence in support of my assertions about stakeholder perceptions and evaluations of district transition policies and practices. Finally, I conducted a cross case analysis which involved looking across the cases to form implications about what these local transition experiences say about policy and practice. In what follows I discuss how Hawthorn and Silverton transition experiences are informed by and extend current research on transition to kindergarten.

Discussion

I organize this discussion by examining the study's findings in relation to each of my research questions, relevant literature, Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theoretical framework and Rogoff's social historical perspectives on children's development. The first research question of this study sought to understand how transition was conceptualized and enacted in two districts, Hawthorn and Silverton; therefore I begin by examining the similarities and differences in the transition policies and practices between these two cases. Next, I explore the transition policies and practices for each district through the perspectives and experiences of key stakeholders, namely administrators, teachers, children and parents. Third I examine these perceptions and experiences for what they suggest for improving to transition activities in policy and practice.

Transition in Hawthorn and Silverton. According to Bronfennbrenner (1979, 2005) the bioecological theory of development places children as the central figure in expanding concentric systems that influence the child's development as well as are influenced by the child's relationships with others. The most furtherest system from the child is the macrosystem, which is the system of cultural values and beliefs. The macrosystem provides the structure by which transition policies are defined, but it is through participant actions and evaluations that occur at the microsystem level where policy is best determined to be effective. According to Bronfenbrenner (2005) policies like the transition plan become the framework for understanding the dynamics that define transition to kindergarten within reciprocal relationships that are sustained between key participants, for instance defining teacher practices that build relationships with parents,

or among preschool and kindergarten teachers where policy defines teacher goals for visiting one another's classroom.

Pianta and Cox (1999) apply the bioecological model by framing transition policy, action and activity within a dynamic systems theory. The dynamic systems theory calls forth the complexities of relationships within the various contexts that reach out to link families to schools "according to cultural and community needs and resources" (p. 6). The findings from this study resonate with this body of literature as state and district policy provided opportunities for teachers, administrators and other school personnel to collaborate with one another to develop and enact transition experiences. Hawthorn's transition policy, for instance, was designed and enacted to allow key personnel to be available to families during the Bump Up Night experience. During this one evening event families were able to reach backwards to the long term relationships they had with preschool personnel who gave their support to parents and children. Families reached forward to begin to carve out relationships with primary school personnel in the context of that environment, and at the same time reach horizontally to one another, parent- to-parent or child-to-child, about their shared experiences. At the same time the findings from this study indicate in the Silverton case where policy did not exist, it became evident that transition experiences were neither fully understood nor effectively managed by school administrators, and as a consequence, never truly appreciated by teachers or for the parents whose duty it was to carry out these events.

Research on transition embraces continuities as the foundations by which effective transition activities develop (Petriwskyj, Thorpe & Tayler, 2005). Accordingly clearly defined transition policies in the macrosystem that support relationships among

individuals in the microsystem will focus on continuities within the mesosystems in order to create links among these systems. Both cases in this study attempted to smooth out the transition experiences for their families by attending to continuities between the preschool and kindergarten programs. For instance, Hawthorne administrators believed that if the preschool and kindergarten teachers found continuity between one another's academic standards or benchmarks, they would gain an appreciation for one another's contribution to the transition experience. While noble attempts were made at smoothing out the move from preschool to kindergarten, continuity barriers prevented effective transition experiences from being realized. The two focal teachers in this study talked about professional development training that emphasized the need for shared practices meant to address common benchmarks, but they were unable to support policy continuities when they enacted these practices in their individual settings, in part, due to the contrasting learning goals each held for children. In contrast to Hawthorn, continuity at Silverton arose as a natural course of events. For instance, Silverton's preschool and kindergarten teachers were able to build continuity within the context of similar routines, actions and activities from simpler play based games in the preschool to increasingly more complex sets of skills and abilities in the kindergarten classrooms.

Contributions from Rogoff's (2002) cultural basis of child development stress that in order to understand how children develop we have to consider cultural practices, values and local community goals that guide and prioritize learning. Framing transition experiences and evaluations within cultural practices demand that attention be made to the contexts and value systems that influence the ways individuals interact with one another during transition periods. Dynamic systems theory clarifies that in order for

transition experiences to be effective, leadership must be in place that builds the kinds of organizational structures which facilitate an interconnectedness among the different grade levels and stakeholders responsible for enacting transition activities (LoCasale-Crouch, Mashburn, Downer & Pianta, 2008). In other words when leaders build interconnectedness between policy and practice they can more clearly define the value for transition experiences.

Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta, (2000) have identified that the most effective transition experiences are those which are designed to address local community needs. The current study extends the relationship between culture and community practice to better understand transition experiences. For instance leadership in both districts facilitated transition activities that were sensitive to community needs by providing multiple opportunities for families to interact with professional staff during transition events. While both districts had visits to kindergarten each district handled these experiences in quite different ways that made sense within the local communities. One of Hawthorn's goals for a visit to kindergarten was to draw particular attention to the common elements that bridged preschool practices to kindergarten experiences, maintaining the assumption that this was the first time families were exposed to the primary school. Silverton, on the other hand, was able to develop kindergarten transition experiences with the knowledge that families were familiar with the primary school because their children's preschool experiences were already integrated into this culture. From their perspective transition was less likely to become a traumatic experience for individual families and therefore it was assumed that little attention needed to be paid to transition events.

Despite best efforts to support cultural diversity in the district, Silverton paid little attention to building partnerships among the separate English and Spanish speaking parent communities. This tension was most obvious in this study during parent visits to kindergarten. On these visits, the Spanish speaking families were separated from the English speaking families, one to visit the English only kindergarten classroom and the other being escorted to the bilingual classroom. These separations were carried throughout the transition event so that parents never really engaged with one another whether in the classrooms or in post visit debriefings with Mrs. Garcia, the school superintendent. To me it was as if two separate school experiences were being carved out for the Spanish speaking and English speaking parents. While both Hawthorn and Silverton recognized how important it was for families to visit kindergarten each district was hard pressed to include these stakeholders in the planning process.

Teachers, children and families perspectives and experiences of transition.

Bioecological theory (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) applied to transition policy (Pianta & Cox, 1999; Pianta, Cox & Snow, 2007) suggests that the microsystem level, where relationships are sustained, may provide a lens for examining larger, more distant exosystem and mesosystem issues that press upon the microsystem and, at the same time, can serve to effect changes at these more distant system levels. In general the research literature on transition (for instance see Dockett & Perry, 2007; Pianta, Cox & Snow, 2007) has shown that children and their families gain a better sense of what it means to be in kindergarten when they are included in the planning process for these activities. Current research (for instance see Kagan & Tarrant, 2010) also suggests that parents and children become deeply engaged in transition activities with teachers who find value in,

and understand, the goals for these events. In other words even if you have teachers involved in the transition planning process it does not mean that they necessarily understand or agree upon the purposes and goals for transition activities (for instance see LaParo, Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2003). When individuals hold divergent values and beliefs about the goals for effective transition experiences and, in turn, when these goals are impressed upon by the relationships individuals share with one another, tensions arise.

Parent evaluations from this study seem to bear out this result; that supports the need for all stakeholders to be at the table in order to address tensions in order to effect positive transition experiences and outcomes. Despite the best efforts to provide for transition experiences that smoothed the move from preschool to kindergarten both districts in this study paid minimal attention to the contributions that parents and children are capable of providing (Dockett & Perry, 2007). Although I only spoke with a few families it seemed that rifts persisted within each program in the ways that partnerships were built and maintained among the various stakeholders. These rifts were most noticeably expressed by the parents at Hawthorn who recognized qualitative differences between their relations with preschool than with kindergarten teachers. The former being more engaged and interested in building partnerships while the latter giving little attention or time to build strong relationships with parents. The lack of respect for what parents and children can bring to transition policy decisions was most evident in the ways that Bump Up Night was enacted. Even with the extensive planning that was committed to this event, little regard was paid to what parents and children wanted. As a result parents seemed to leave the evening feeling overwhelmed by the vast amounts of

information that was provided during that evening, while children felt abandoned when they were separated from their parents during a large portion of the evening's events.

Despite the best efforts for the children to be the focus of transition activity at both Hawthorn and Silverton, the findings of this case study would suggest that their needs were only being partially met. While both districts considered it necessary to have activities where children were able to experience kindergarten classrooms alongside their kindergarten peers very little time was set aside for these cohorts to interact with one another. In the case of Hawthorn, the kindergarten children were given opportunities to share their advancements in reading but that was as far as peer interactions went. The preschool children never engaged with their peers during any other part of that transition experience. Although the preschool children at Silverton met with their kindergarten peers during Buddy Reading times the teachers did not adequately prepare children for the visit to the kindergarten, nor did they take the time to debrief the children on what they learned about kindergarten through these activities.

As a result due to the lack of attention to children's needs, tensions persisted between the perceived goals for transition events and the ways that children actually experienced these activities. Despite the best efforts to achieve a sense of smoothness from preschool to kindergarten children were only really able to gain insights into the physical differences between classrooms. While this is an important aspect of the purpose for effective transition activities children seem to demand more from these events. For instance at least for the focal children in this study their drawings and descriptions of kindergarten experiences included themselves in relation to family and friends. At the

very least it would have been prudent for the planning process to include discussions with parents and children about what they hoped to gain after participating in these events.

Bronfenbrenner's (2005) structural model for understanding dynamic systems frames teacher relations within the complimentary or conflicting mesosystem practices between preschool and kindergarten. Whereas preschool teachers view children's experiences from a developmental perspective that supports the notion that children develop at variant rates, kindergarten is rapidly being absorbed within the unifying standards based approach to academic experiences which tends to ignore the differential needs children place on learning experiences. At times such as with transition periods, when there is a shift from one mesosystem to another, both ecologies are more readily available for examination as each is exposed by the ways that participants interact with one another across systems. It is more likely that teachers from each setting use separate frames of reference to guide their evaluations of transition to kindergarten. Therefore from the context of the separate mesosystems, kindergarten and preschool, transition to kindergarten goals may greatly differ for the teachers who participate in these events depending upon the context by which they evaluate these activities.

The rich contextual lens that this investigation provided created a window for exploring the tensions that persisted between the preschool and kindergarten teachers through their contrasting experiences and evaluations of these events. For instance Hawthorn's preschool teacher participated in transition experiences based upon each child's needs. She provided emotional support for one child while at the same time attended to socialization issues for another child. The kindergarten teacher, in contrast, focused mostly on delivering the message that kindergarten was about achieving

academic goals, for instance when she demonstrated the academic skills her current group of kindergarten students achieved, being able to read and write. In general, the Silverton transition experience, though quite different from Hawthorn, also revealed mesosystem tension when, for instance, the preschool coach saw a particular need for transition experiences while the central administrators believed continuities between programs resolved many transition concerns. Perhaps because upper administrators tend to emphasis school wide policy decisions, they are less likely to understand why transition experiences cause tensions between the preschool and kindergarten teachers. This seemed to be the case with the focal teachers at Silverton. Despite great efforts from administrators to require both the preschool and kindergarten to share the same curriculum model, the kindergarten focal teacher in this study remained steadfast in her belief that her program aligned more closely to the first grade rather than with the preschool program.

In summary, transition in each district was acted upon through carefully constructed transition plans and organizational structures. While the best efforts of each district was to enact meaningful transition experiences for all participants, improvements are still needed for the ways that transition is understood and enacted among stakeholders so as to resolve persistent tensions. In the next section I consider implications that can be drawn from these cases.

Implications for Policy and Practice.

Given the findings there are several implications that can be drawn from this study. The first of these is the need for administrators to consider how to create policy

and practices that create common understandings among teachers about the purposes for transition activities. In both districts some teachers were not as committed to the transition experience as might be expected, in part, it seems because they held different philosophies about what was important for children to be able to do when they prepared to enter kindergarten. Therefore, it is important that transition policy addresses the purpose for these events in ways that support children's development. That might mean school district personnel should take more time to sit down and talk to one another to find out what they need to get out of transition activities. It might also mean that teachers need to be on the same page when talking about the value for transition experiences in ways that children's development is being supported.

A second implication addresses the effectiveness of typical transition programs. In both districts transition was, for the most part, centered on some kind of visit to a kindergarten classroom, for both parents and children. Yet after their visit, children talked only about differences observed in the classroom spaces and about whom they expected would take this journey with them. Families were confused about what to expect in kindergarten and about what their roles should be to support their children's move. As a result the focal parents seemed to be unsure about where to go to for answers to their questions. Therefore it is important that policymakers and practitioners consider not only the purposes of transition but how to build into these purposes all stakeholders' concerns. Transition events may need to be of a different kind so that parents and children can feel supported in ways that make sense to them and these events need to be held more often to allow kindergarten and preschool teachers to build stronger relationships with one another as well as with parents and their children.

A third implication that can be drawn from this study is the attention that needs to be made to maintain continuities between programs. The findings from this study reveal that in both cases continuities were narrowly defined by similarities between preschool and kindergarten programs and classroom spaces, but attention to continuities must be more broadly developed. In order for continuity support structures to be in place teachers need to build a shared culture about what early education should be. They need to better understand how continuities can be reached around the practices that are appropriate for enabling children to learn and develop in optimal ways. This will involve teachers having straightforward conversations with one another that address the persistent tensions which interfere with their ability to reach continuity goals.

Fourth, transition to kindergarten experiences must strive to include all key stakeholders at the table in order to build deeper relationships among constituencies. This can only happen if school personnel place greater value on what parents and children find important about these activities and if they ask parents to join in on the planning processes for transition events. It also means providing the flexibilities needed so that the participants who work at building effective transition experiences have the latitude to do so in the contexts in which these experiences arise. This may mean restructuring the teacher's day to provide time to meet and talk with parents. It may also mean that teachers need to engage in community events to forge stronger bonds within the community they serve.

A final implication from this study is more methodological in nature. By purposeful design this study addressed transition to kindergarten using a qualitative lens that allowed the various stakeholders' rich descriptive stories to be told. These stories

included those told by parents and children, whose evaluations are often overlooked . In doing so this study acknowledges the value parents and young children bring to transition experiences. By its very nature this qualitative investigation also exposed the tensions that persisted among participants as they interacted with one another during their first transition experiences into kindergarten. This study brought an intimacy to the changing nature of kindergarten as its purpose and position is currently being redefined within primary school models. Moreover it exposed some of the pressures that are being felt by preschool and kindergarten teachers as they wrestle with ways to maintain a developmental perspective for learning in an increasingly accountability driven systems based early learning culture that seems to emphasize academic outcomes over all other learning goals. Therefore, another important implication of this study is that schools need to find ways to better assess the effectiveness of the transition programs they put in place with regard to all the stakeholders. It is not enough for teachers or administrators to assume there is no great need for a transition program, or that one is indeed adequate, when there is no documentation of the direct experience had by the parents their children and even the teachers themselves. Direct observation, participation and interviews proved to be an important additional tool that needs to be considered when seeking out ways to provide effective transition experiences for all participants.

Limitations and Future Research

The aim of this qualitative case study was to describe transition in depth and in context from the perspectives of those who enact it. While this type of study allows readers a chance to understand transition in depth and up close; this study does not allow one to see whether these similar kinds of patterns play out in a range of contexts.

Moreover this study is limited in that it looks at transition policies and practices descriptively but not at the relationship between these policies, practices and child outcomes. Therefore there need to be more studies that look across a number of sites in both quantitative and qualitative ways to consider both what transition policies look like in practice, and the impacts these policies have on children's development and the well being of their families. Such studies will help with identifying effective transition policies in ways that describe what these look like in practice so others can implement similar approaches at the local level.

A second limitation of this study is that I only interviewed a handful of teachers, children and families. The findings from this research study suggest that teachers, children and parents may have different interpretations of the purposes of transition experiences. To date much of the research is primarily from a policy perspectives and less so from those who do the work of transition. More studies are needed that gather the perspectives of teachers and families and that take time to include children in conversation about transition to kindergarten experiences. This kind of information will contribute to the development and implementation of more responsive transition events and practices.

A final limitation is that I purposefully selected two school districts that have model full day preschool programs as an integral part of the primary school experience. While advantages for selecting this delivery model were that I could more closely examine transition to kindergarten practices and continuities within a systems approach to early learning, my findings are limited to the extent that other types of early learning systems were not included in this study. Future research may consider capturing the

experiences of individual participants who experience transition to kindergarten within mixed delivery models. Research that captures transition experiences across diverse preschool through third grade delivery systems will broaden understanding of how to achieve effective transition goals.

Conclusion

Despite these limitations this study is one of a small handful of investigations that attempts to capture the dynamics of transition to kindergarten in practice. In doing so this study illustrates how transition is a socially constructed experience that involves relations between a number of stakeholders. At a time when the nation is focused on systems building efforts in early childhood, it seems essential that more attention is paid to the purposes of transition within these systems. Effective transition experiences are best when they consider specific contextual issues, weigh the contributions from among a variety of stakeholders and allow continuities to form. The findings from this study suggest that paying attention to transition means listening to children, teachers and parents to ensure that the policies and practices achieve the goal of allowing children to experience a seamless move from preschool to kindergarten. Effective transition experiences may seem to be simply defined and enacted but in fact are developed among a complexity of contexts. By enriching relationships during transition periods, key stakeholders work in partnership with one another to support children's first experiences in school. This is especially important for children who are considered susceptible to failure to achieve school success.

Children, especially those from poor families appear better adjusted to kindergarten when exposed to better connected support systems. By

increasing intentionality in activities that we know contribute to children's adjustment, transition practices may serve as a prevention strategy for future school problems. Investments in transition practice that build coherence across early childhood settings through vertical and horizontal linkages show promise as a means of supporting children's adjustment during early schooling. (LoCasale-Crouch, Mashburn, Downer & Pianta, 2008, p. 139)

References

- Bates, M., Mastrianni, A., Mintzer, C., Nicholas, W., Furlong, M., Simental, J. & Green, J. (2006). Bridging the transition to kindergarten: school readiness case studies from California's first 5 initiative. *The California School Psychologist*, 11, 41-56.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1977). Toward an experimental ecology of human development. *American Psychologist*, 513-531.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The Ecology of Human Development*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (Ed). (2005). *Making Human Beings Human*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Brooks-Gunn, J., Rouse, C.E. & McLanahan, S. (2007). Racial and ethnic gaps in school readiness. In R. Pianta, M. Cox & K. Snow. *School Readiness & the Transition to Kindergarten in the Era of Accountability*. Baltimore: Paul Brookes Publishing.
- Burchinal, M., Peisner-Feinberg, E., Pianta, R. & Howes, C. (2002). Development of academic skills from preschool through second grade: family and classroom predictors of developmental trajectories. *Journal of School Psychology*, 40 (5), 415-436.
- Chavkin, N. & Williams, D. (2001). Working parents and schools: implications for practice. *Education*, 111 (2), 242-248.

- Christenson, S. (2004). The family-school partnership: an opportunity to promote the learning competence of all students. *School Psychology Review*, 33 (1), 83-104.
- Connell, C. & Prinz, R. (2002). The impact of childcare and parent-child interactions on school readiness and social skills development for low-income African American children. *Journal of School Psychology*, 40 (2), 177-193.
- Cook-Sather, A. (2002). Authorizing students' perspectives: Towards trust dialog and change in education. *Educational Researcher*, 31 (4), 3-14.
- Copple, C & Bredekamp, S. (2009). *Developmentally appropriate Practice in Early Childhood Programs*. Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children.
- Creswell (1998). *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. & Miller, D. (2000). Determining validity in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into Practice*, 39 (3), 124-130.
- Dail, A. & McGee, L. (2008). Transition to kindergarten: reaching back to preschoolers and parents through shared summer school. *Childhood Education*, 84, (5), 305-311.
- Department of Health & Human Services. (2000). Head Start children's entry into public school: a report on the national Head Start/ public school early childhood transition demonstration study (Civitan International Research Center Contract No. 105-95-1935). Birmingham, AL: Authors

- Diamond, K., Reagan, A. & Bandyk, J. (2000). Parents' conception of kindergarten readiness: relationships with race, ethnicity, and development. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 94 (2), 93-100.
- Dockett, S. & Perry, B. (2005). "You need to know how to play safe": children's experiences of starting school. *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 6 (1), 4-18.
- Dockett, S. & Perry, B. (2007). *Transitions to School Perceptions, Expectations, Experiences*. Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, LTD.
- Dockett, S. & Perry, B. (2008). Starting school: a community endeavor. *Childhood Education Annual*, 84 (5), 274-281.
- Doucet, F. & Tudge, J. (2007). Co-constructing the transition to school: reframing the novice versus expert roles of children, parents, and teachers from a cultural perspective. In R. Pianta, M. Cox & K. Snow. *School Readiness & the Transition to Kindergarten in the Era of Accountability*. Baltimore: Paul Brookes Publishing.
- Duda, M. & Minick, V. (2006). Easing the transition to kindergarten: demonstrating partnership through service-learning. *Mentoring & Tutoring*, 14 (1), 111-121.
- Early, D., Rimm-Kaufman, S., Cox, M., Saluja, G., Pianta, R., Bradley, R. & Payne, C. (2002). Maternal sensitivity and child wariness in the transition to kindergarten. *Parenting: Science and Practice*, 3 (4), 355-377.

- Espinosa, L.M. (2007). English-Language Learners as they enter school. In R. Pianta, M.Cox & K. Snow. *School Readiness & the Transition to Kindergarten in the Era of Accountability*. Baltimore: Paul Brookes Publishing.
- Fanzutto, J. & McWayne, C. (2002). The relationship between peer-play interactions in the family context and dimensions of school readiness for low-income preschool children. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 94 (1), 79-87.
- Fantuzzo, J., Rouse, H., McDermott, P., Sekino, Y., Childs, S. & Weise, A. (2005). Early childhood experiences and kindergarten success: a population-based study of a large urban setting. *School Psychology Review*, 34 (4), 571-588.
- Farver, J.M., Xu, Y., Eppe, S., & Lonigan, C. (2006). Home environments and young Latino children's school readiness. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 21, 196-212.
- Garcia, E. & Cuéllar, D. (2006). Who are these linguistically and culturally diverse students? *Teacher College Record*, 108 (11), 2220-2246.
- Goldenberg, C., Gallimore, R., Reese, L. & Garnier, H. (2001). Cause or effect? A longitudinal study of immigrant Latino parents' aspirations and expectations, and their children's school performance. *American Educational Research Journal*, 38 (3). 547-582.
- Goldstein, L.S. (2007). Beyond the DAP versus standards dilemma: examining the unforgiving complexity of kindergarten teaching in the United States. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 22, 39-54.

- Graue, B. (2003). Kindergarten in the 21st century. In A. Reynolds, M. Wang and H. Walberg, (Eds.). *Early Childhood Programs for a New Century*. Washington, DC: CWLA Press.
- Graue, B. & Walsh, D. (1998). *Studying Children in Context*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Graue, E. (2006). The answer is readiness—now what is the question? *Early Education and Development*, 17 (1), 43-56.
- Graziano, P.A., Reavis, R.D., Keane, S.P. & Calkind, S.D. (2007). The role of emotion regulation in children's early academic success. *Journal of School Psychology*, 45, 3-19.
- Hair, E., Halle, T., Terry-Humen, E., Lavelle, B. & Calkins, J. (2006). Children's school readiness in the ECLS-K: Predictions to academic, health and social outcomes in first grade. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 21, 431-454.
- Hatch, J. (2002). *Doing Qualitative Research in Education Settings*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Howes, C., Burchinal, M., Pianta, R., Bryant, D., Early, D., Clifford, R. & Barbarin, O. (2008). Ready to learn? Children's pre-academic achievement in pre-kindergarten programs. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 23, 27-50.
- Hughes, J., Gleason, K. & Zhang, D. (2005). Relationship influences on teachers' perceptions of academic competence in academically at-risk minority and majority first grade students. *Journal of School Psychology*, 43, 303-320.

- Kagan, S. & Newman, M. (1998). Lessons from three decades of transition research. *The Elementary School Journal*, 98 (4), 365-379.
- Kagan, S. L. & Tarrant, K. (2010). *Transitions for Young Children*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing Co.
- Kinlaw, C. R., Kurtz-Costes, B. & Goldman-Fraser, J. (2001). Mothers' achievement beliefs and behaviors and their children's school readiness: a cultural comparison. *Applied Developmental Psychology*, 22, 493-506.
- Ladd, G. & Price, J. (1987). Predicting children's social and school adjustment following the transition from preschool to kindergarten. *Child Development*, 58, 1168-1189.
- Lam, M. & Pollard, A. (2006). A conceptual framework for understanding children as agents in the transition from home to kindergarten. *Early Years*, 26 (2), 123-141.
- LaParo, K., Kraft-Sayre, M. & Pianta, R. (2003). Preschool to kindergarten transition activities: Involving and satisfaction of families and teachers. *Journal of Research in Childhood Education*, 17 (2), 147-158.
- Latte, A. (2004). Children's experiences and voice in transition: A preschool transition activity. Unpublished manuscript.
- Ledger, E., Smith, A. & Rich, P. (2000). Friendships over the transition from early childhood center to school. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 8 (1), 57-69.

- Ledger, E., Smith, A. & Rich, P. (1998). "do I go to school to get a brain?" the transition from kindergarten to school from the child's perspective. *Children's Issues*, 2 (1), 7-11.
- Lin, H., Lawrence, F. & Gorrell, J. (2003). Kindergarten teachers' views of children's readiness for school. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 18, 225-237.
- LoCasale-Crouch, J., Mashburn, A., Downer, J. & Pianta, R. (2008). Pre-kindergarten teachers' use of transition practices and children's adjustment to kindergarten. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 23, 124-139.
- Lopez, A. & Cole, C. (1999). Effects of a parent-implemented intervention on the academic readiness skills of five Puerto Rican kindergarten students in an urban school. *School Psychology Review*, 1999, 28(3). 439-447.
- MacNaughton, G., Smith, K. & Davis, K. (2007). Researching with children the challenges and possibilities for building "child friendly" research. In A. Hatch (Ed.) *Early Childhood Qualitative Research*. London: Routledge.
- Magolda, P. (2000). Being at the wrong place, wrong time: Rethinking trust in qualitative inquiry. *Theory into Practice*, 39 (3), 138-145.
- Mangione, P. & Speth, T. (1998). The transition to elementary school: a framework for creating early childhood continuity through home, school, and community partnerships. *The Elementary School Journal*, 98 (4), 381-397.
- Marshall, C. & Rossman, G. (1999). *Designing Qualitative Research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.

- McIntyre, L., Eckert, T., Fiese, B., DiGennaro, F. & Wildenger, L. (2007). Transition to kindergarten: family experiences and involvement. *Early Childhood Education Journal*, 35 (1), 83-88.
- Merriam, S. (1998). *Qualitative Research and Case Study Applications in Education*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Merriam, S. (1988). *Case Study Research in Education A Qualitative Approach*. San Francisco: Jossey- Bass Publishers.
- National Association for the Education of Young Children. (1995). School readiness a position statement of the national association for the education of young children. Retrieved January 24, 2009, from <http://naeyc.org/about/positions/pdf/psready98.pdf>
- National Education Goals Panel. (1998). *Ready schools a report of the goal 1 ready schools resource group*. Washington, DC: Authors.
- Nelson, R. (2004). The transition to kindergarten. *Early childhood Education Journal*, 32 (3), 187-190.
- O'Donnell, K. (2008). *Parents' reports of the school readiness of young children from the National Household Education Surveys Program of 2007* (NCES 2008-051). National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Educational Sciences, U.S., Department of Education, Washington, DC.

- Palermo, R., Hanish, L., Martin, C., Fabes, R. & Reiser, M. (2007). Preschoolers' academic readiness: what role does the teacher-child relationship play? *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 22, 407-422.
- Patton, M. (1990). *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*. Newbury Park: Sage Publishing.
- Peters, S. (2003). "I didn't expect that I would get tons of friends...more each day": children's experiences of friendship during the transition to school. *Early Years*, 23 (1), 45-53.
- Petriwskyj, A.; Thorpe, K. & Tayler, C. (2005). Trends in construction of transition to school in three western regions, 1990-2004. *International Journal of Early Years Education*, 13 (1), 55-69.
- Pianta, R.C. (2007). Early education in transition. In R. Pianta, M. Cox & K. Snow. *School Readiness & the Transition to Kindergarten in the Era of Accountability*. Baltimore: Paul Brookes Publishing.
- Pianta, R & Cox, M. (1999). *The Transition to Kindergarten*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing.
- Pianta, R., Cox, M. & Snow, K. (2007). *School Readiness & the Transition to Kindergarten*. Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes Publishing.
- Pianta, R., Cox, M., Taylor, L. & Early, D. (1999). Kindergarten teachers' practices related to the transition to school: results of national survey. *The Elementary School Journal*, 100(1), 71-86.

Pianta, R., Kraft-Sayre, M., Rimm-Kaufman, S., Gercke, N. & Higgins, T. (2001).

Collaboration in building partnerships between families and schools: the National Center for Early Development and Learning's kindergarten transition intervention. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 16, 117-132.

Pianta, R., Nimetz, S. & Bennett, E. (1997). Mother-child relationships, teacher-child relationships, and school outcomes in preschool and kindergarten. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 12, 263-280.

Piotrkowski, C.S., Botsko, M. & Matthews, E. (2000). Parents' and teachers' beliefs about children's school readiness in a high-need community. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 15 (4), 537-558.

Ramey, S., Ramey, C., Phillips, M., Lanzi, R., Brezausek, C., Katholi, C. & Snyder, S. (2000). Head Start children's entry into public school: a report on the National Head Start/ public school early childhood transition demonstration project (Contract No. 35294-0021). Washington, DC: Department of Health & Human Services.

Raver, C., Garner, P. & Smith-Donald, R. (2007). The roles of emotion regulation and emotion knowledge for children's academic readiness: are the links casual? In R. Pianta, M. Cox & K. Snow. *School Readiness & the Transition to Kindergarten in the Era of Accountability*. Baltimore: Paul Brookes Publishing.

Rimm-Kaufman, S. & Pianta, R. (2005). Family-school communication in preschool and kindergarten in context of a relationship-enhancing intervention. *Early Education & Development*, 16 (3), 287-316.

- Rimm-Kaufman, S. & Pianta, R. (2000). An ecological perspective on the transition to kindergarten: a theoretical framework to guide empirical research. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 21 (5), 491-511.
- Rimm-Kaufman, S. E., Pianta, R.C., & Cox, M.J. (2000). Teachers' judgments of problems in the transition to kindergarten. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 15 (2), 147-166.
- Rimm-Kaufman, S. & Zhang, Y. (2005). Father-school communication in preschool and kindergarten. *School Psychology Review*, 34 (3), 287-308.
- Rogoff, B. (2002). *The Cultural Nature of Human Development*. Oxford: University Press.
- Rous, B., Hallam, R., McCormick, K., & Cox, M. (2010). Practices that support the transition to public preschool programs: results from national survey. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 25, 17-32.
- Saluja, G., Scott-Little, C. & Clifford, R. (2000). Readiness for school: a survey of state policies and definitions. *Early Childhood Research & Practice*, 2 (2), 15p.
Retrieved October 27, 2008, from <http://ecrp.uiuc.edu/v2n2/saluja.html>.
- Schulting, A., Malone, P. & Dodge, K. (2005). The effect of school-based kindergarten transition policies and practices on child academic outcomes. *Developmental Psychology*, 41 (6), 860-871.
- Schweinhart, L., Montie, J., Xiang, Z., Barnett, W., Belfield, C. & Nores, M. (2005). *Lifetime effects: the High-Scope Perry Preschool study through age 40*

- (Monographs of the High/Scope Educational Research Foundation, 14). Ypsilanti, MI: High/Scope Educational Research Foundation.
- Seefeldt, C, Galper, A. & Denton, K. (1997). Head Start children's conceptions of and expectations for their future schooling. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 12, 387-406.
- Silvers, R., Measelle, J., Armstrong, J. & Essex, M. (2005). Trajectories of classroom externalizing behavior: contributions of child characteristics, family characteristics, and the teacher-child relationship during the school transition. *Journal of School Psychology*, 43, 39-60.
- Stake, R. (1995). *The Art of Case Study Research*. Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Sy, S. (2007). Rethinking parent involvement during the transition to first grade: a focus on Asian American families. *School Community Journal*, 16 (1), 107-125.
- Valeski, T. & Stipek, D. (2001). Young children's feelings about school. *Child Development*, 72 (4), 1198-1213.
- Wesley, P. & Buysse, V. (2003). Making meaning of school readiness in schools and communities. *Early Childhood Research Quarterly*, 18, 351-375.
- Wildenger, L.K., Mc Intyre, I. L., Fiese, B. H. & Eckhert, T.L. (2008). Children's daily routines during kindergarten transition. *Early Childhood Education*, 36, 69-74.
- Winter, S. M. & Kelley, M. F. (2008). Forty years of school readiness research: what have we learned? *Childhood Education*, 84 (5), 260-267.

Appendix A

Consent Forms and Letters of Introduction

Consent Form

Transition to Kindergarten

Rutgers University Graduate School of Education

Dear Parent:

You are invited to participate in a research study conducted by Ave Latte, a doctorate candidate from Rutgers University. I am investigating how children, families and teachers experience transition activities such as first visits to kindergarten. With your permission I will be visiting your child's preschool classroom from February through June 2009. During this time I will be talking to your child about going to kindergarten. I will also take part in transition activities with your child's preschool class such as visiting a kindergarten classroom. I would also like to spend a little time with you and your child to make a book about getting ready for kindergarten. A copy of your story will be kept at the school to share with other families. All information I collect for this study will be used for research purposes only. Any information I gather will be kept in confidence, your real names and personal information will not be used as a part of this study. There are no foreseeable risks or benefits associated with your child's participation in this research study.

If you have read this form and have decided to allow your child to participate in this study, please understand that participation is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw your consent or end participation for your child at any time without consequences.

I can be reached at: Ave Latte, 765 Newman Springs Rd, Lincroft, NJ 732-224-2543
Rutgers Graduate School of Education
10 Seminary Place
New Brunswick, NJ 08901

Faculty Advisor:
Dr. Sharon Ryan
GSE - Learning & Teaching
10 Seminary Place
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
Phone Number: 732-932-7496 extension 8114
Email address: sr247@rci.rutgers.edu

If you have any questions about your child's rights as a research subject, you may contact the Sponsored Programs Administrator at Rutgers University at 732/932-0150 ext. 2104

Audio Addendum to Consent Form

You have already agreed to participate in a research study entitled: A Case Study of Transition to Kindergarten Experiences conducted by Ave Latte. I am asking for your permission to allow me to audiotape (sound) as part of this research study. You do not have to agree to be recorded in order to participate in the main part of the study.

The recordings will be used for analysis by Ave Latte as principle researcher.

The recordings will not include your name or any other identifier such as your school or location.

The recordings will be stored electronically in a computer file secured by a password with hardcopies of the audio recordings stored in a locked file cabinet with no links to your identity and will be kept for a period of one year after the end of data analysis then destroyed upon completion of the study results.

Your signature on this form grants the investigator as described above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above referenced study. The investigator will not use the recordings for any other reason than those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

Subject (Print) _____

Subject Signature _____ Date _____

Principle Investigator Signature _____ Date _____

Introduction to Teachers

Dear Preschool/ Kindergarten Teacher:

I would like to introduce myself to you through this letter. I am conducting a research investigation on transition to kindergarten activities for my dissertation study through the Graduate School of Education, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ. I would like to spend some time with you to interview you about how you plan and participate in transition activities. I would also like to spend some time in your classroom to learn about how children participate in transition activities. Finally I am interested in learning about how their families participate in transition activities. Data collection will begin in mid February, 2009 and be completed by June 2009. I will be using audio recordings and field notes to capture the interviews and transition events. I am enclosing a brief synopsis of my study for your information. I look forward to meeting with you to discuss my study. In the meantime should you wish to contact me I can be reached at the following location:

Education Dept

Brookdale Community College

765 Newman Springs Rd

Lincroft, NJ 07738

732-224-2543

alatte@brookdalecc.edu

Sincerely,

Introduction to the Principal

Dear Principal:

I would like to take this opportunity to introduce myself to you. I am conducting a research investigation on transition to kindergarten through the Graduate School of Education at Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ. I am the principle investigator in this study. I would like to spend some time in your school conducting research with one preschool teacher and one kindergarten teacher, four children from the preschool classroom and their parent. My study is intended to begin in mid February, 2009 and to be completed by the end of June 2009. During this time I will be conducting interviews with one preschool teacher, one kindergarten teacher and four parents and their children. I would also like to observe several transition activities that they partake in. All research data and reports will be used for research purposes only. Your name, the school and any participants in the study will remain anonymous. There are no payments for participating in this study, and there are no foreseeable costs associated with your participation. I am enclosing a synopsis of my study for your information. I look forward to meeting with you to discuss my study. In the meantime should you wish to contact me I can be reached at:

Education Dept. Brookdale Community College
765 Newman Springs Rd
Lincroft, NJ 07738
732-224-2543
alatte@brookdalecc.edu

Sincerely,

Appendix B

Parent Interview Protocol

Project: A case study of transition to kindergarten activities in one urban district

Time of Interview:

Date:

Place:

Interview participant(s):

Introduction: I am going to ask you a few questions about how you prepare your child to enter kindergarten. Think about the ways you talk about kindergarten, the activities you have done, are doing or will be planning for your child that will support his/her move from preschool to kindergarten. If I ask any questions that you do not understand I will be happy to reword them or explain them. I am really interested in what you have to say about your child's first experiences in school; your hopes and expectations. Even though I am asking particular questions feel free to add to the conversation however you like.

Part 1 Building rapport

1. Tell me about yourself and your experiences you are having with your child in preschool?
2. Tell me about some conversations you have had with your preschool child about starting kindergarten.
3. Have you had any other children go through preschool and kindergarten?
4. What were these experiences like?
5. What are you most excited about with your child's move to kindergarten? What concerns do you have about this move?

Part 2 Transition experiences and expectations

6. Do you think parents should help kids transition to kindergarten?

7. How are you preparing your child for the change from preschool to kindergarten?
8. What do you plan to do to help your child with this change? When might you do these activities?
9. How has the preschool teacher/director helped you and your child prepare for the move to kindergarten? What more would you like them to do?
10. How has the kindergarten teacher or the new school helped you? What more would you like them to do?
11. What are your expectations for your child in kindergarten?
12. What else would you like to share with me about your child moving into kindergarten?

Appendix C

Teacher Interview Transition Planning Protocol

Project: A case study of transition to kindergarten activities in one urban district

Time of interview

Date

Place

Interview participant(s):

Interview questions:

Part 1 Background information

1. Tell me about your background in teaching. How long have you been teaching at this level?
2. What experiences have you had with children moving from preschool to kindergarten?
3. Did you find these experiences to be important? Why?

Part 2 transition event planning

4. How do you describe transition activities?
5. What do you think about and do to plan for transition to kindergarten?
6. Who should be involved in the planning process?

Reflection on transition event participation

1. Tell me about some transition events you have planned or participated in.

- a. What is your role during this event?
 - b. Who was involved in these events?
 - c. Who else was included in this process?
 - d. Did the event meet your expectations?
 - i. If so tell me why you think so
 - ii. If not what might you do differently if you were to participate in this event again?
2. What other information would you like to share that I have not asked about transition to kindergarten?

Appendix D

Teacher Interview Transition Activity Reflection Protocol

Project: A case study of transition to kindergarten activities in one urban district

Time of Interview

Date

Place

Interview participant

Interview Questions:

Part 1 Reflection on experiencing the transition activity

1. Tell me about the event you just experienced. What was your role? What did you find valuable?
2. How did your interactions with other participants support your transition activity goals?
3. Were there any unexpected outcomes from these activities? For yourself? That you observed in others?
4. What else would you like to add to this conversation that I may have overlooked?

Part 2 Comparing planned goals to actual outcomes

1. To the extent that you predicted outcomes during the planning process were realized how were they demonstrated?
2. If they were not realized what expected activities or outcomes were missing or did materialize?
3. If you are able to redo this activity what would you change? Why?

4. How would you report the importance for these changes to your administrator?

Attachment 7

Appendix E

Administrator Interview Protocol

Project: A case study of transition to kindergarten activities in one urban district

Time of interview

Date

Place

Interview participant(s):

Interview questions:

Part 1 Background information

1. Tell me about your background as an administrator. How long have you been in this position?
2. What are your major responsibilities related to transition to kindergarten?
3. What professional development activities have you provided to school staff on transition to kindergarten?
4. How do these sessions support district policy on the goals for transition activities?

Part 2 transition event planning

5. How do you describe transition activities?
6. What do you think about and do to plan for transition to kindergarten?
7. Who should be involved in the planning process?

Part 3 Reflection on transition event participation

8. Tell me about some transition events you have planned or participated in.
 - a. What is your role during this event?
 - b. Who was involved in these events?
 - c. Who else was included in this process?
 - d. Did the event meet your expectations?
 - i. If so tell me why you think so
 - ii. If not what might you do differently if you were to participate in this event again?

Part 4 Policy & Reporting

9. What tools do you to gather information on and assess the effectiveness of transition activities that prepares children for kindergarten?
10. How often do you collect this data?
11. What do you do with the data once it is collected?
12. How do the assessment outcomes from transition events get reported to key stake holders such as the Board of Education or the Superintendent?
13. What other information would you like to share that I have not asked about transition to kindergarten?

Appendix F

Children Informal Conversation Interview Protocol

Children will not be formally interviewed. Instead I will conduct informal conversations with focus children during their daily classroom routines or when they are willing to share a storybook about kindergarten with me.

The following probes will be used or adapted where appropriate to access focus children's perceptions about kindergarten as well as about their experiences before, during and after participating in transition activities. I am separating these probes into two sections. The first section will be used when having conversation with preschool focus children. The second section will be used when having conversation with kindergarten focus children.

Section One:

Before transition activities:

1. What do you think kindergarten will be like?
2. What does it look like?
3. What do children do in kindergarten?
4. What will you do in kindergarten?
5. Who would you like to have with you when you start kindergarten?

While sharing a storybook about kindergarten I will use the story prompts to have conversation about the focus children's views and perceptions of how the child in the book is experiencing kindergarten.

After transition activities I will rely mostly upon teacher directed conversations with all children as he or she debriefs the transition activity. Should the opportunity arise that I might pursue deeper questioning with preschool focus children I will attempt to gain access into their perceptions to answer research question two.

1. What did you do during (mentioning the specific transition event)?
2. What did you find out about kindergarten?
3. What did the teacher (kindergarten or preschool) do?

4. Do you like the kindergarten room?
5. What did you like?
6. What were you surprised about?

Section Two

Probes for focus kindergarten children before they participate in transition activities

1. What are you doing to help preschool children get ready for kindergarten?
2. What do you want to tell them about coming to kindergarten?
3. What do you want them to know about the things you do in kindergarten?
4. What do you not want to tell them?

Probes for focus kindergarten children after they have participated in a transition activity

1. What did you do with the preschool children?
2. What did you tell them about kindergarten?
3. What would you like to tell them but didn't get to say?
4. How did you help them learn about what you do in kindergarten?
5. If you could say anything you want about kindergarten what do you think would be the most important thing to talk about?

Appendix G

Rubric Children's Awareness of Kindergarten

Point Descriptor	1 Low awareness level	2 Moderate awareness	3 High awareness level
Friendship	Child has little interest in talking about friends during kindergarten transition.	Child shows some concern for friends during kindergarten transition but speaks about adults being more important in the transition period	Child talks in detail about friends during transition to kindergarten as being important and necessary for their comfort.
Work and Play	Child uses none to minimal descriptions of kindergarten activities that would be different than in preschool.	Child talks about working instead of playing in kindergarten in general terms. Talks about doing homework and taking tests but are not specific about what this means.	Child is aware that they will not play in kindergarten. Talks about having homework, tests and other early academic activities. Talks about missing preschool activities such as play and learning labs.
Rules and procedures	Child does not mention or makes minimal comments about rule or procedure changes. Child shows little concern or interest in personal expectations and increased responsibilities.	Child focuses on rules and procedural changes but does not detail these descriptions. Shows an awareness of increased academic activity and responsibilities but limits descriptions to preschool habits.	Talks in detail about rule changes, classroom procedures having a general sense of personal growth as getting bigger and accepting more responsibility.

Dockett, S. & Perry, B. (2007). *Transitions to School Perceptions, Expectations, Experiences*. Sidney: University of New South Wales Press.

Appendix H

Document Collection Log

Title or topic	
Source	
Date received	
Purpose	
Annotated summary	