

2016

Preschool to School: Transition through the Eyes of Teachers

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Preschool to School: Transition through the Eyes of Teachers

A dissertation submitted to
The Graduate College of
Marshall University
In partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education

In
Curriculum and Instruction
by

Ruthann Arneson

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Marshall University
December 2016

SIGNATURE PAGE

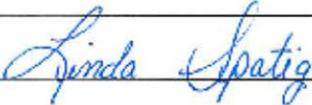
I hereby affirm that the following project meets the high academic standards for original scholarship and creative work established by my discipline, college, and the Graduate College of Marshall University. With my signature, I approve the manuscript for publication.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would first like to thank all the teachers who shared their time and expertise with me. Providing your insight into transitions is appreciated. Your dedication to the children you teach was evident and I am grateful for all you do.

Next I thank the members of my committee, starting with Dr. Spatig, my committee chair. I appreciate your guidance throughout this process. I was intrigued by qualitative research when I met you 23 years ago during TDP. Little did I know where that interest would take me! Your expertise in qualitative research, the endless edits and suggestions you made while encouraging me to go forward have made this journey possible. You have supported me and have truly influenced me to be the person I am today.

Next, I thank Dr. Childress. You were one of the first people I met when I began the doctoral program. You have provided guidance and wisdom throughout my time in the program and through the writing process. Thank you for your continuous support and encouragement. Thank you, too Dr. Watts. I appreciate the time, effort, and insight you have given me as I have moved through the doctoral process. I always did appreciate your keen sense of observation when we worked together in Lincoln County.

Dr. Dozier, thank you for being there from the very beginning when I decided to pursue my doctorate. You have been my greatest fan and cheerleader. I so appreciate your encouragement, expertise, knowledge, and vision. You saw that I could do this even when I didn't see it myself. I wouldn't be where I am without your reassurance and support.

A big thank you goes to McKenzie Conley for taking on the job of transcribing my interviews. You took on this task and did it conscientiously and went over and above

the job of a graduate assistant. To my fellow student, Georgia Thornton, thank you for being with me during this journey.

Finally to my family Neil, Emma, and Ethan Arneson, thanks for all your love and support. You never complained when I had to work and couldn't spend time with you. Neil, you have always been there for me and I so appreciate that. No matter what, you had my back. Emma, you have read and edited my work and been there throughout the program. Ethan, you put a smile on my face whenever you asked me how my day was. Thank you all for your love and support. I couldn't have done it without you.

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative comparative case study conducted in two West Virginia school systems examined the factors that regulate the implementation of transition practices from pre-k into kindergarten from the perspective of pre-k and kindergarten teachers. The participants' perceptions were explored in relation to teacher practices, school practices, and practices with families in both pre-k and kindergarten classrooms. The study investigated what teachers perceived to be barriers and/or inducements relating to the implementation of transition practices. Findings were based on interviews with pre-k and kindergarten teachers from the two counties. One county participated in a year-long professional development intervention on transitions; the other did not. Overall, the county that had the transition intervention showed more enabling factors that supported positive transition practices than the county that did not have the transition project. Two themes emerged from the data. The first theme, spending time and talking together, resulted in rapport and relationships among teachers that facilitated the development of positive transition practices. The second theme was related to differences, distance, and dissension that made the transition into kindergarten challenging. The findings, which were interpreted in relation to the extant literature on transitions, provide evidence that providing professional development to teachers and implementing summer transition camps is beneficial for the implementation of positive transition practices.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Starting school is a major life experience for children and their families. The first day of school is an exciting time; it is full of both joy and apprehension. Parents worry about how their child will adjust. Teachers look forward to meeting their new students and embarking on the journey of providing exciting new learning experiences. Over the last decade, funding for public preschool programs has doubled with more than one million children enrolled in state programs (De la Torre et.al, 2011). It is estimated that 75% of all four year olds attend some type of center-based preschool programs (Barnett, 2011). With so many children enrolling in prekindergarten, these early childhood programs are playing a significant role in the development of school readiness skills as well as being major partners with the public school systems as children make transitions into kindergarten (Gill, Winters, & Friedman, 2006).

With increasing national attention on school accountability, preschool programs and school readiness are viewed as political keys to improving school performance and to lessening underachievement in America's schools. Current educational reform efforts feature quality preschool programs as a way to enhance school readiness and prepare children for academic success in future schooling (Wat, 2010). The transition into kindergarten is closely related to school success. It is the shared responsibility of many individuals and institutions to make the transition to kindergarten a positive experience for children and families (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2002). Understanding the practices involved in transitions and the barriers that exist in the implementation of them was examined in this study. When children experience difficulty with transition into school they may have trouble later in their school career. This is especially true for low income and rural children. Results of this study may lead to a better understanding of

what barriers may exist that prevent schools from implementing uniform transition practices and greater insight into methods that can be used to enhance transition practices for all children.

School Readiness

When children complete the preschool experience, it is expected that they will be ready for kindergarten. School readiness is seen as a key element for children being prepared to begin kindergarten, but there is not a consensus regarding the meaning of this concept. Ackerman and Barnett (2005) found definitions of this term to lack consistency. Broadly defined, school readiness is a term that can be used to describe the expectation of how children will fare upon entry into kindergarten (National Governor's Association, 2005). The National Education Goals Panel (1998) identified components of school readiness to include children's physical health, social and emotional development, language development, and academic competencies comprising of cognition and general knowledge abilities and approaches to learning. Another factor is that young children's development is uneven as individual children learn different skills at different rates (Rafoth, Buchenauer, Crissman, & Halko, 2004). Additional factors such as health, nutrition, and living conditions may impact children's knowledge, skills, and behavior and their preparation for kindergarten (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005). Dockett and Perry (2009) argued that definitions of readiness should also involve children's relationships with families, schools, and communities, as these will also have an impact on expectations and perceptions of readiness.

National attention to the concept of school readiness came to the forefront when the Goals 2000: Educate America Act stated that "all children in America will start school ready to learn" (PL-103-277, 1994). This initiative, along with the No Child Left Behind Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2002), generated interest in the importance of preschool programming

at the federal, state, and local levels. The central aim of these programs is to promote the attainment of skills, knowledge, and behaviors that are associated with success in school (Gormley, Phillips, & Gayer, 2008). Many studies have investigated the components of school readiness (Gill et al., 2006; Howes et.al, 2008; Ackerman & Barnett, 2005). It has been consistently demonstrated that entry into kindergarten is the critical point at which school readiness is evaluated (Ferguson & Wood, 2005). According to the West Virginia Department of Education, West Virginia defines kindergarten readiness as “a stage of transition that encompasses the child’s various learning experiences and general knowledge, physical well-being, social and emotional development, and familiarity and ease with expressing themselves and understanding language (2013). The state recognizes that children develop at their own individual rates and readiness is highly individualized.

Preschool is a critical factor in school readiness. Research has provided evidence that attendance in high quality preschool programs can improve learning and prepare children to meet the demands of kindergarten (Barrett & Jung, 2007). Ackerman and Barnett (2005) reported that children entering kindergarten have widely varying skills and abilities and come from a wide variety of preschool settings. They found readiness for school is influenced by family and environmental factors and can be enhanced when children have an effective preschool experience. Over the last decade there has been a shift in the understanding of what pre-k programs provide for young children. Halpern (2013) noted that, traditionally, programs for children under five were associated with child care and the need to support working parents. Early childhood settings were seen as places where children acquired knowledge through active learning and play and were supportive of cooperative and socio-emotional needs. Pre-k programs now are viewed as an educational opportunity to ensure children are ready for school

and prepared for the learning challenges ahead. Academic learning standards and structured settings are the norm in kindergarten today (Ray & Smith, 2010). States that have developed comprehensive standards for their pre-kindergarten programs (pre-k) address the needs of the whole child including the domains of health and physical development, social and emotional development, language development and communication, cognition and general knowledge, and approaches to learning (Barnett, Hustedt, Hawkinson, & Robin, 2006).

Transition

The term transition is defined as the “passage from one state, place, stage, or subject to another” (Merriam Webster, p.760). Nelson (2004) described the transition to kindergarten as the process used to provide continuity between preschool and kindergarten. Given that transition into kindergarten is a critical period in the educational life of a child, it is important to understand how the connections between home, school, and the community are developed.

Having a positive adjustment to school can have an impact on later social and academic outcomes in a child’s school experience (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003). Children entering kindergarten are adjusting to a change from the social and emotional support provided by early education programs to the more academic demands and expectations of the school setting (Miller & Almon, 2009). The developmental/ecological approach to transition as described by Rimm-Kaufmann, Pianta, and Cox (2000) emphasizes the connections made between early education programs and public schools. It is framed around a model that states transitions are influenced by multiple learning environments and stakeholders. Ongoing interactions between children, families, schools, and communities are interconnected and interdependent throughout the transition process.

With many more children entering kindergarten with preschool experience, it is increasingly important that schools and communities develop supports to help children and families from diverse preschool experiences make a successful move from early childhood settings into the formal school setting. Three components of school readiness were identified by the United States National Education Goals Panel (1997): children's readiness for school so that they can participate fully in classroom and learning experiences, school's readiness for children by responding to the children enrolled, and family and community supports and services which contribute to school readiness by promoting environments where learning is supported. Transition practices that are supportive of children, families, teachers, and the community will enhance readiness and thus prospects for later school success.

Preschool and kindergarten can be substantially different kinds of school experiences for children as they shift from spending the majority of their time learning through play and exploration in preschool to spending much more time being taught math and literacy skills in kindergarten (Miller & Almon, 2009). Research on the reciprocal nature of transition practices to support young children as they enter public school has been the focus of researchers for over twenty years (Ramey & Ramey, 1998; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000; Pianta, Cox, Taylor, & Early, 1999). Kraft-Sayre and Pianta, (2000) asserted that transition from preschool into kindergarten is significant as it sets the course for children's future school careers. Successful transitions provide children with a sense of self-confidence and promote positive feelings about school and formal education as well as fostering self-assurance in their own ability to learn (Entwhistle & Alexander, 1998). Increasing purposeful transition practices is seen as a strategy for improving children's social competence and lessening behavior problems as they enter kindergarten (LoCasale-Crouch, Mashburn, Downer, & Pianta 2008).

Some children find the transition to kindergarten difficult. A large national survey of kindergarten teachers looked at teachers' judgments of the occurrence and types of problems children had upon entering school. It was reported that teachers perceived up to one half of a typical kindergarten class as having some general adjustment problems transitioning into school, with one sixth facing serious adjustment problems. The most common issues identified were difficulty following directions and the lack of academic skills (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2000). Schulting, Malone, and Dodge (2005) found that more school transition activities at the beginning of kindergarten were related to better academic outcomes over the kindergarten year. Transition practices such as pre-k children visiting kindergarten classrooms, spring orientation for pre-k parents, and the sharing of records between pre-k teachers and kindergarten teachers are helpful in supporting children and families as they move from pre-kindergarten programs to kindergarten, thus helping children make better adjustments to kindergarten (Gill et al., 2006; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008). These kinds of transition activities may be especially beneficial for children who experience social and economic risk factors (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008; Schulting, et al., 2005). Further, Rimm-Kaufman et al. (2000) found that there were higher adjustment problems for children entering kindergarten in rural than in urban schools.

The continued interest in the transition of children from pre-kindergarten programs into kindergarten has led to an examination of these practices to see what works. Kraft- Sayre and Pianta (2000) found that successful entry into school was more than ensuring that children had the readiness skills to begin school. Establishing linkages between home, school, and community was also important. More recently, Bogard and Takanishi (2005) maintained that purposeful coordination of these systems is an underutilized way to help children continue to make gains as they move into the next school setting.

Ready schools are those with staff who understand that families, schools, and communities are partners (Dockett & Perry, 2013). Establishing links between settings that build continuity corroborates the National Education Goals Panel's (Kagan & Bredekamp, 1995) focus on relationships for developing successful transitions, identifying them as tools to improve connections between home, pre-k programs, and kindergartens. Emphasis recently has been on the reciprocal nature of school readiness, meaning that children are ready for schools and the schools are ready for children (Ahtola, Silinskas, Poikonen, Kontoniemi, Niemi, & Nurmi, 2011; Graue, 2006; Meisels, 1998; National Education Goals Panel, 1998; Ramey & Ramey, 1994). Focusing on the alignment of curriculum, interactions between children and adults, and linking the institutions that touch children's lives are underscored in early childhood reform efforts (Kagan, 2009). Ahtola et al., (2011) found that cooperation on curriculum issues between preschool and kindergarten teachers emerged as a critical factor in influencing later school achievement. Additionally, they found passing on written information about children from preschool teachers to kindergarten teachers was a useful but infrequently implemented transition practice. LoCasale-Crouch et al. (2008) observed that additional study on the content and purpose of what is being communicated between teachers, parents, and children during transition activities would contribute to a more in-depth understanding of interactions that create support for children's adjustment.

Several states such as Ohio and Connecticut have developed policies that address ways to smooth the transition of children from preschool to kindergarten, home to school, and grade to grade. They emphasize the need to strengthen linkages between early learning and early elementary education, to support an infrastructure that provides the foundation for sustaining

these linkages, and to improve the relationships of those working on behalf of young children and their transitions to new educational settings (Kauerz & Howard, 2009).

According to the National Institute for Early Childhood Research (NIEER) West Virginia is recognized as one of the top preschool systems in the nation. It meets eight out the ten benchmarks NIEER has cited as indicators of quality, including the development of early learning standards, professional development criteria for teachers, and monitoring of programming (Barnett, Carolan, Fitzgerald, & Squires, 2012). Education leaders in the state realize the significance of connecting preschool to the K-12 system in terms of philosophy, curriculum, and expectations. Nevertheless the state ranks 45th out of 50 in the number of three and four year olds enrolled in preschool (West Virginia Kids Count, 2014). It is specified in Policy 2525, West Virginia's Universal Access to Pre-kindergarten System, that every county have a written plan including the implementation for transition which includes communication with families and kindergarten teachers (WVDE, 2010.). More recently a comprehensive framework for school readiness and transition called Ready, Set, Go was developed. It includes a framework to support children and their families that includes recommendations on implementing effective transition practices within the context of home, schools, and communities (WVDE, 2013).

A review of research related to transition to school including readiness by Dockett & Perry (2013) maps the trends on this issue for the period of 2005-2012. The review identified 300 papers published in Australia, North America, Asia, Europe, Scandinavia, the UK, New Zealand, and Africa. The most prominent issue covered in the literature focused on readiness, with over 76% of the articles looking at some aspect of school readiness. Only 25% reported on transition. The readiness factor of specific groups including special needs, children living in

poverty, and children from culturally and linguistically different backgrounds was a recurrent feature in much of the literature. In many cases the children in these groups faced more challenges or were considered not to be as prepared to start school as their counterparts from less marginalized groups. The literature suggested that they needed additional supports to facilitate a positive start to school.

Additionally the study found the literature on transition mainly covered transition practices or policies and the effect transition had on the children. Parent and teacher perspectives on transition were categorized in this area of the review. These studies showed there is consensus that transition practices help children's adjustment to school and participation in more activities rather than fewer is beneficial. Communication between home and school was also highlighted. It was noted that parents and teachers working together was important but there were indications this did not always happen. A smaller number of articles (10%) reported on parent family and community issues. Parent behaviors or practices were discussed under this category. The stability of the family, parenting styles, parental attitudes, and parent experiences and involvement with schools contribute to children's experiences at the entry to school. Transition is recognized as a time of stress for families and some articles looked at strategies to support families.

Problem Statement

Much is known about the importance of school readiness and the association between transition practices and children's adjustment to kindergarten. However these practices are not consistently utilized. More information is needed to identify factors that regulate the implementation of transition practices as it appears that teachers consider them important but are not consistent in their implementation (Ahtola et al., 2011). Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, & Cox

(2000) described teachers' judgments on transitions but did not examine how these judgments were developed. They further showed that low income and rural students were perceived as having increased difficulty with transitions. Likewise, Schulting et al. (2005) found there was a relationship between transition practices and achievement that was moderated by socioeconomic status. The effect of transition practices on academic achievement was higher for children from average or low income families. Thus an unexamined issue in the current research is teachers' perceptions of transitions and what barriers or supports influence their implementation of transition activities.

Research Questions

The following research questions were investigated in this study:

1. How do preschool teachers perceive the practices that support children in the transition from preschool into kindergarten?
2. What do they perceive to be the barriers and/or inducements relating to the implementation of transition practices?
3. How do kindergarten teachers perceive the practices that support children in the transition from preschool into kindergarten?
4. What do they perceive to be the barriers and/or inducements relating to the implementation of transition practices?

Purpose of the Study

The proposed study was conducted using qualitative methods that focused on "understanding the process by which events and actions take place" (Maxwell, 2005, p. 23). In this study, I was seeking to understand preschool and kindergarten teachers' experiences with, and insights concerning transition practices and what they perceived to be barriers or supports

that influenced their implementation of transition activities, especially in their work with low income and rural families. The theoretical framework was based on a phenomenological approach that can be described as a form of interpretive inquiry which focuses on human perception and experience (Pinar et al., 2004). A comparative case study was done to compare teachers who participated in transition intervention with a group of pre-k and kindergarten teachers who had not had the intervention. Interviews were conducted to generate descriptive data about how teachers experienced and interpreted the transition process and their roles in it.

Settings and Participant Selection

Purposeful sampling was used to select participants. As Patton (2002) suggests, purposeful sampling focuses on selecting information-rich cases that will provide answers to the questions being studied. Three pre-k and three kindergarten teachers involved in a yearlong professional development study where strategies to enhance the transition experience for families and children from pre-k to kindergarten were interviewed. Also three pre-k and three kindergarten teachers not involved in the intervention were interviewed. Teachers who were invited to be part of the study were from rural or low income schools as these students have been shown to have the most difficulty in making successful transitions (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2000; Schulting et al. 2005, LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008).

Data Collection

In-depth interviews were conducted with participating preschool and kindergarten teachers. Participant observations were done at professional development events and other events sponsored by the transition project. I conducted interviews with preschool teachers and kindergarten teachers in order to gain insight into how transition practices are accomplished and how teachers perceive them. Preschool and kindergarten teachers were able to express their

expectations for the children entering kindergarten. This is consistent with Glesne's (2011) interpretive approach to qualitative research where the methods focus on interacting with the research participants and talking with them about their perceptions. Preschool teachers were asked about methods they use to facilitate transition and were asked to discuss practices that prepare children for kindergarten. Kindergarten and preschool teachers were asked their views on school readiness and how children entering their classrooms are prepared for school. These interviews were recorded and then transcribed verbatim.

In addition, I did participant observations during transition events that occurred in the schools during the time I was conducting my research. I made use of extant data from the transition intervention project and written documents that teachers had regarding transition.

Data Analysis

The interviews were coded for analysis and interpretation. In accordance with Bogdan and Biklen's (2007) guidelines, I developed a coding system that helped to establish patterns and themes in the data. Coding categories were used to sort the descriptive data into categories that were managed in order to understand major themes. Findings were interpreted in relation to extant literature about transition practices.

Strengths and Limitations

The strength of this study is the use of qualitative methods which allowed me to gather "rich" data that is detailed and varied enough to provide an understanding of transitions practices (Maxwell, 2005). It allowed me to gain a better understanding of the perceptions and attitudes of the teachers who are closely involved with transition processes on a daily basis.

A limitation to this study was that there was a potential for researcher bias that could be a threat to validity (Maxwell, 2005). I had a professional relationship with many of the preschool

teachers in the local geographic area. I did pilot research with the transition project and had been present during the professional development activities. I emphasized that I wanted teachers' honest views about the transition process. I was familiar with many aspects of the transition processes that preschool teachers typically utilize. I needed to remain neutral to prevent the occurrence of what Maxwell (2005) describes as reactivity “to prevent researcher variability from being an unwanted cause of variability in the outcome variables” (p. 108). I acquired participant feedback to ensure I was interpreting correctly what I learned from interviews and observations.

Significance of Study

Transition is a pivotal time of life for children, and their families and teachers. Transition practices that are not consistently implemented by school personnel may be ineffective for some children and their families. This is especially true for children from low income and rural backgrounds. Results of this study can be used to understand why these inconsistencies exist and what gets in the way of schools incorporating uniform transition measures. Results of this study may also contribute to understanding by decision makers on what methods can be used to support positive transition experiences.

Organization of the Study

Chapter one introduces the study and includes a conceptual framework, overview of related literature, problem statement, and the purpose of the study. Chapter two is comprised of a thorough review of the scholarly literature related to school readiness and transitions. Chapter three provides a detailed description of the research methods including research design, data collection, and analysis. Chapter four describes the setting and the participants who took part in

the study. Chapter five consists of study findings from interviews with teachers and participant observations done in Clifton* County. Chapter six consists of study findings from interviews with teachers and participant observations in done in Merritt County. Chapter seven presents an interpretation of the findings and implications of the results of the study along with an interpretation of the findings and implications for practitioners and policymakers.

* All locations, schools, and participants are pseudonyms.

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Overview

The purpose of this study is to understand the perceptions and experiences of preschool and kindergarten teachers related to transition practices as children enter kindergarten. Relevant literature is focused on school readiness and transition practices. School readiness literature was divided into a description of the components of school readiness, the effect of pre-k programs on readiness, and the influence of poverty and environment on school readiness. The transition literature examined transition practices in relation to children, families, communities, teachers, and schools.

School Readiness

School readiness has been a topic of discussion among early childhood educators for over twenty years (Kagan, 1990). For many children and their families, the entry into kindergarten is the beginning of a child's formal education. A child's future academic success has been linked to being ready to learn and participate in a successful kindergarten experience (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005). There is widespread belief that children starting school should be physically and mentally healthy, have effective communication skills, and have an approach to learning that is characterized by curiosity and excitement (Wesley & Buysse, 2003).

Components of School Readiness. What constitutes readiness? Currently preschool education is receiving attention in the media and from public policymakers due to proposals by the U.S. President and the call for expansion of preschool programs (Barnett, 2013). This interest and growth in early education can be attributed to the growing awareness of the importance of increasing school readiness skills, especially for those children struggling to meet the academic and social demands in elementary school (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001).

The National Education Goals Panel (NEGP) issued a report in 1990 that stated “by the year 2000, all children in America will start school ready to learn” (NEGP, 1997, p. 5). Three components of school readiness were identified: readiness of the child, the school’s readiness for children and family, and community supports and services that add to children’s success. This report established the five dimensions of school readiness that are interrelated, showing development in one area impacts all of the other areas as well. The five dimensions included physical wellbeing and motor development, social emotional development, approaches toward learning, communication and language usage, and cognition and general knowledge (Doyle, 1992).

There are many ways of conceptualizing school readiness. Some describe readiness as the age when children are ready to enter school (Ackerman & Barnett, 2005). According to Pianta and Kraft-Sayre (2003), readiness can be described as “a set of skills, generally academic, the acquisition of which determines how successful a child is expected to be in kindergarten” (p. 12). Dockett and Perry (2009) describe readiness in the context of what children are able to do or know before they start school. Miesels (1998) discusses the interactionist view of school readiness where teachers attend to what the child knows and at the same time schools develop the capacity to adapt to children’s individual needs and strengths.

Research has established that the first five years of life are critical for brain development along with the importance of providing stimulating environments for young children. Early experiences affect the construction of the brain by establishing a foundation for all learning and behaviors that follow. The interactive nature of experiences with others shapes the developing brain (Center on the Developing Child, 2007). The capacities that prepare children to be ready for school and to be lifelong learners are formed during these early years. Shonkoff and Phillips

(2000) emphasize three developmental tasks significantly related to school readiness and brain development of children during these years: acquiring self-regulation, communicating and learning, and getting along with peers. This research documents that cognitive and social-emotional growth are interrelated. Further, the research illustrates the important role social and emotional development play in the growth of young children and more specifically the role early relationships play in fostering cognitive development (ZERO TO THREE, 1992).

In addition, children who are best prepared to do well in school have been found to possess confidence, curiosity, intentionality, self-control, relatedness, a capacity to communicate, and cooperativeness (ZERO TO THREE, 1992). If children lack these skills they are at greater risk to experience behavioral and academic problems in school. They are prone to being disruptive in the classroom environment, have problems relating to their peers, fall behind academically, and eventually face problems that lead to academic failure and dropping out of school (Peth-Pierce, 2000).

Dockett and Perry (2009) described readiness within the context of Bronfenbrenner's (1993) ecological theory. This theory emphasizes the importance of the individual and the interactions that occur between people, objects, and symbols within the environment to learn what is expected of them and how they should interact with others. The characteristics of the individual also influence these interactions. This perspective contends that understanding children's readiness for school goes beyond assessing the child's skills but looking at how the child fits into the school setting and the interactions that occur between the child, families, schools, and community. Forty years of school readiness research has shown that high quality school readiness programs generate positive outcomes for children (Winter & Kelley, 2008).

Mistry et al. (2010) found preschool children's cognitive and social emotional abilities upon entry to school had serious implications for their future academic success.

Preschool. Quality preschool experiences support school readiness and prepare children for successful school careers. Attendance in high quality prekindergarten programs is associated with positive outcomes over the long term (Barnett, 2011). As pre-k programs continue to expand, more children will benefit from early educational opportunities. This is especially beneficial for children from disadvantaged backgrounds. Pre-k programs are among the fastest growing sectors of state-supported educational initiatives and are projected to continue to grow over the next decade (Bogard & Takanishi, 2005).

Programs to support school readiness for young children started to be developed in the mid-1960s with the War on Poverty and the passage of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. The Head Start program was developed as a result of these government initiatives and focused on providing a comprehensive program to children who were socially and economically disadvantaged. The High/Scope Perry Preschool Program, the Carolina Abecedarian Project, and the Chicago Child-Parent Centers were other early intervention programs that were designed to boost young children's learning and development, especially those at risk socially or economically. Karoly, Killburn, and Cannon (2005) found these kinds of programs working with children and families could yield benefits past the kindergarten year. They demonstrated that participants in these programs had fewer placements in special education classes, less grade retention, increased rates of high school graduation, more job placements, and a decrease in criminal behaviors.

Recent studies have found that typically, children made gains in pre-academic skills when enrolled in state Pre-k programs (Camilli et al. 2010; Howes et al.; 2008, Gromley,

Phillips, & Gayer, 2008). A meta-analysis by Camilli et al. (2010) found that on average children enrolled in preschool programs had substantial growth in cognitive development. Early experiences, knowledge, and skills acquired before children begin formal education have an effect on their later success in school.

Attendance in a high quality preschool plays an important role in developing the skills that are essential to school readiness and has been found to produce relatively large gains in learning and development for the children enrolled (Barnett, 2011). Bowman, Donovan, and Burns, (2001) noted both program features and curriculum and pedagogy can have an effect on children's learning and development. Program features may include how many children enrolled in a classroom, education level of teachers and the classroom environment. Features of the most effective preschool programs include better paid teachers, reasonably small class sizes, and low child-teacher ratios (Barnett, 2011).

Quality preschool programs include several components. Looking first at early childhood programming, Bowman , Donovan, and Burns (2001) observed that cognitive, social-emotional, and physical development are interrelated and are necessary domains to be included in early childhood pedagogy if young children are going to succeed in school. Duncan et al. (2007) found that the strongest predictors of later achievement in school were school entry math, reading, and attention skills. Socio-emotional behaviors including children demonstrating behavior problems were generally an insignificant predictor for later academic performance. These patterns were similar for children across socioeconomic backgrounds and gender differences.

A significant element of quality in preschool is the responsive interpersonal relationships teachers have with the children (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001; Pianta et al., 2005; Howes

et al., 2008; Burchinal et al., 2008). These researchers have found that social competence and school achievement are influenced by the positive interactions teachers have with their students. Another feature of effective preschool programs is staffs that are well trained and have degrees (Karoly, Kilburn, & Cannon, 2005). Bowman, Donovan, and Burns, (2001) believed teachers who are trained and are encouraged to reflect on their practice reflect quality in the classroom. These teachers are responsive to the children and the classroom activities; thus they are able to revise and plan appropriately. Another characteristic of programs exhibiting quality and learning gains is curriculum implementation that is focused on intentional teaching with specific learning goals. Research has found that children are better prepared for kindergarten when they are exposed to a variety of classroom structures and teaching strategies. This means providing a mix of whole group, small group, and individual interactions with teachers (Bowman, Donovan, & Burns, 2001).

Influence of Poverty and Environment. Children from lower socioeconomic status (SES) backgrounds have been found to have fewer opportunities to develop skills in language acquisition, social skills, and to develop their cognitive abilities (NICHD Early Child Care Research Network, 2002; Early et al., 2007). A study by Coley (2002) addressed kindergarteners' readiness for school and found that children from a low SES background may be educationally at risk when they begin school. SES was related to children's proficiency in reading and math with children with a higher SES more likely to be proficient in these subjects than children with lower SES. A recent report (The Poverty and Inequality Report, 2014) concluded that achievement gaps related to family income and parent education are large by the time children enter kindergarten and change very little beyond elementary school. Umek, L., Kranjc, S., Fekonja, U., and Bajc. K. (2008) showed that children's intellectual and language

abilities were predictive of school readiness and preschool enrollment had a positive effect principally for children whose parents had a low level of education. Ramey and Ramey's (2004) research supports this and shows that children from economically poor and undereducated families are at a higher risk for deficits in school readiness due to having less school-related knowledge and skills. Hart and Risley (2003) showed there is a strong relationship between the amount of parental language usage and children's language development. Children from a low socioeconomic background came to school hearing 32 million fewer words as opposed to children from families where parents were professionals. In a similar study, Farkas and Beron (2004) studied children from low socioeconomic backgrounds and found these children were far more likely to arrive at school with smaller vocabularies, being 12-14 months behind their peers from higher SES backgrounds.

Transition

The move from preschool into kindergarten is a momentous event for children and families and is a challenge as it sets the stage for children's future educational experiences (Pianta & Cox, 2002). The move into kindergarten results in a different environment than home or preschool. This start to school means adjusting to a change in social and emotional support received from early caregivers and teachers to the more rigorous academic expectations of school (Love, Logue, Trudeau, and Thayer, 1992). Kindergarten has explicit goals for literacy, numeracy, and socialization that are not generally the same as home or preschool (Miller & Almon, 2009). It is an introduction to instruction that is aimed at raising children's skill levels and preparing them for later schooling (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2000). Adjusting to school and coping with the changes brought about by transitioning to kindergarten is important as research

shows that a positive start in school is associated with future school success (Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000).

Shaped by the bioecological model of Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998), the Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transitions, as proposed by Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000) has influenced the modern concept of school transition. According to this model, transitions consist of the ongoing and changing interactions that occur between children, families, classrooms, schools, and communities. Transition is a process that is shared and experienced simultaneously by all participants involved. Children's readiness for school is influenced by the interactive nature of the relationships formed at home, school, with peers, and in the community. Positive transition practices ease the discontinuity of the preschool and the new kindergarten environment. Transition practices which build relationships between the family, preschool, and the elementary school are a means to smooth the move for the child. Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta. (2000) stress the importance of frequent contact, agreement about goals, and supporting the child as a way to grow positive connections that lead to the child's success in school. Transition is a process that involves these partners rather than an event that happens just to the child (Bohan- Baker & Little, 2002).

Transition Practices Related to Outcomes for Children. The use of effective transition practices can have a positive impact on children both socially and academically (Entwhistle & Alexander, 1998; Schulting et al., 2005). Preparing children for school is seen as a national priority (McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGennaro, & Wildenger, 2007). Transition practices have been studied around the world. There is a wide variety of transition practices used and consistent practices have not been implemented (Einarsdottir, Perry & Dockett, 2008). Seamless transitions

have been found to benefit children as they begin school with those from low-income backgrounds benefitting the most (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003; Schulting et al., 2005).

The number of children attending preschool programs has continued to increase over the last three decades. This has brought about an increased interest in easing the transition for children from preschool to kindergarten. As accountability increases in education, early childhood education programs have felt the impact. Children are facing academic deadlines in order to comply with the No Child Left Behind Act. High stakes testing has found its way into kindergarten (Schulting et al., 2005; Wilson, 2009).

Children come from a wide variety of backgrounds upon entry to kindergarten with socioeconomic status and cultural connections impacting their school experiences. Not all children are successful in making this move. A national survey of kindergarten teachers by Rimm-Kaufman et al. (2000) revealed that up to 48% of children had difficulty with starting kindergarten. They reported approximately a third of children had some problems and 16% were characterized as having a difficult time entering kindergarten. Teachers reported that about half of the class or more started school with specific problems. These included difficulty following directions, lack of academic skills, disorganized home environments, and difficulty working independently. The study found a greater mismatch between teachers' expectations and the competencies of children in areas of higher concentration of minorities and poverty status and rural living environments.

It is essential that children get off to a good start in kindergarten since positive social behavior and academic achievement are predictors of school success. Providing children transition experiences which help bridge the gap between preschool and kindergarten does have a modest effect on children's academic achievement in kindergarten (Schulting et al., 2005;

Ahtola et al., 2011). Kindergarten teachers observed that children who had attended preschool where the use of transition activities were carried out, were more socially competent and had fewer behavior problems when starting school (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008; Wildenger & McIntyre, 2012). Ahtola et al. (2011) concluded as transition practices increase in number, there is an easier transition for children. These findings are especially true for children from low income and minority backgrounds (Schulting et al., 2005; & LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008). Early et al., (2001) concluded that to maximize outcomes for children as they move into the more formal school setting, more widespread use of transition practice is needed. The research team recommended that transition practices should start before kindergarten and include individualized communication with families and children.

Family Roles and Expectations. Starting school is a developmental milestone for children and their families. There is a discontinuity with the new environment and a decrease in parent-teacher communication as a child moves from preschool to kindergarten (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta 2005). It is understood that best practices in transition include emphasis on involving family members in the transition and enhancing the communication between home, preschool, and kindergarten (Pianta, Cox, Taylor & Early, 1999; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003). Bohan-Baker and Little (2002) stated that schools need to take a proactive approach in involving families in the transition to school. They suggested three approaches for engaging families: schools need to reach out to families and preschools to establish relationships and develop two-way communication in order to facilitate effective transitions; links need to be established before school starts so relationships are created, then sustained in order to enhance continuity; and range of activities that have varying intensity need to be used. This should include low-intensity

practices such as sending home flyers and high intensity practices such as conferences or home visits.

Wildenger and McIntyre's (2011) research recognizes the important role parents play in the transition to kindergarten. They investigated family perspectives on the move to kindergarten and sought to identify parents' needs, concerns, and involvement during this process. A survey was conducted with 86 parents. A majority expressed few concerns over the transition. Like the study by Rimm-Kaufman et al. (2000), a small percentage of parents reported concerns that centered on child behavior problems and fears about separation. Parents did appear to have several needs related to transitions. More than half expressed a need for more information about the academic expectations for their children entering kindergarten and for more information about the current level of skills their children had attained. Many parents also wanted additional information about the kindergarten program and the teacher their child would have. These needs may be an indication families are not as connected to kindergarten as they were to their child's preschool program. Parents also expressed a need to be more involved with the preparation for transition. The most frequently cited transition activity cited in this survey was a generic form of contact such as group orientation or flyers sent home. Lower income parents and those from urban settings reported fewer transition practices overall and were less likely than those who had more resources to participate in the ones that were offered.

McIntyre et al. (2007) examined family experiences and involvement with transitions. Few studies have looked closely at this issue with most studies looking at the variables that may impact positive transitions and the outcomes for the children as the result of a successful transition. A survey of 132 families asked parents to describe their transition-related activities, to explain the concerns they had pertaining to their child's transition, and to identify variables

that impacted them during this move. Results suggest families would like additional information regarding school readiness, academic and behavioral expectations for children, as well as more involvement in planning for the transition to kindergarten. The top issues identified involved children getting used to attending a new school and children following directions. Worries also centered on academic and behavioral expectations in the new setting. Families with fewer economic resources reported less involvement with transition activities than families from higher incomes.

Routines are an important part of daily family life including schedules for meals, bedtime, and getting up in the morning. Wildenger, McIntyre, Fiese, and Eckert. (2008) looked at how daily family routines may be impacted as children transition to kindergarten. In a parent survey, the majority of families reported they anticipated that starting school would have an effect on the regular routines in their household including sleep patterns. The research found significant changes in child and family routines that may influence children having difficulty making the adjustment to kindergarten. Single-parent families reported more difficulties with going-to-bed and getting-up-in-the-morning routines while working families said meal-time routines were disrupted. This shift in routines is likely to cause additional stress on all family members as they become accustomed to the changes that are happening as children begin school.

In another study by McIntyre et al. (2010), 132 parents were surveyed about their concerns surrounding kindergarten transition, with about one-fifth of the population including parents with children who had disabilities. These parents received additional supports including Individual Education Plans and family-focused programs. These parents were nervous that their children would have difficulty with general kindergarten readiness along with problems in making their needs known and following directions in the classroom. Families with and without

disabilities expressed similar levels of concern regarding their children attending a new school, getting along with peers, separating from parents, and getting along with the kindergarten teacher.

In a study examining the engagement of parents as their children started school, Dockett and Perry (2009) learned it is important for positive connections to be made early in the school year with schools and teachers. Families need to feel respected with relationships built on trust. The establishment of rapport is essential. Families who are experiencing complex needs are the ones most likely not to be involved and the hardest to reach out to. Reaching these families takes time and it is not a straightforward process.

Building partnerships between preschools, kindergartens, and families is a complex task. Each stakeholder comes at it from a different perspective. In a study by Pianta et al. (2001), parents and preschool teachers share positive views about each other developing a sense of trust and partnership between the two groups. Mothers and preschool teachers appeared to establish strong ties and the preschool staff was seen as a source of support to the family. This study suggests relationships, mutual support, and a shared vision are key elements of making family-school collaboration around transition work.

Seeking to gain an understanding of how parents of children with emotional or challenging behaviors experienced transition practices, Malsch, Green, and Kothari (2011) used a qualitative study to investigate the role parents and teachers played in facilitating transition to kindergarten. The findings revealed the importance of the collaborative efforts of Head Start and other early childhood educators, families, and schools to support families whose children have social-emotional challenges. This study highlights the significance of developing positive relationships with kindergarten teachers and schools before children begin school to ease the

fears of both children and parents. Parents appreciated the role of Head Start in preparing them to be advocates for their children. Individualized transition supports like home visits and meetings between families and teachers built relationships and smoothed the move to a new educational placement for these children and families. A major barrier found to impede transitions was the practice of not making kindergarten placements until just before school opens in the fall. This limited the ability for individualized outreach to families and children. The families in this study were eager to receive information about transition practices but were tested by not only their children's issues but struggling with poverty and lack of resources. These families represented a group that was at high risk for having problems with the transition to kindergarten. The researchers concluded that these families could benefit from individualized supports that provide information through face to face meetings, letters, and orientation sessions that would provide the encouragement and support these parents need.

The research indicates families are a critical partner in providing continuity as children move from preschool into kindergarten. The level of involvement is related to relationships built between teachers, parents, and schools. Families coming from challenging circumstances may need additional supports to enhance their child's smooth transition between educational settings.

Community and Collaboration. Collaboration between schools and communities is another important element of the transition to kindergarten process. As children make the move to kindergarten, it is believed that communities play a role in facilitating positive transitions. Communities benefit when families and children feel connected to schools and education (Dockett & Perry, 2013). Several Australian programs were studied where educators from schools and preschools worked with local communities to build relationships based on trust and respect (Dockett & Perry, 2013). One program developed a community network that met

regularly and provided a forum to discuss issues related to transition to school. Regular events and celebrations were held before the start of school in the community to share information and resources. A Billy the Backpack mascot was created to emphasize the importance of transition and could be borrowed by community agencies to promote upcoming transition events. The other program was started in a culturally and linguistically diverse community. Six schools were involved with the aim to encourage families to share their transition experiences with the broader community. A brochure was designed that included information about what families could do to help their children be comfortable about starting school. It was then translated into the languages that were spoken in the community and distributed. Both of these efforts had a broad understanding of school readiness rather than focusing on what children needed to know in order to start school. They provided support to families and the building of relationships was central to the success of the programs. These endeavors each built the capacity of the community, helping it to gain a sense of ownership and control over an event that had influence on their children.

Patton and Wang (2012) studied six state pre-k programs (New Jersey, Georgia, Maryland, Minnesota, Virginia, and California) concerning their use of collaborative transition practices at the local and state level. An integrated approach to transition practices was used with each state using at least two of the following supports. One strategy was to align state assessments, standards, and curriculum across early educational programs and coordinate learning experiences with later academic instruction so there was continuity in children's learning. The second practice was supporting collaborative transitions by offering joint professional development activities to both kindergarten and pre-k teachers. Similarly, the Office of Head Start (2011) has concluded that joint professional development opportunities increase teachers' knowledge of transition practices. Those who have received this type of

training reported using more transition activities than those who have not had the training. Another tactic used by the states in this analysis was to examine transition practices for special populations. To ensure support was provided to special populations, several states provided funding for summer programs and high quality universal pre-k programs to help at-risk preschoolers. To involve the community, states used ads and websites to communicate and disseminate information to families and the public about how to access pre-k programs and to encourage families to learn about children's health, nutritional, social, and developmental needs. In addition, to support effective transitions, the states in this case study developed policies for making collaborative efforts to create articulation and transition teams at the community level. These teams involved a diverse population of participants including families, preschool teachers, kindergarten teachers, and community members such as health care workers and librarians. These groups met locally and chose which activities they felt were meaningful for their community. In addition they planned and evaluated transition policies to ensure that children had a successful transition to kindergarten.

Teacher and School Transition Practices. School-based transition practices vary in both number and intensity (Schulting et al., 2005; Rous, Hallam, McCormick, & Cox, 2008; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008; Ahtola et al., 2011; Patton & Wang, 2012). McIntyre (2014) noted that most schools engage in at least one kindergarten transition activity a year. According to Rous, McCormick, Hellam, and Cox (2010), public school preschool teachers have been found to use proportionately more practices than kindergarten teachers. The most common practices by the preschool teachers happened before the transition to kindergarten occurred. For kindergarten teachers most of the transition practices occurred after the transition took place at the beginning of the school year. The preschool transition practices were more likely to be low-

intensity activities that involved the whole group. These low-intensity practices served the basic function of communicating general information and were the most likely to be utilized.

Based on a national survey, Schulting et al. (2005) described seven specific transition practices that kindergarten teachers implemented to ease children's transition into kindergarten: information about the kindergarten program was sent home to parents; preschoolers had an opportunity to visit a kindergarten class; at the beginning of the school year, school days were shortened; children and their parents visited the kindergarten classroom before school started; teachers made home visits to incoming students; parents attended an orientation session prior to the start of the school year; and other various activities were provided. Rous et al. (2008) identified 25 transition practices from a national survey of 2,434 preschool teachers. The practices were categorized from high-intensity to low-intensity. High-intensity practices involved individual interactions with children and families as well as coordination with other programs and the community. The low-intensity activities involved whole-group activities with parents and children.

Rous et al. (2010) looked at the results of a survey with public preschool teachers that focused on the types of transition practices they implemented and which ones they felt were important. The practices they used included visiting kindergarten classrooms, sending information out to parents, and holding joint meetings with kindergarten teachers to discuss curriculum. Fewer than half the teachers surveyed said they had received guidance on ways to enhance transition services. Those teachers who did receive training reported they used a higher number of transition practices. Workshops were the principle way they received information concerning transitions followed by magazines and journals.

Gill et al. (2006), in a study of a single school district, examined the educators' views of existing kindergarten school readiness and transition practices. A semi-structured survey was used to obtain educators' perspectives on factors influencing these issues. The survey found the primary focus in both kindergarten and pre-kindergarten was on academic skills regarding child readiness. Teachers from both pre-k and kindergarten programs reported that the development of social and interpersonal skills were addressed in the curriculum. The pre-kindergarten programs focused more on helping to facilitate children's separation from parents while kindergarten programs concentrated on academic skills. The kindergarten programs were more involved in information-sharing activities associated with school transition compared to the preschool programs. The educators recognized the role of the family as important in the transition process. Additionally they observed communication between families and school was found to be a challenge and coordinated efforts between schools and families needed to be established.

A study by Pianta et al. (2001) worked with 110 families in a transition intervention project designed to improve the process of school transitions. This collaborative effort was explored through the use of questionnaires and interviews with parents and teachers enrolled in the project. The data revealed preschool teachers and kindergarten teachers differed in their use of transition activities. Preschool teachers were more actively involved by bringing their classes to visit kindergarten rooms. Kindergarten teachers had more difficulty implementing activities that involved collaboration with preschool. There appeared to be differences in the way kindergarten and preschool teachers approached the transition process.

LoCasale-Crouch et al., (2008) conducted a study of programs participating in the National Center for Early Development and Learning (NCEDL). The study examined pre-kindergarten teachers' use of kindergarten transition practices and the extent to which they were

associated with kindergarten teachers' positive perceptions of children's adjustment to school. The teachers' judgments of children's social, self-regulatory, and academic skills at the beginning of kindergarten were found to be stronger with greater numbers of transition practices. Children who were economically and socially at risk seemed to benefit the most. Pre-kindergarten teachers reported that a wide range of transition activities were used to support the move to kindergarten. Nine transition practices were included in the survey: pre-kindergarten children visiting a kindergarten class; pre-kindergarten teacher visiting a kindergarten class; kindergarten teachers visiting a pre-kindergarten class; spring kindergarten orientation for pre-kindergarten children; spring kindergarten orientation for pre-kindergarten children's families; school-wide activity for pre-kindergarten children; individual meetings with parents about kindergarten; sharing of written records about children with the elementary school; and contact with the kindergarten teacher about curriculum and/or about specific children.

Kindergarten teachers noted that children exhibited more social compliance and fewer negative behaviors when children attended preschool classrooms where more transition activities were implemented (LoCasale-Crouch, et al., 2008). Contact between the kindergarten teacher and the pre-kindergarten teacher about curriculum or specific children was the top indicator of being consistently and positively related to kindergarten teachers' perception of children's skills. Personalized transition practices were reported to be used frequently. The majority of prekindergarten teachers brought their students to visit a kindergarten room. Another frequent practice found was holding individual conferences with parents to discuss the upcoming move to kindergarten. Visits from kindergarten teachers to pre-kindergarten was the least reported transition practice. The practice of elementary schools reaching back to preschool programs was observed to be underutilized.

Lee and Goh (2012) conducted action research with the children in their kindergarten class in Singapore. They recognized the stress children came under as they made the move from kindergarten into the primary school. Through intentional planning of play activities, the teachers helped the children become familiar with some of the aspects of primary school. As a result, children engaged in learning activities that supported growth of confidence which contributed to positive attitudes about moving to the new school. Another program called *Zippy's Friends* was used in classrooms helping children cope with everyday problems that they would have as they moved to elementary school. This 24-week program was used successfully throughout Europe and South America. Monkeviciene et al., (2006) found that using this program helped children make a better adjustment to school. The experimental group had better behavioral and emotional adaptations to school and had a more positive reaction to the new school environment. This group used more adaptation and diversified coping methods than the children in the control group. It appears planning with children for the transition to a new school may help them adapt easier to the new situation.

The Stars program was a school-based program formed to focus on social competence, pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills, and school routines. It was developed in response to a community's awareness that the children in low-income, minority, and urban areas needed additional supports as they made the transition to kindergarten. It provided a four-week, half-day program to children the summer prior to kindergarten. The classes were led by kindergarten teachers. Family school specialists were available to work with families. Berlin, Dunning, and Dodge (2011) found the Stars program eased children's social transition as assessed by kindergarten teachers. The positive effects were stronger for the children placed in the same classroom with the teacher they had during the summer program. Another summer transition

program was reported on by Maxwell et al. (2013). The Pre-k Summer Transition Program in the state of Georgia concluded the pre-literacy and school readiness skills improved as a result of participation in the program. The enrollment in this program was limited to children from low income households but children who had not participated in the state Pre-k program were eligible to attend.

A trend in our nation's schools is addressing the learning needs of young children by creating programs that are comprehensive, span multiple years, and target key transition points. A study by Reynolds, Magnuson, & Ou (2010) reviewed the benefits of the Pre-school to Third Grade (PK-3) perspective. PK-3 programs have consistently demonstrated lasting and sizable links to school achievement and lower rates of remedial education. Higher levels of school adjustment have been shown in children participating in PK-3 programs. This approach involves planned interventions that begin during the preschool year and continue up to third grade. They may include childcare center-based education, instructional supports for teachers, family services, and community outreach. There are four principles associated with PK-3 programs and practices: continuity, organization, instruction, and family involvement. Continuity involves school stability, peer group consistency, and smooth transitions. Organization refers to full-day kindergarten, reduced class sizes, and low child-to-staff ratios along with instructional support for teachers. Curriculum alignment, joint professional development opportunities, and increased collaboration among staff are central to an emphasis on instruction. Finally, programs and practices encourage family involvement.

The National Association of Elementary School Principals (2010) has endorsed strengthening the development of PK-3 programs. Members are aware of the positive outcomes of designing systems that connect early childhood development, school readiness, and success in

early school years. This group envisions a thoughtfully planned, standards-based, and well-resourced system where all families have opportunities to access high-quality learning and care which will enhance early school success for all children.

A Finnish study conducted by Ahtola et al. (2011) examined whether transition practices were a contributing factor for children's academic performance. They identified preschool and elementary pairs in schools surveying the teachers and assessing the children during the spring of preschool and the spring of kindergarten. Cooperation related to curricular issues between preschool and elementary school and passing on written information about students emerged as the most effective predictors of positive outcomes for children even though they were the least utilized by teachers. Ahtola et al. (2011) surmised that cooperation on curricular issues reflected continuity between preschool and school, providing uninterrupted teaching and learning experiences for young children. The researchers described the transition activities more as an orientation to school rather than intentional transition programs.

A review of research by Skouteris, Watson, and Lum (2012) found meaningful collaboration between preschool and kindergarten teachers was important in building children's competencies as they moved from preschool into kindergarten. They concluded that kindergarten teachers need to recognize the impact preschool programs have on learning and therefore better facilitate children's learning in the new placement. Further they determined that mutual respect between preschool and kindergarten teachers is needed to develop partnerships that are beneficial for children.

In summary, transition practices are not a one-size-fits all concept as Kraft-Sayre and Pianta (2000) suggest. Rather, a wide variety of strategies are used ranging from low-intensity efforts to state-wide initiatives and high-intensity activities. Overall, prior research suggests that

transition practices help children make a smoother transition to school than they would make without transition efforts.

Literature Synthesis

An analysis of the research indicates school readiness and transition are important issues concerning the education of young children. The literature closely links the concepts of school readiness and transition (Meisels, 1998; Pianta et al., 1999). School readiness is considered to be a major factor for promoting children's future educational success. Three aspects of school readiness are relevant in this study: the components of school readiness, the effect of preschool, and the influence of poverty and environment. There are different views on what factors constitute readiness but there is agreement that the perception of readiness involves some type of assessment of the child against a measure of expectations of being ready for school (Dockett & Perry, 2009). Another factor contributing to the development of readiness is attendance in a high-quality preschool program. Studies have shown quality preschool experiences support school readiness and prepare children to be successful in school (Barnett, 2011; Gromley et al. 2008; Camilli et al., 2010). The experiences children have before entering school have an impact as well (Bowman et al., 2001). Several studies (Coley, 2002; Ramey & Ramey, 2004; Early et al., 2007; The Poverty and Inequality Report, 2014) have documented that children from a lower socioeconomic status are less likely to be fully prepared for school due to gaps in language proficiency, social skills, and having the opportunities to develop their cognitive abilities.

The transition to school has become a significant factor in school readiness. Successful transitions from preschool into kindergarten can have a positive impact on children socially and academically (Entwhistle & Alexander, 1998; Schulting et al., 2005). The research indicates that many children have problems with the move into kindergarten (Rimm-Kaufman, et al. 2000).

Kindergarten teachers found children who had transition experiences did better socially, academically, and were more motivated for learning (LoCasale-Crouch, et al., 2008).

Additionally children who come from more disadvantaged backgrounds often have difficulties with the transition to school and often receive the least support. For these children, as transition activities increase in number, the move to kindergarten goes smoother (Schulting et al., 2005).

McIntyre et al. (2007) found that families may have concerns about academic and behavioral expectations for their children as they begin kindergarten. It has been found to be a complex task building partnerships between preschools, kindergartens, and families. Building relationships that provide mutual support and shared vision between home and school are key elements in making positive transitions work (Pianta et al, 2001).

Collaboration between schools and the community is another important aspect of transition. Local and state initiatives have implemented collaborative transition practices (Dockett & Perry, 2013; Patton & Wang, 2012) that have been designed to help children be prepared for entry into school.

School-based transition practices have been the focus of numerous studies. The practices vary both in number and intensity (Schulting et al., 2005; Rous et al. 2008; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008; Ahtola et al., 2011). Sharing information between preschools and kindergarten and cooperation on curriculum issues was found to be particularly significant (Ahtola, et al. 2011). An association of improved skills was especially true for those children at economic and social risk (Schulting et al., 2005).

The literature on school readiness and transition demonstrates that transition practices can have a long-term impact on children's future success in school. Many studies examine what the best practices are in regards to transition and how to help children make a smooth adjustment to

school. The literature reviewed here shows that collaboration and cooperation among parents, community, and schools build positive relationships that improve the outcomes for children. However the practices described are not consistently utilized. This study seeks to understand why. Specifically, the proposed study examined practices used to achieve positive transitions and what barriers or supports influence their implementation.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODS

Starting school is a critical time in young children's lives. Making a positive adjustment to kindergarten can have long term effects on future academic and social outcomes in a child's school career (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003). Ackerman and Barnett (2005) have found children who have attended preschool are better prepared to meet the demands of formal schooling. This qualitative study sought to understand preschool and kindergarten teachers' perceptions on transition practices. The research questions in this study addressed how preschool and kindergarten teachers perceived the practices that support children in the transition from preschool into kindergarten. What did they perceive to be the barriers and/or inducements relating to the implementation of transition practices in relation to the child, family, school, and community? Information from this study may benefit school administrators and teachers to form a better understanding of transition practices. Insights on positive transition experiences for children and families may help direct decisions on the development of transition practices and policies in the future.

Design

A comparative qualitative case study with a phenomenological approach was used to examine the perceptions of preschool and kindergarten teachers' on transition practices. Of particular interest were their perceptions of barriers or supports that influenced their implementation of transition activities. Bogdan and Biklen (2007) found "researchers in the phenomenological mode attempt to understand the meaning of events and interactions to ordinary people in particular situations" (25). This phenomenological approach can be accomplished through in-depth interviews with people who have directly experienced the

phenomenon (Patton, 2002). The phenomenon of interest in this proposed study is participants' perceptions of transition practices.

According to Yin (2014), "case study research arises out of desire to understand complex social phenomena and allows investigators to focus on a 'case' and retain a holistic and real world perspective" (289). Data was collected from two groups of teachers. Each group or case was seen as unique. The distinctiveness of each case is established by the collection of features and the sequence of events by those experiencing it (Stake, 2010). Doing this comparison involved looking at the presence or absence of a particular characteristic (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007), in this case the perceptions of teachers regarding their participation in transition interventions.

One group, or case, had an intervention around transition practices and one group did not. Descriptive data was generated from both groups of teachers. A comparison was done to see if those in the two groups experienced and perceived transition practices in different ways. This comparison assisted in understanding functional relationships and comparing things is one of the most common ways to arrive at generalizations (Stake, 2010). A comparative case study looks at two cases, then during analysis draws a set of "cross-case" conclusions (Yin, 2014).

Gaining access to the teachers was done by contacting principals and administrators from the county school board offices. I followed this up by contacting the teachers and inviting them to participate in the study. Using a cooperative style, I made my interests known and sought cooperation from those involved in the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007).

Setting

The settings for this study were in six elementary schools. Three of the schools were located in Clifton County, West Virginia where teachers participated in a transition intervention

project. Three elementary schools in Merritt County, West Virginia, where teachers did not have the intervention, participated. The schools in the study were identified as having a minimum of 35% of students coming from low income or rural populations. The West Virginia Department of Education school enrollment data figures provided information on the demographics of each school including the percentage of students who receive Free/Reduced lunch. The schools that were asked to take part in this study were those that operate in rural and low-income areas as the research shows students coming from these types of demographics have the most difficulty with transitions (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2000; Schulting et al., 2005; LoCasale-Crouch, et al., 2008). The proposed schools in Clifton were Garfield, Mountview, and Sage Brook. These schools participated in a year-long professional development study where they were introduced to strategies to enhance transition practices. Sage Brook is located in a section of Clifton County that is a mixture of rural and suburban families. Garfield and Mountview have at least 35% of students receiving free/reduced lunch. In Merritt County, three schools with rural and low income populations were asked to participate in the study. The proposed schools in this county are Bateman, Abbott, and Powell Park, none of which participated in the transition intervention.

Sampling/Participants

Participants in this study were derived from two different school districts, Clifton* and Merritt Counties in West Virginia. Preschool and kindergarten teachers were the focus of the study. The teachers in Clifton County attended a year-long professional development intervention project on transitions during the school 2012-2013 year. The focus of this project was on strategies to enhance transition between kindergarten and pre-k. The elementary schools that were involved in the project presented teachers with information on developmentally appropriate practices when teaching young children and examined the differences between pre-k

and kindergarten programs. They developed a curriculum project jointly around a book study that was appropriate to both grade levels. The project culminated in a week-long summer camp experience at each school for incoming kindergarteners and/or preschoolers who attended the session at their home school. A total of 12 teachers were interviewed—three pre-k teachers in each county and three kindergarten teachers in each county.

Purposeful sampling was used as a way to locate information-rich participants strategically and purposefully (Patton, 2002). Participants were selected using an operational construct sampling strategy. Patton (2002) describes this as finding indicators of real-world examples of the concept of interest in order to explain and examine the construct and its variations. The concept of transitions is the construct that was explored in this study. Three preschool teachers and three kindergarten teachers from each county were asked to participate. If there was more than one grade-level teacher in a school I asked the teacher with the most experience with transitions to participate in the study.

Data Collection

The primary data collection methods were semi-structured, individual interviews with pre-k and kindergarten teachers, participation observations, and written documents. Extant data from the transition intervention project was also to be utilized. Interviews as a method of data collection is an effective way to solicit and document the interviewee's perceptions, feelings, opinions, and attitudes (Saldaña, 2011). During semi-structured interviews, issues may emerge during the interview that may involve adding or replacing the pre-established questions the interviewer starts out with (Glesne, 2011). Interviewees were assured early in the interview that their responses are confidential and to be used only for research. The interviews were arranged at the convenience of the participants so as not to interfere with their daily responsibilities.

Interviews were conducted face-to-face at the schools or at a location convenient to the interviewee. One interview with each teacher was done starting in March 2015. Interviews were completed by the end of June 2015. Additional interviews were scheduled as questions arose as a result of interviews with other participants. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Interviews included questions aimed at understanding how teachers perceived the process of transition and how it related to children's readiness for school. Pre-k teachers were asked about their experiences preparing children for kindergarten and about transition practices. Kindergarten teachers were asked about how ready their students were for kindergarten and about transition practices. The teachers in Clifton County who participated in the transition intervention were asked to reflect on their experience with the project and to what extent and in what ways their practice changed as a result.

Preschool teachers were asked about school readiness and their concept of it. They were asked to explain teaching strategies used to prepare children for kindergarten. Questions were asked about the characteristics, knowledge, or skills they felt children needed to have in order to be ready to move on to kindergarten. They were asked questions about their concerns regarding children as they move into kindergarten. Questions were posed about parents and what role they have, if any, in the preparation of children moving on to kindergarten. I asked questions about planning for the transition into kindergarten and any preparations they did with the children and/or their families. Pre-k teachers were asked to describe any activities or events they engaged in to facilitate transitions. Additionally they were asked if there were school-wide activities that facilitated preschool age children's move to kindergarten.

Likewise, kindergarten teachers were asked about their concept of school readiness; what were their perceptions regarding children being ready for kindergarten. They were asked about concerns they had about children being prepared for kindergarten. Kindergarten teachers were also asked about parents and what role they have, if any, in the preparation of children moving on to kindergarten. Questions were asked about their participation in transition practices. They were asked to describe any activities or events they engaged in to facilitate transitions. Did the teachers have experiences with children and families before they started school? The kindergarten teachers were asked about any school-wide activities that facilitated transitions in their school and if so, the nature of their involvement.

As transition activities occurred in the designated schools during the time I was conducting my research, participant observations were completed. During participant observations I gained a deeper understanding of how transition activities take place. Field notes were written that contained descriptive information about transition practices observed. Finally, I made use of written documents and extant data from the teachers and from the transition intervention project. These materials were related to transitions and relevant to the research questions. Those documents included transition materials that teachers or schools distributed to families and the community. Training agendas, other documents teacher received during the transition intervention, and field notes written by me during the transition intervention sessions were a part of the data set for this study.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is the process of systematically searching and arranging the material gathered during the study (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). This involves organizing the data collected, breaking it down into measurable units, coding, synthesizing, and finally looking for patterns.

Finding patterns to bring order to the data and constructing categories allowed me to grasp the features of the categories and identify possible interrelationships (Saldaña, 2011). A coding system to organize the data was developed. Regularities and patterns in the data were identified. Coding categories were developed based on words and phrases representing topics and patterns that appeared in the data (Saldaña, 2011). A priori organizational categories consisting of school readiness, transition, family, schools, and community were used initially to sort the data before I used open coding. The code words resulting from the open coding were descriptive in nature and, as Maxwell (2005) states, “include description of the participants’ concepts and beliefs” (97). “Emic” categories were developed based on the participants’ own words and concepts (Maxwell, 2005). Theoretical categories which were more general were developed based on the researchers’ concepts about the data (Maxwell, 2005).

First, each of the cases was analyzed alone, then a cross-case analysis was done. Comparing the two school districts provided insight into the effectiveness of the intervention project. Findings were interpreted in relation to existing theories and literature to determine the importance of what was found.

Methodological Strengths and Delimitations

A strength of the proposed research is the use of qualitative methods. These methods of research, as Patton (2002) states, “permit inquiry into selected issues in great depth with careful attention to detail, context, and nuance” (227). Qualitative methods allowed me to get a holistic, deep understanding of the perceptions teachers have of transition practices. These teachers have direct lived experience with transitions. Through in-depth interviews I gained an understanding of transition practices from individuals who had a close involvement with it on a regular basis.

The teachers were invited to share their views on the challenges, barriers, and advantages of transition practices from pre-k to kindergarten.

Using observations of transition events along with interviews built on the strength of the study. It reduced the risk of chance associations and systemic bias if interviews were the only method used. Various sources of data allowed me to build on the strength of each type of data collected. I compared and cross-checked the information drawn from my data, checking on the consistency obtained by different means. This meant I compared interviews with observations, compared the perspectives of teachers from preschool and kindergarten, and checked interviews against program documents (Patton, 2002).

A limitation to the study was the potential for researcher bias. I had extensive knowledge about transitions, having worked in the field of early childhood for over thirty years and in programs that were connected with supporting transition practices for children and families. I have a professional relationship with the pre-k teachers involved in the study due to my previous employment with an agency that collaborates with pre-k programs. Any personal or professional information that may have affected data collection was reported (Patton, 2002).

Validity

Qualitative researchers should be concerned about how their values and expectations may influence a study (Maxwell, 2005). A limitation of the proposed study is that there was potential for researcher bias that could be a threat to validity. As reported above, I had worked in the pre-k system and had a professional relationship with most of the preschool teachers in the geographic area being examined. I attended the transition intervention sessions the pre-k and kindergarten teachers attended in Clifton County as an employee of a collaborative agency and a participant observer. My dual role was explained to the participants at the first session of the

intervention. I remained neutral to prevent the teachers from speaking or acting in reaction to me, to avoid a threat Maxwell (2005) calls reactivity. I emphasized during these interviews that I wanted teachers' honest views about transition practices and activities they were involved in. My knowledge about the area of transition could potentially influence this study. I did, as Maxwell (2005) suggests, avoided leading questions and understood how bias could influence me, the participants, and the conclusions drawn from the data collected in this study.

Strategies used in this study to safeguard validity are recommended by Maxwell (2005). They involved completing in-depth intensive interviews which allowed me to collect rich data that was detailed and varied so a clear picture of teachers' perceptions emerged. Respondent validation occurred by getting participant feedback. I solicited feedback from the participants in the study to ensure I understood their perspectives and experiences correctly. This prevented me from misinterpreting the meaning of what the participants said, and as well, assisted me in identifying my own biases and misunderstandings (Maxwell, 2005).

Conclusion

The development of this proposal and completion of this study represents the final project in my doctoral program in Curriculum and Instruction. I started working on this proposal in the spring of 2011 in EDF 626. For my capstone project in EDF 679, I completed an annotated bibliography on transitions and school readiness. I participated in a pilot study of the transition intervention project in Clifton County taking field notes and doing participant observations during the yearlong project. The use of qualitative research methods allowed me to get a better understanding of the experiences of teachers and their views about transitions. As a graduate level researcher I have the confidence to use this qualitative research project as the proposal for the completion of the terminal degree. As an early childhood educator, I look forward to

answering my research questions on transition practices. The results of this study can add to knowledge about transitions and provide insight to decision makers, administrators, and school personnel to enable them to implement positive transition experiences for children and families.

CHAPTER FOUR: PARTICIPANTS AND THE SETTING

In order to understand my participants and their experiences relating to the transition of children from preschool into kindergarten, this chapter provides an overview of the districts and sites involved in the research and the teachers who participated. It begins with descriptions of the two counties, the schools, and the preschool and kindergarten teachers involved. It concludes with a summary of the transition intervention in which one county was involved.

Clifton County

Clifton County is located on the banks on a large river in West Virginia and is the third most populous county in the state (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). The county is a mixture of rural and city landscape. According to the U.S. census information for 2010, Clifton County had 342 people living per square mile. In 2013, 35.6% of the population under the age of 18 was living below the poverty level (U.S. Census Bureau, 2013). This is in comparison to the national level of 17.8%. The overall poverty rate of the county is 22.2% (U.S. Census 2010). It does not have a racially diverse population, with 91.4% of the population being white and 6.3% being black. According to the annual KidsCount (2012) the number of children receiving free or reduced lunch in 2012 was 63.5%.

The percent of four year olds enrolled in the WV Department of Education (WVDE) pre-k program in Clifton County is 75% and they rank second in the state with the number of four year olds attending the WV Department of Education pre-k program (WVDE, 2013). One hundred percent of the pre-k programs in Clifton County are in collaboration with the state. There are 25 licensed day care centers in the county and 14 of those sponsor a WV Department of Education pre-k program (KidsCount, 2012).

Merritt County

Merritt County is located along a major river, north of Clifton County. It is a rural area that has less than a third of the population of Clifton County. It has 63 people living per square mile and is almost two thirds larger in size than Clifton County (U.S. Census, 2010). In 2010, the total population living in poverty was 19% (U. S. Census 2010). The percent of children living in poverty as of 2012 was 28.6%, with 66% of children approved for free and reduced price meals (KidsCount, 2012). The minority population for the county is 2.2% (KidsCount, 2012). The percent of children in Merritt County who are enrolled in the WV Department of Education pre-k program is 87% (WVDE, 2013). According to the WVDE, 84% of the programs in Merritt County are in collaboration with the state pre-k program.

School and Teacher Characteristics

Schools. Six schools were included in this study. Three are from Clifton County and three from Merritt County. The three schools in Clifton County participated in a year-long project that provided professional development on transitions to teachers, staff, and parents. The schools in Clifton County are from both rural and suburban environments. One school, Sage Brook, serves a mixture of rural and suburban families. Mountview is in an urban district as is Garfield. The three schools in Merritt County—Bateman, Abbott, and Powell Park—are all located in rural areas. Powell Park is located in the largest population center in the county.

The schools in Clifton County are neighborhood schools. The largest, Garfield, serves about 280 students. It is a newer building that was built in the 1990s and serves a large low-income population; 79% of the school population is designated low socioeconomic status (SES) according to the WV Department of Education (2013). Sage Brook and Mountview are older schools and each serve around 260 students. Most of the children attending these schools come

from a mid-level income bracket; the school's SES population is 35%. The student population at Mountview is more diverse racially than at the other five schools studied with 72.2% white and 10.8% black; the other five schools are over 90% white.

Teachers from Clinton County in the study believe that family characteristics have an influence on students. A pre-k teacher from Sage Brook commented:

Some children come with a horrific schedule of being transported back and forth between a mom and a dad. Might be their grandparents, or now their guardian, you know that they live with their grandparents. Or they have a child that grew up in a child care facility.

The kindergarten teacher expressed similar concerns: "I see a lot more grandparents raising children and I have a lot more kids that come from drug related home issues and I have a lot more kids that come from neglectful or abusive backgrounds." At Mountview, the kindergarten teacher commented: "I know some may come from poorer homes. They don't even have the background because their family doesn't speak to them or share with them. They're more just there; they're not really worked with."

Merritt County schools are larger schools that serve children from more rural settings. Abbot and Bateman are located in rural districts with Point Powell being in the biggest town in the county. It has the largest population of the three schools at 472 students. Abbot and Batemen each serve over 300 students. These schools are newer compared to Powell Park. The population of these schools is not very diverse with an average of 96% being white. The three schools being studied all have a significant low-income population. According to the West Virginia Department of Education (2013), the low SES population at Batemen is 72.5%. Powell Park follows with 58.3% and Abbot at 46.4%. In comparison, the schools in Merritt County are

more rural, less diverse, and have a higher low income population than the schools studied in Clifton County.

Like the teachers in Clifton, the Merritt County teachers have concerns about the students in their classrooms. The pre-k teacher at Bateman stated that the children in her class may live in situations where they are very isolated. She shared that she has had one family where the mother didn't have transportation: "Their nearest neighbor may be two miles [away], you know, maybe three miles, maybe more. The dad's on a boat and he parks the car, so she has to get groceries for 30 days." The kindergarten teacher at Abbot sees that her families have challenges: "I think there's a lot of poverty in this area. I think we have a lot of people, several probably, who don't work; it's kind of a generational thing." She observed, "I'm thinking recent years with the drugs and everything; it's in this area too, a lot. We're seeing that now, we're seeing the results of that." The kindergarten teacher from Point Powell also sees her families struggling: "I just think that our county doesn't have a lot of jobs and a lot of our people live on pay from Wendy's or pay from McDonald's and things like that." She observes other issues negatively affecting families as well, "Drug babies. Which, you know, that's never been a problem before. But I probably have five in here that are drug babies." She points out another concern about parents being in jail and grandparents raising the children, "They're being raised by the other mom, or the dad, or grandparents, like, 12 of these guys are being raised by grandparents."

Teachers. The teachers in this study are experienced and have a passion for teaching young children. All of the teachers had taught for at least seven years. The pre-k teachers averaged 14 years of teaching experience, ranging from 7 to 25 years in the classroom. The kindergarten teachers had an average of 24 years of experience, ranging from 9 to 40 years in the classroom.

The pre-k teachers had spent the majority of their educational careers teaching pre-k. Some had administrative experience in early childhood programs and two had done subbing before becoming pre-k teachers. Since taking a position in pre-k they have stayed with that age level. When asked what she likes about teaching pre-k, one teacher said: “I enjoy being with the young kids; I like the young ones better. They give you hugs and its fun. It’s not about sitting down with pencils and paper; you get to do fun things with them.” Another teacher said, “They’re just fun. I get to be kind of a kid myself and play with them and show them new things they haven’t discovered yet. Yet another commented, “I’ve always been drawn to younger kids...and Clifton County was putting pre-k classrooms in their public schools and they needed a lot of teachers at the time and it just so happened that I graduated with that degree at the right time.”

The kindergarten teachers were enthusiastic about teaching in their grade level as well. When asked why she liked teaching in kindergarten one teacher said “They are honest for one thing, but they love you pretty much no matter what...I like their excitement, their wanting to learn.” Another teacher remarked that “The progress they make is so drastic that it is so rewarding at the end of the year to think about where they’ve come from, and I don’t think you have that much progress in any other grade.” Yet another teacher observed, “They are just like little sponges.” The kindergarten teachers agreed that learning to read was an exciting experience that happened during the kindergarten year. The children’s enthusiasm for learning is often strong in kindergarten and the teachers found this gratifying to observe.

Transforming Transitions

Summer Institute. In May 2012, four elementary schools and one pre-k program came together in Clifton County for training and to be provided with an overview of a year-long grant

that they would participate in titled Transforming Transitions. The schools participating in the project were: Mountview, Garfield, Sage Brook, Newton, and the STEM Center at Marshall University. I attended this meeting to observe the Summer Institute of the Transition Project but also wear the hat of a Head Start collaborative partner with Clifton County. The partners in the grant included the local school system, a local university, the West Virginia Department of Education (WVDE), and the Claude Worthington Benedum Foundation. This grant was designed to create a support system for the county to enhance the transition experience for families and children as they move from pre-k into kindergarten. The components of the grant included The County Collaborative Team (CPT) and the Transitions Cadre which was made up of members of the Higher Education Community, West Virginia Department of Education, teachers, principals, family members, and school support staff. The group leader noted that “it takes many hands to make this happen.”

The project began with a two-day summer institute, followed by monthly after-school sessions throughout the 2012-2013 school year. During the summer of 2013, the project was to provide a five-day summer institute and a five-day school-based transition camp, with a follow-up symposium in the fall of 2013. Only the transition camps occurred. For participating in the project, participants received a \$150.00 per day stipend for a full day of attendance or \$75.00 for each half day.

During the summer institute, the project team gathered data from the participants and collected feedback from all stakeholders on their perceptions concerning transition practices. The session also framed the training for the coming year and allowed participants in the project time to collaborate. In the course of the two-day institute, participants were provided a summary of the vision the state had for the future of pre-k and kindergarten, a description of the

components of transitions, and an opportunity to share their knowledge and expertise in their specific areas of experience with other members of the group, and to convey their thoughts and ideas about transitions. The institute allowed the participants time to investigate varied aspects of the transition process and develop insights on transition practices. This initial training was to set the tone for the rest of the project.

The first day the participants heard from the WVDE Director of the Office of Early Learning. He discussed the vision the state has for a seamless system for children from the ages of pre-k through grade 3. The presentation included a description of WVDE's concept of school readiness—Ready, Set, Go! which is a resource outlining school readiness practices developed by the WVDE. This resource can be found on the WVDE website (<http://wvde.state.wv.us/ready-set-go/>). Another resource provided to the participants was a copy of the WV Kindergarten Transition Toolkit. This document identifies key activities that promote successful transitions within school systems. In the introduction it states, "Successful transitions should not be left to chance; rather, they can be thoughtfully planned to ensure that the experience of going to school is a positive one" (WVDE, 2012, p. 10). The framework of this plan is characterized by four components: Ready Children, Ready Families, Ready Schools, and Ready Communities (WVDE, 2012). This document provides counties statewide strategies that may assist school administrators and teachers in supporting children and families as they transition into public school kindergarten.

A follow-up activity from the WVDE presentation involved giving each participant group the opportunity to reflect on possible transition practices within their school/group. Ideas generated included giving families information regarding school readiness and the value of early childhood learning and experiences, to create a County Early Childhood Collaborative Team that

would develop a professional development session to be delivered online or in person as part of a county pre-k/kindergarten teacher orientation, and scheduling kindergarten teacher visits to community programs of children who will be in his/her room during the coming year.

Following this activity, the Director of Early Learning returned to talk about the Kindergarten Transition Report. He shared how teachers and counties across the state do not have the same system for reporting children's progress. He stated,

You can go to [Clifton] County and receive a report card for a kindergarten child then go to Berkley County and the report card would look entirely different. In pre-k some classrooms teachers collect portfolio information that can be passed on to a kindergarten teacher but what teacher has time to look through a two inch binder of material?

He explained to the group that the state has designed an assessment report that pre-k teachers can pass on to kindergarten teachers and they will be able to access it through the West Virginia Educational Information System (WVEIS). He went on to describe how this Kindergarten Transition Report is a summary of children's progress from their year in pre-k. Future plans by WVDE include requiring this type of assessment tool up through third grade. This statement created a great deal of discussion among teachers and principals. Before the lunch break, participants were asked to fill out a survey that pertained to the each person's level of involvement with transition in their school.

The following day the training began with a look at both the Early Learning Standards Framework (ELSF) for pre-k and the Content Standards and Objectives (CSOs) for kindergarten. The participants were then broken into groups: administrators, pre-k teachers, kindergarten teachers, and family members and support staff. A series of questions was given to the groups to have them brainstorm and reflect on characteristics of children, grade levels, and expectations.

The first questions posed were, “What do you consider important for a child to be successful in kindergarten? What does a quality kindergarten experience look like for a child?” The replies that were generated ranged from expectations about children’s developmental skills and abilities to expectations about families. Next the groups were to consider “What does a quality preschool experience look like for a child? The responses were: “child-directed”, “busy and a little noisy”, “purposeful/facilitated play”, and “opportunities for exploration and problem solving”. Question 3 was “What do you think needs to occur to successfully transition children pre-k to kindergarten?” Answers to this question included: “shared kindergarten and pre-k philosophy”, “celebrate/recognize transitions,”, “transition day/activities throughout the year”, “communication between teachers”, and “a prep list for families.” The final question was “In your opinion, what is the biggest gap that exists between pre-k and kindergarten education?” Across the board each group responded that there are differences in philosophy and there is a lack of knowledge about each other’s standards.

Discussion of the *Common Core* Standards followed in the afternoon session. Participants were informed how they were developed, given an overview of the standards, and the implementation of them within the state of West Virginia where they are called the “Next Generation Standards.” Another group activity involved asking participants to list the key components in the Next Generation Standards and ELSFs in language and literacy and math and numeracy. This reflection was the final activity for the Summer Institute.

After School Training

In September two-hour professional development sessions started up for the Transforming Transition project. These sessions were planned to meet bimonthly throughout the 2012-2013 school-year in the afternoon. The first session began with all reflecting on the joys

and concerns that the participants had in beginning the new school year. In summary, the joys centered on the children and the concerns were around time or lack of it. The facilitators of the grant then shared the results from the surveys that were completed in May. Three themes emerged that would drive the professional development for the coming school year.

Developmentally appropriate practice in pre-k and kindergarten would be examined. Issues of curriculum would be explored highlighting what instruction looks like in pre-k and in kindergarten. Finally to help the participants gain a better understanding of transitions, the question to be addressed was, “What is required for a child to enter kindergarten?”

For this first after-school session, the main topic of discussion was Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP). An in-depth discussion on what that looks like for children ages three through six took place and each of the participating school teams had the opportunity to talk about issues particular to their setting. A video was played to help inform the participants about the topic and each received a copy of the book *Basics of developmentally appropriate practice: An introduction for teachers of children 3-6*.

Another transition survey was administered looking at participants’ viewpoints on developmentally effective curriculum along with teacher attitudes about how children learn. They were asked to respond to the question “How has your thinking about Developmentally Appropriate Practice been confirmed, changed or evolved? What will you take home from today?” Most of the responses indicated a positive response to DAP and felt they were implementing those practices. Some of the comments referred to paperwork and testing as challenges which caused them to be inconsistent about implementing developmentally appropriate practices. The session ended with participants being asked to reflect on their individual practice and return in November with ideas related to reciprocal relationships with

families, creating caring communities of learners, planning appropriate curriculum, and assessing children.

The November session was divided into two parts. The first hour was spent looking at standards and relating them to practice. An article on how to implement standards was provided and discussed among school teams. The second hour was devoted to introducing developmentally appropriate teaching methods in six different areas of curriculum that included the arts, blocks, technology, science, mathematics, and social studies. It was explained that interest groups would be formed around these topics and the teachers, support staff, and principals would consider how to put the subjects into practice at their school.

During the following meeting in January, the participants were divided into interest groups around the selected books. All participants were able to indicate their preference about which group they would be in. Books were provided to each member of the group. A short presentation on all five books was given to the whole group on each book. The grant facilitators and the Clifton County administrative staff led each book group. Participants were asked to read the books and think about how they could put the subject matter into practice in their classroom.

In April the participants came together and met with their interest groups. The facilitator for each group led a discussion on how teachers could implement best practice according to their topic. Each group was asked to put together a presentation of how they were implementing the subject matter of their book for a showcase presentation in May. Following the book discussion, school groups got back together and were given an overview of the summer camp the schools would sponsor for children transitioning into their school. The stated purpose of the camp was to empower children and families as they began their journey into public education. Each school would receive \$750.00 for camp supplies and be responsible for the logistics, planning, and

implementation of the camp. The schools were asked to create a binder documenting the camp experience and submit it to the project staff at the end of the camp. It was anticipated that each school would have a time built in during the camp week for planning in addition to the camp activities. The expectations of the camp were to include what was learned in the project about Developmentally Appropriate Practice, through Interest Group Work and the collaboration between kindergarten and pre-k teachers.

The session in May featured displays and presentations by all of the interest groups. They demonstrated through word, pictures and/or video the activities they did in their classrooms to exhibit how the topic of their interest group was integrated into their classrooms. Additional time was given to start the process of planning for each school's transition camp. This was the final session of the project.

Transition Camps

Transition Camp 2013. Mountview Elementary School had a transition camp in early June of 2013. The six staff members involved with the camp spent Monday and Tuesday planning and preparing materials. I participated throughout the week as an observer. The teachers decided to split the children into a morning session and an afternoon session. Fourteen children were in each group. The teachers planned two units for the week. The pre-k teacher and the school speech therapist prepared a unit focusing on "Beautiful Junk". The kindergarten teachers focused on lightening bugs. The kindergarten teachers planned more product outcome craft activities as opposed to the more process oriented activities planned by the pre-k staff. A schedule was worked out so that the children would meet initially at the library and then split and go to either the pre-k room or one of the kindergarten rooms. The children would then have an opportunity to visit both classrooms. Following the classroom activities they would have a snack

and finish up the session playing on the playground. On Tuesday, families were invited to a kick-off meeting and were asked to bring collections of “beautiful junk” for the unit that they would be involved with during the week.

Reflecting on the expectations of the camp, one of the kindergarten teachers hoped the experience would ease the fears of the children and make parents more comfortable with the school along with the expectations of kindergarten. The pre-k teacher wrote, “I hope that the students will be excited to begin their kindergarten careers. I also expect that parents’ fears will be alleviated by having a tour of the school and meeting the kindergarten staff.”

On the first morning of camp most of the children came in smiling and greeting friends from either their pre-k class or day care. The children were separated into two groups, one to the pre-k room, and the other to a kindergarten classroom. The children who went to the pre-k class were asked by the teachers to dump their beautiful stuff into a big yellow tub. They began a dialogue with the children by asking what it means to sort. They proceeded to encourage the children to investigate and sort the materials brought in. Throughout the sorting process teachers posed questions such as “I wonder how you can use this.” “What do you think this is?” and “Why should this object go with this group?”

In the kindergarten room, the children were engaged in a sequence activity based on the story they read about a firefly. When they finished the activity, they were given the choice to go to blocks or make a firefly from Band-Aids. Block building students got involved building houses for their bugs. The groups switched rooms after 45 minutes and each group had an opportunity to sort “Beautiful-Junk” or do firefly activities. The teaching staff in both groups interacted with the children, asking questions about what they are doing and assisting them if

they are having difficulty with the projects. After the center time, both groups go to the cafeteria for snack then outside to the playground.

There was an hour break and afternoon session began. One child in the afternoon group was very apprehensive but after an adult interacted with him, he joined the group for the initial story in the library. The children appeared to enjoy the activities and the afternoon went smoothly. The consensus among the teachers at the end of the day was that it went well.

The second and third days were similar in scope and sequence to the first day. The children came in excited about coming to school and were engaged in the planned projects. On Friday, the last day of camp, the parents were invited for a “showcase” in the cafeteria to provide an overview of what the children were involved in during the three days of camp. The kindergarten teachers had the children sing a song. The pre-k group brought down their “beautiful-junk” creations. A slide show of photographs from the camp was displayed.

The parents expressed their pleasure with the experience. One family shared that they had considered private school for their child, but after this experience they planned to send their child to public school in the fall. The parents were asked to fill out a survey at the end of the session. They were asked to explain what they learned about their child’s school throughout the transition camp. Some of the responses were: “morning car routine”, “cafeteria habits”, “that she will not be intimidated when school actually starts”, and “that he is excited to learn and motivated about kindergarten.” When asked to describe what their child said after being part of the camp one parent wrote: “He loves it and wants to start now.” Another parent said, “She said that she had a lot of fun and made new friends.” Another added’ “He has really enjoyed it, especially the playground, and he looks for fireflies and has talked about them all week.” Parents were asked if the camp was beneficial. They responded by saying, “Yes, he seems more

excited about school”, “Absolutely, he feels comfortable about starting school”, and “Yes, he is not as nervous or scared.”

The staff reflections were similar. One said, “Parents seemed eased with being ready for school.” Another staff wrote, “The camp was a huge success. Children were engaged and excited, parents were happy.” One additional comment was, “Children really felt at home at Mountview.”

Transition Camp 2015. During the summer of 2015 the administrators of the transition project had monies available for the schools that participated in the Transforming Transitions project to have transition camps again. Three schools—Sage Brook, Garfield, and Mountview—agreed to take part. The planned schedule for the camp consisted of two days of planning and preparation and three days of children attending camp. Mountview did not have enough students sign up initially for the camp which they planned for at the beginning of July so it was cancelled, much to the disappointment of the staff. The kindergarten teacher commented, “We didn’t get to do it this year. I would have liked to compare the two years.”

Sage Brook ran its camp in early June. Staff invited children who would be transitioning into both pre-k and kindergarten to participate. The entering pre-k students came in the morning with 11 children in attendance. The kindergarten children came in the afternoon and 12 children were present. They both had the same underwater theme. Routines and expectations for the coming school experience were emphasized. A positive climate regarding school was established and the teachers began to develop relationships with the children who would be entering their class in the fall.

I was able to observe the pre-k group on the first morning and found the children engaged and excited about attending. There was one child who had difficulty leaving his parent

but the pre-k teacher was able to calm him down and he joined the group, willing to participate in all activities. During the morning hands-on activities that included playdough, block building, and bingo painters were available. The children had a snack and an opportunity to be on the playground. The kindergarten teacher did similar art activities but she began her afternoon with a coloring sheet laid out on the table for each child to color. Her schedule was more structured than the pre-k class. A snack and outside time was also provided.

Garfield held its transition camp for incoming kindergarten students in the middle of July. Planning and preparation centered on developing a unit on the life-cycle of a butterfly. This was similar to the unit they had done in the 2013 transition camp. The pre-k staff and kindergarten staff worked together facilitating the move into kindergarten. The two pre-k rooms that were used during the school year were used for the camp. The camp ran similar to the regular kindergarten day (8:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m.). One child had separation problems but the pre-k teacher told him there would be no nap time and he easily left his mother. Songs, stories, and art activities familiarized the children to the life cycle of a butterfly unit. After a period in the gym the children participated in structured centers designed to be similar to what would happen in a kindergarten class. The children were engaged and the teachers provided support when necessary. After lunch the children had another opportunity to play in the gym. When they returned to the classroom, the structured center time continued for an hour so all the children got to rotate through each activity. After clean up the children returned to group time and discussed and recorded what activities they enjoyed or didn't like about camp. Some positive responses included: finger-painting, iPads, and reading books. What they didn't like were carrots, sitting, and books. Free play activity time was scheduled at the end of the day. As the parents arrived to pick up their children, they received a note titled "Caterpillar Chronicles" with the children's

responses about what they had enjoyed or disliked about the day. As the kindergarten teacher waited in the hallway to release the children to their parents she made contact with parents.

The staff reflected at the end of the day, discussing what they would need to adjust. Comments made were the children were getting to know the routine. The kindergarten teacher added, “There are some smart kids!” They felt it was a successful day.

On Friday afternoon, families came for a parent engagement activity. A slide show of the transition camp was shown. The kindergarten teacher discussed some of the things introduced, for example kindergarten rules such as raising your hand and waiting your turn. The children then performed the life cycle of a butterfly song that they had worked on. The children then were instructed go to the tables to join their parents. There were enough adults, with the teachers and myself included, for every child to have an adult with them. To demonstrate to the parents what the children had learned during the week, the kindergarten teacher explained that each child and parent/adult pair would make a mobile from a coat hanger showing the life cycle of a butterfly. Parents smiled and talked with their children as they worked on the project. The children had learned the parts of the life cycle and were eager to tell their parents. As the activity was completed, parents took pictures of the finished product. The pre-k teacher informed the families that they would proceed to center time and the parents were welcome to play with their children. Several parents sat back and watched their children play at the centers. One mom sat on the floor with her daughter and built with small blocks. Another watched his son and followed him around the centers but did not participate. While at centers, the kindergarten teacher spoke with parents about their children’s reactions to camp. One parent told her that her son told her that morning, “I don’t need you to come in with me, I can do it myself.” She replied, “I don’t think so!” Another child asked on the second day of camp (this was the only

child with no preschool experience), “What are we going to learn today?” When he was told the life cycle of the butterfly, he replied “Again?” She told the parent that he seemed ready for school. The staff was available during this time to answer questions concerning buses, meals, school supplies, health concerns, and things they didn’t know or had concerns about. They seemed to appreciate having this time before school started to address some of their worries about their children starting kindergarten. As the children left, the teachers took pictures of the children with their parents.

The teachers reflected over the week after the children and parents departed. The parent engagement activity went well. Overall the consensus was that it was a positive experience for children, parents and staff.

CHAPTER FIVE: RESULTS FROM CLIFTON COUNTY

This chapter includes the case findings from the six teachers from Clifton County. The answers to the research questions will be presented. The teachers in this county attended a year-long professional development intervention project on transitions during the 2012-2013 school year. The focus of this project was on strategies to enhance the transition process between kindergarten and pre-k. In chapter six the results from Merritt County will be presented. Chapter seven will be a comparative analysis of the teachers from the two counties, interpretation of the findings, discussion of potential flaws of the study, implications for practitioners and policy makers, and suggestions for future research.

In this chapter, the responses from Clifton County teachers have been aligned with the following research questions:

1. How do preschool teachers perceive the practices that support children in the transition from preschool into kindergarten?
2. What do they perceive to be the barriers and/or inducements relating to the implementation of transition practices?
3. How do kindergarten teachers perceive the practices that support children in the transition from preschool into kindergarten?
4. What do they perceive to be the barriers and/or inducements relating to the implementation of transition practices?

PRE-K TEACHERS

This section addresses the question of preschool teachers' perceptions in relation to research question number one and discusses the practices that were perceived as supportive to children in the transition from preschool to kindergarten. It conveys the teachers' observations

and insights related to the practices of the teachers, school practices, and practices with parents. Teacher practices they discussed included visiting, playing, and expressing ideas. School practices featured opportunities for children to participate in activities to prepare them for transitioning to kindergarten. In addition, forming relationships with kindergarten teachers helped improve transition experiences for children. Practices with parents were comprised of the pre-k teachers working to build relationships with families and facilitating communication in order to make the transition trouble-free.

These pre-k teachers shared strategies that they used to help children be prepared for kindergarten. They involved holistic goals of getting them ready socially, emotionally, and academically. When the Garfield teacher was asked about preparing children for kindergarten, she noted:

I think my role is...to make them feel comfortable here, feel safe here, and once we get that established at the beginning of the year then I want them to learn to love school. ...If I can instill that in their first school experience, then I feel like the other things will come along as they're supposed to.

The Mountview teacher emphasized that it was important for children to become familiar with letters and numbers as that was an expectation in kindergarten. She saw that her responsibility included, "Exposing them to the information, and the letters and alphabet, and also just trying to help them learn through exploring materials." The Sage Brook teacher noted that by the end of pre-k, "I've created these children to be independent thinkers, to make safe choices, and to identify unsafe choices."

In addition to a holistic development focus, pre-k teachers in Clifton County talked about specific teacher strategies that supported effective transitions. These teachers reported how

home visits with families and visits within the school eased transitions for children. Second, they described how through play, children are prepared for kindergarten. Finally, they described practices enabling children to express and understand ideas.

Teacher Practices

Visiting. Teachers making visits with families in their homes, along with children making visits within the school was a practice used to encourage smooth transitions to kindergarten. Home visits allowed teachers to build relationships with families. Visits within the school helped children to become familiar with kindergarten classrooms and teachers. For example, as the Sage Brook teacher talked about how she prepared children for school she reflected, “So you start the transition from the time they enter the door.” She added, “First I go in and do a home visit. I acknowledge home being the first environment the child comes from.”

Opportunities for visits within the school occurred in each of the schools. The Mountview teacher shared:

We eat lunch in the cafeteria every day so that the kids know how to go through the line. Then they go visit the kindergarten classrooms, have a story read to them and then this year we tried to go in during their center time, even though they didn't have a lot of it so that the kids could kind of see...the different centers they have and how it's similar but yet different.

The Garfield teacher spoke about how her children visited kindergarten classrooms:

Our kids went to music class with the kindergarten class one day. They had a move-up day where we divided our class and half of the class went with one kindergarten teacher, and the other half of the class went with the other kindergarten teacher.

Playing. The second strategy which pre-k teachers reported using to facilitate effective transitions was play. The teachers remarked that children in pre-k learned through play and this was how children were able to build their abilities to get along with each other. Academic skills and independence were similarly developed as children played. The three pre-k teachers talked about activities in the classrooms that assisted children with the move into kindergarten.

Focusing on social development, one teacher put it this way:

I think it's more being able to socialize, and get along, so that they don't go to kindergarten next year, jerk a toy out of somebody's hand, hit them because they don't like them. To me it's the socialization and trying to make sure they can communicate and survive in life by being able to express themselves verbally.

When asked about the types of activities that were done to prepare children for kindergarten the Sage Brook teacher replied:

It's hands-on so that they buy into it and they're independent in their play. And then you go around and ask them questions, you know, like to make them be critical thinkers, in terms of step one, we do this, [and] step two, I can do this.

The Garfield teacher shared her ideas on how she used play to encourage children's development in her class. She believes children learn through fun hands-on experiences:

You can make any type of learning seem like a game....They want to see things and to touch things and things that move....They have to be engaged actively to feel like they have to have a piece in it....It can't be all sitting and...paper and pencil.

Expressing Ideas. Beyond visiting and playing, pre-k teachers at Clifton County believed a focus on enabling children to express and understand ideas was key to successful transitions. They read books, wrote in journals, and talked about the move to kindergarten.

The Mountview teacher talked about reading books:

We read a lot of books about getting ready for kindergarten, like the “*Miss Bendergarten Gets Ready for Kindergarten*” and there [are] a couple others...“*The Big Yellow Bus*” is one. We read about pedestrian safety and also to get them ready because none of our children this year in pre-k ride the bus.

The Sage Brook teacher expressed the importance of communication in preparing children to succeed in a school environment:

And I have high goals for all of them. If we walk down the hall, we can greet someone; we can say please, we can say thank you, and we can help somebody. And we know you can see the self confidence in a child. Readiness is willing to change and to move.

She went on to say that she helped children prepare for kindergarten through literacy activities: “We start talking through books. We’ve read books, we’ve journaled about it, because I do a lot with the writing and pose a question to them.” She further stated:

I do a lot with picture journals, take pictures of them in that transition, and then at the end of the year they have a lot of pictures from their pre-k year, but they are recorded, but they also have pictures where they’re going to.

In addition to the activities listed above, the Sage Brook teacher worked on preparing children for kindergarten by providing activities to build skills in math, writing, and language:

And I look at writing, putting words together and naming things, and like naming mom, dad, start them—those that are interested and ready, writing words....We [in pre-k] count to 50 by 5s and by 10s; they [kindergarteners] go to 100.

School Practices

School practices involved activities that were provided by the school to help children transition to kindergarten. Participating in morning school announcements, being part of a school-wide behavior plan, attending kindergarten enrollment, and participation in transition camp at the schools were events that provided support with the move from pre-k to kindergarten. Along with the activities, the pre-k teachers found building relationships with kindergarten teachers within the school helped with the transition process.

Participating in Transition Activities. Activities sponsored by the school during the school year, along with transition camps that occurred in the summer, aimed to foster positive kindergarten transitions. Practices by some school administrators provided additional support for transition. The Sage Brook teacher shared how her administrator included the pre-k children:

Morning announcements and children say the pledge;...we take four or five [preschoolers] and they go down [to the office]. They say the pledge over the intercom...I started giving [the principal] things to read so the children [would] hear their names...[and realize that] they're part of the group and with the school.

The Garfield teacher said other school-sponsored transition activities included: "Kindergarten orientation at the beginning of the year for kindergarteners and their parents. I think they have an open house day as well."

In order to help children to understand the behavioral expectations in kindergarten, one pre-k teacher used the school-wide behavior plan during the last month of school. Helping her children understand this school practice that pertained to all students in the school prepared the pre-k students for the transition to kindergarten. The Garfield teacher shared how she had incorporated this plan into her classroom:

I felt that this year the kids separating from parents needed a little bit more of understanding of...the behavior program that the [whole] school uses...It's a positive behavior program [in] which the children followed the same rules wherever they are...Especially for my children that struggle sometimes with behaviors...I really felt they needed a little more understanding of that or they were going to really [be] blind-sided when they went to kindergarten. So I went a little bit further into detail about how it works and began using it for the whole month of May as a transition activity.

Transition camp was another activity the teachers talked about. It was mentioned as an enriching experience for students and was thought to improve the transition to kindergarten for those who participated. Clifton County schools had participated in one camp during the summer of 2013 and were eagerly anticipating another camp during the summer of 2015. Both the pre-k and kindergarten worked together to prepare and participate in camp activities. The Mountview pre-k teacher talked about the first camp: "A couple of years ago we did a Marshall [Harless Center-sponsored] transition ... [program] where we went through the school year meetings and then at the end of that we have a transition camp." The Garfield pre-k teacher shared her perception of the camp:

This year, we are going to have a kindergarten camp, which is a transition activity in and of itself...The whole idea here is that any child going to kindergarten here can attend this kindergarten camp, and this year it's going to be for three days. There will be a kindergarten teacher and kindergarten aide, and a pre-school teacher and a preschool aide....Parents and children can adjust to this next step by being exposed to these teachers. The kids that were in my classroom are going to be familiar with me and feel

secure, and then know they are going to meet this new teacher who very well may be their kindergarten teacher for next year.

She saw the camp as a positive strategy in helping her pre-k students adjust to the changes they would face in kindergarten. Her perception was that having the camp experience also gave the kindergarten teacher insight into concerns that might become problems in kindergarten:

First of all, the children were...familiar with the teacher when school started. More importantly, the teacher was familiar with certain family issues that may be going on.... She could understand some of their learning issues...if they had IEPs...and that she could plan ahead to... just be ready, and maybe... have a little heads up on certain issues and things she would have to be doing next year.

The Sage Brook teacher felt that the transition camp helped develop a sense of community in the school and children, parents, and teachers benefitted:

Over half of our children are coming in for transition activities. So I think that just shows a sign of...the commitment from parents, you know, to want to do the right thing for their child, teachers wanting to do the right thing for the children, and us working together as a team to build a family.

Building Relationships. The teachers believed that building relationships and keeping in close communication with kindergarten teachers eased the move from pre-k to kindergarten.

One Clifton County pre-k teacher talked about her relationship with the kindergarten teachers: “I have a really good relationship with the kindergarten teachers. I talk to them all year long. We share ideas, problems, and concerns. It’s easy for me to discuss with them about the kids that are moving up.” She went on to say: “We try to work together for placement of the kids because I know their [the kindergarten teachers’] personalities....We know each other and we know our

strengths and our weaknesses and our personalities.” She added that this collaboration helped in preparing children for kindergarten and provided her an opportunity to build skills children would need in the future:

We do discuss things, and I tell them all the time, “Please, if there’s something that you feel the kids are lacking, you know a skill or a social something that just doesn’t seem right, let me know. I’ll work on it; I’ll change my lesson plans.”

A pre-k teacher in another school talked about the ongoing communication she had with the kindergarten teachers:

We see each other all the time...I mean daily. We know our families, because again, there may be a child in pre-k [who] might be a sibling that’s in that class. Once they’re part of our school’s family, that’s the way our school looks at it. Whether you’re the teacher in their classroom or not, you’re a teacher of all the children in this building.

Practices with Parents

Connecting. The teachers saw parents as an important factor in preparing children for the move into kindergarten and making the adjustment to the next school setting. One teacher observed that connections should start at the beginning of the school year:

I think it’s real important when we have our meetings with families and the children because the kids are getting to meet me....It’s a connection that they see their parents with us and that we’re all on the same page and I think that makes the first connection of, “Okay, this is a safe place because my mom and dad and my grandparents wouldn’t bring me here. I trust them, so I know this is a place for me to be.”

The same teacher went on to say that activities were reinforced at home and supported the learning that was going on at school: “We do a lot of take-home activities with the families that

we send home, so that's a connection between school and home.... I think that just builds the bridges all year long." When asked what parents need to do to help their children be ready for kindergarten, the Garfield teacher replied:

I think parents just need to make that connection with the kindergarten teacher. It's a little harder because I get access to them every day here....They are not going to have that when they go to kindergarten. These kids will be dropped off and picked up, and the teachers don't really have that interaction...with the parents every day.

Communicating. Communication between preschool teachers and families was perceived as an important component to forming connections. Ongoing verbal and written interaction between teachers and parents helped to build links between home and school. Daily exchanges, newsletters, and information on preparing families for transition were some of the ways teachers communicated with parents. One teacher talked about the importance of home-school communication: "I think they need to listen to the teacher, and take their guidance and talk and communicate."

In discussing what kind of things were done to prepare parents for transition, one teacher said: "We send newsletters and things like that home to parents to let them know we're talking about going to kindergarten; we're going to visit kindergarten; these are some things you need to be talking about at home." Another teacher said: "I sent home a huge packet this year about transitions and kindergarten readiness. It had a lot of guidelines in there...things that you should be discussing with your child, things you should know. Activities...they could do over the summer." When asked how parents can help children get ready for kindergarten, another teacher replied:

They can help by talking about it, talking about kindergarten and also just getting them into the preschool program in a school setting so that way it gets them on a routine and they know what's coming next...and what the expectations are.

Many forms of communication were used to inform parents about transitions and methods that would prepare their children for kindergarten. These communications with parents appeared to happen mostly from school to home; they were generally in one direction. Little mention was made of parents sharing information with teachers.

Barriers

This section addresses the Clifton pre-k teachers' perceptions related to question number two and discusses what they perceive to be the barriers and/or inducements relating to the implementation of positive transition practices. The teachers' observations and insights related to parents dealing with challenges at home that were perceived to be barriers that hindered transitions, inauthentic visits by child care centers, lack of resources, and conflicting expectations between pre-k and kindergarten teachers.

Parenting Challenges. The teachers voiced concern about challenges parents were facing, which were perceived as having a negative impact on preparing children to transition to kindergarten. Teachers noted that not all parents understood the importance of transitions and many did not participate in transition activities. The Sage Brook teacher noted:

Well, not everyone participates, you know. They don't understand the importance. You know I don't have every family participating in the transition. That's a barrier. And then parents work...or don't have babysitters, or don't have outside care.

In discussing additional barriers that arose with families, she observed: "Other barriers to transition could just be, if you yourself have not gone through a lot of transitions, if you don't

have any prior knowledge or prior experience, you're not going to be good at facilitating transitions.”

The pre-k teachers suggested that due to busy lifestyles, the wide variation in children's daily schedules and routines, and differing family structures, children's adjustment to school may be negatively impacted. These issues were thought to be a source of stress for the children and their families. One teacher described what she observed: “Some children come with a horrific schedule of being transported back and forth between a mom and a dad [due to divorce]. [They] might be [living with] their grandparents, or now their guardian.”

Another teacher was concerned that parents did not always understand their responsibilities when it came to supporting their children in school. Encouraging parents to develop positive habits around school routines such as homework and ensuring their children got enough sleep did not always occur. She believed that these behaviors were important to future school success and parents needed to put them into practice to make the transition to kindergarten easier for the children and to help them be successful in school. She first gave this example:

I think the parents need to understand that, no, this is not pre-school anymore. We do have deadlines and we do expect this stuff [homework] returned....We need you to check the backpack...and [be sure] the homework is looked at....So the responsibility needs to lie on the adults, and we need to let them know what their responsibilities are.

She went on to express another concern centered on establishing routines at home that supported children being ready to learn. She viewed children coming to school tired as a problem. Not getting enough sleep contributed to children struggling in school and not doing their best in the classroom. Ensuring children had a regular bedtime and parents establishing

consistent routines were thought to be ways to support children being prepared to learn and ready for kindergarten. She depicted it this way:

Make sure your kids are getting enough sleep. We have kids that are coming to school so tired and parents just don't seem to value having a daily schedule for their children that stays the same day after day....They don't have nap time in kindergarten anymore and they are finding that every day there are some kids that fall asleep. That is not conducive to learning.

Inauthentic School Visiting: “It’s not real.” The West Virginia Pre-k Transition Plan recommends all pre-k classrooms visit a kindergarten school setting to ease transitions (WVDE, 2010). Each spring community-based pre-k programs visit elementary schools to prepare for transition. Pre-k teachers expressed two concerns related to these visits. One had to do with the difficulty of scheduling visits. The other centered on authenticity. When community-based pre-k classrooms in childcare centers visited schools, not all children in the group were able to visit the school where they would be enrolled for kindergarten. Pre-k teachers saw this as a barrier to successful transitions. The pre-k teachers felt it would be best if all children could visit their real home school for a transition activity. The teacher from Garfield commented on the scheduling of visits:

I think the way that most transitions work are that if you're in the school building, it's probably a little bit easier to set up these transition activities, whereas the pre-school classrooms that are outside in the communities....I think they have a really hard time scheduling these activities.

She went on to express her concern that the visits did not give all children an accurate view of how their kindergarten classroom would appear. If the children were not going to be attending that particular school, they may gain a false impression of school:

If we're doing these transition activities, why are we not sending the kids that are coming here [to school] for transition activities here, and the ones that are going to [other schools] should go to [those schools]. I understand that in the big picture of things they've got a large group of kids and to divide 30 kids up into three different schools is also a problem.

The teacher from Sage Brook agreed, saying: "I think a concern would be if you had a lot of children who were transitioning to different places. And it's very...hard to talk about something you can't see. That's not always available."

Lacking Resources. The pre-k teachers spoke of a variety of resources that were not sufficient and thus became barriers to the implementation of transition practices. Lack of time, funding, and additional ideas about transitions were mentioned as obstacles, but the shortage of time seemed to be the biggest impediment to implementing effective transition practices. The lack of this resource had an effect on collaboration between teachers and on opportunities for children to visit classrooms. The Mountview teacher saw the lack of time as a major barrier to effectively collaborating with the kindergarten teachers:

Sometimes I think it's the time constraints of the kindergarten classrooms, like they have a certain amount of time they have to do things. We [pre-k teachers] introduced them to the music specialists, the music, art and P.E. teachers, but sometimes it would be nice if at the end of the year they could go in with the class or kind of learn the routine.

She believed that the shortage of time lessened the quality of interactions with the kindergarten teachers: “Usually during...two-hour early release and things like that we have time provided to work together, but usually they’re busy working with the other kindergarten teachers; I don’t feel like there’s a lot of interaction.” She saw the lack of time for interaction as a problem:

[I wish] they [kindergarten teachers] would understand I need some help with it, trying to make sure that we’re getting them on the same page and ready so that we may need more time to collaborate and maybe more willingness to collaborate when we have time.

The Garfield teacher also saw the lack of time as a barrier because it limited the amount of time that she could schedule visits to kindergarten classrooms. She believed this lack of time reduced opportunities for the children to visit in kindergarten classrooms:

I think that the pre-school teachers feel...one hour...is not a whole lot of time to go see kindergarten. The problem is I think that the end of the school year is so busy....And to add to that by saying, “Can we come once a day, every day for a week” is just you know [difficult]....But sometimes I think we think that one activity here, or two activities here is enough. I don’t feel it’s enough, but I understand that it’s hard to work it in.

The Sage Brook teacher also noted the lack of time and linked it to a lack of funding: “And then there’s no funds; they really don’t fund transition. She went on to explain the connection between the lack of funds and the lack of time:

When you don’t have the time to collaborate, and you’re not given any funds to buy different materials that’s not curriculum or workbooks, that’s a lost component, not just in our school, but it’s in all schools. We do the best we can do by meeting them [kindergarten teachers], talking, us stepping back, letting them step forward. We do as much as we can...[given the existing barriers].

The Mountview teacher expressed a desire for more ideas on how to facilitate transitions. She thought if there were other suggestions on how to implement transitions, the transition practices could be improved:

It would help to have other people suggest activities that we could do to incorporate into our classroom to get [students] ready for [kindergarten], because I feel like we just always do the same thing. We always talk about kindergarten and the expectations and how much it's kind of different from preschool. I think the kindergarten teachers and Head Start workers, they could maybe suggest something...to send home, ideas to help your child move into kindergarten.

Conflicting Teacher Expectations. A barrier identified by the three Clifton pre-k teachers was the conflict in expectations between pre-k and kindergarten teachers. The pre-k teachers perceived that the kindergarten teachers did not understand how the goals and objectives in pre-k were aligned with those in kindergarten. They believed that the kindergarten teachers had expectations that were inconsistent with pre-k values and were not always developmentally appropriate. One preschool teacher commented on her concern that some kindergarten teachers have inappropriate expectations for children entering kindergarten:

I think that some of the kindergarten teachers have expectations that don't really align with my goals and objectives in pre-school....I'm more concerned about emotional and social [development]....What they're expecting these kids to be able to do is not always what our [pre-k] objectives and goals from the department of education really are, and that's a little frustrating at times.

Another teacher saw a conflict between pre-k and kindergarten goals for children in the classroom: "It's sometimes difficult because the kindergarten teachers don't quite understand

what our goals are as a preschool and it's sometimes difficult to see what their goals are as kindergarten teachers." She added, "I'm always questioning myself. Did I do enough? Are they prepared for kindergarten? [Does] what I say that they know really match to what they know?" She shared her frustration:

With the kindergarten teachers, especially one in particular, I feel like she feels that I should be teaching: "This is an A. This is how we make an A. This is how the A sounds." So by the time they get to her class they know all the letters of the alphabet, they know numbers, written numbers 1 to 10.... That's not what I'm supposed to be doing. I could get in trouble with [the Pre-k Coordinator] if I do that.

The Garfield teacher noted that transition activities with the children did little to benefit the kindergarten teachers' understanding of the pre-k experiences of children who would be entering their classrooms in the fall:

Because the activities that we do are more for them [the children] to see what's going to be expected in kindergarten, what's going on in the classroom in kindergarten, than it is about letting the teachers know where my kids are.... I don't think they really understand sometimes what our goals and objectives were at this level.

Inducements

Training on transitions was felt to have had a positive impact on improving positive transitions for students. Training specific to transitions, training with kindergarten teachers on standards, and the yearlong transitions training were seen as a means to help teachers improve what they were doing in helping children move into kindergarten. Another factor facilitating positive transitions was having pre-k classrooms in close proximity to kindergarten classrooms.

Training. The pre-k teachers talked about professional development training as a means to improve practice. One teacher shared how a training on transitions for all pre-k programs encouraged positive ways of moving children into kindergarten:

This year we didn't actually have transition training like we have in the past. I think we do it every other year or so....That's most important for the new teachers and it's great to be able to have refresher courses for the rest of us that have been doing this for a while and maybe get some new ideas about some things that are going on within our communities and our counties.... For new people I think it should be mandatory.

This same teacher talked about an additional training where both pre-k and kindergarten teachers were brought together to share their learning standards. She found it to be valuable and provided both pre-k and kindergarten teachers insight into what the other grade level was responsible for:

A couple years ago, the county did a really good session where the kindergarten teachers and the preschool teachers met together....That was the first time I think they [the kindergarten teachers] were really exposed to what our goals and objectives are compared to what is expected in kindergarten...I really did think that it helped the kindergarten teachers more because...they did not know what we were doing in preschool. That was a couple years ago. We have new people going in and coming out all the time and so, in my opinion that should be something that should be done every now and then.

One of the teachers talked about the year-long transition training done through Clifton County Schools. She found that training enhanced transitions at her school:

I think now there's a more, towards the end of the school year, there's more of a focus on transitions, like, making sure we take our kids to the kindergarten rooms, making sure

they eat in the cafeteria. I think [the training] made it more open, gave [us] more awareness of the importance of transition and letting the kids know what happens.

Another teacher talked about the results of the year-long training:

I think that the kindergarten teachers became a little more aware of what we do and what we're not required to do and that maybe some of the gaps that are there....It's more of an understanding...that these are my goals and objectives and these are yours...It's not that these kids are supposed to be ready for kindergarten; it's that you're supposed to be ready for them and that's not the attitude of 90% of the teachers and I think it was an eye opener to a lot of them that, you know, they were expecting too much sometimes from the kids and from the pre-k teachers, actually.

Proximity. The pre-k teachers found that having physical proximity to the kindergarten classrooms in the school was an enabling factor and provided teachers opportunities to develop relationships and easily communicate with each other. The Garfield teacher noted that having the pre-k located in the elementary school eased the transition to kindergarten and prevented some of the anxiety children and families could have if they attended pre-k at another location.

The best part about [having our preschool] in the school system to me is that we get to expose them also to what the school is. All year long they're seeing the school. They're eating in the school; they're having recess out on the playground; they see the other teachers; we have interaction with a lot of the primary grades; we have kids and teachers coming in and out of our classroom all the time. They are becoming familiar so that their first day of kindergarten is not a terrifying place to be, where I know no one, and I don't know this building, and everything is big and scary. So I think it's just all connected.

Transition Grant. The three pre-k teachers felt the Transition Grant provided them an opportunity to participate in training and learn about the importance of transitions and in turn enabled them to hold transition camps at their individual schools. The Sage Brook teacher found that participating in the grant was valuable. This grant provided her school with resources to conduct transition camps and facilitate transitions for her students. She also appreciated that she received compensation for participating. She remarked:

Not always is that [opportunity offered] that [does not impact] on our personal time. And then there's no funds. We're fortunate from the Benedum Foundation where [Sage Brook] participated in a transition program, where we did a whole year of study with transition.

Likewise, the Garfield teacher described what she saw as the benefits of the grant:

All that training ahead of time, it's something that we don't often get as teachers, is the opportunity to get new materials and become familiar with the materials and then [we] had time to plan before we used the materials....It's just like, here it is and then you're on your own and there's no training that goes with it and no ideas, sharing.

KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS

This section addresses the question of Clifton County kindergarten teachers' perceptions in relation to research question number three and discusses practices that support children in the transition from preschool into kindergarten. It conveys the kindergarten teachers' observations and insights about the practices of the teachers, school and community practices, and transition practices with parents. Teacher practices included the visits that children made to kindergarten classrooms while in pre-k and the modeling teachers did once they entered kindergarten. The school practices consisted of activities that were done to prepare children for kindergarten

including enrollment and orientation, kindergarten and pre-k teacher relationships, and the transition camps. The parent practices involved welcoming parents into schools and teachers sharing information with parents.

Teacher Practices

The kindergarten teachers in Clifton County discussed specific teacher strategies that supported the positive transition from pre-k into kindergarten. They reported visits from the pre-k classrooms to kindergarten classrooms helped ease the move into kindergarten. Next they talked about how modeling behaviors was a major aspect of learning in kindergarten as opposed to play in pre-k.

Visiting. Visiting a kindergarten classroom in the spring was seen as a way to help pre-k children get comfortable and prepared for the move to kindergarten. The Sage Brook teacher spoke about how the pre-k children did visits in her school:

The preschoolers come down and spend a little bit of time with us doing calendar time, and sing a couple songs with us. Then towards the end of the year I start talking to them as they're going down the hallway, "Oh I really like the way you're walking," just so they're familiar with me and that it's not so scary.

The Garfield teacher discussed the visits that were done by the local child care centers:

We also have a day that [the child care center] comes to visit our school....The daycares come just to get an idea of what a classroom looks like. They get to walk down through the school, and they can meet us for a minute. Now a majority of them aren't coming to our school but they at least get the opportunity to see a real school....This time they sat, went through and got their trays, sat at a table, ate their lunch, and then went out and got

to dump their trays for the first time, so it gives them a chance to see what big school looks like.

Modeling. The kindergarten teachers talked about their expectations concerning the behavior of the children entering kindergarten at the beginning year. They understood that the move from pre-k into kindergarten was an adjustment and the children needed support during the transition. They conveyed how they worked with their children to help them get used to new routines. Much of their practice was showing children through example. One kindergarten teacher put it this way:

When school starts, you spend a whole lot of time modeling procedures, modeling routines, walking them step by step through everything you want them to do...but once you get them into the routine, and they know, then you don't have to worry about those things anymore.

The Garfield teacher talked about her use of modeling in the beginning of the year. She wanted her students to get adjusted to the classroom and be ready to follow her procedures:

You introduce a couple centers at a time, and you can watch just going around. I model it usually before I do it. We talk about our voices and what it should look like and usually I show them pictures of maybe what the kitchen area would look like and stuff beforehand so they get used to what it's supposed to be and then I allow them to practice it before I start working with my reading groups....I just walk the room, and kind of control how they're doing it first, and then once they've learned those procedures...I start to pull kids over to work with them a little more closely.

School Practices

Kindergarten teachers identified school practices that involved preparing children and their families for the move to kindergarten. All children who would be starting kindergarten were involved in preparation activities such as kindergarten enrollment in the spring and orientation on the first day of kindergarten. Building relationships with the pre-k teachers in their schools was seen as another way to improve transition practices. Participation in transition activities like the transition camps at individual schools also supported the move into kindergarten. These teachers believed that these activities made a difference for children and parents making the adjustment to the new school setting.

Enrollment and Orientation. The kindergarten teachers talked about events that were done in the school to prepare children and families for kindergarten. Kindergarten enrollment in the spring was sponsored by the Board of Education. Orientation in the fall was sponsored at the individual schools. The Garfield teacher described it this way, “For kindergarten and pre-k we have an enrollment day and it’s publicized around so that people know to bring their information to us and fill out forms and stuff like that.” She explained that kindergarten orientation gave children and parents an opportunity to be introduced to the teacher. Parents were given an overview of what to expect in kindergarten.

We have our kindergarten orientation, which is the very first day. All the other classes [in the school], their kids come [a full day] that very first day. Ours, the kids come with the parents and we have just a little thing of talking about some of the rules we have, our procedures...like our card changes, important things, times for pickup, when they bring them in in the morning what they are supposed to do, just giving them general ideas.

Parents also filled out paper work and any questions they had concerning kindergarten could be answered. The kindergarten teachers saw this time as a positive transition for parents as it provided an overview on what to expect during the upcoming school year.

The Garfield teacher went on to explain how parents benefited from the orientation:

Then of course their little binder that...they can take them home. They can ask me any questions that they want. It just gives them, especially if they don't get to come to Open House...or Meet the Teacher, then it gives them one more chance to meet up, because it is their first time ever being at this school and a lot of these kids when they are here in kindergarten, they are here until fifth grade....So I think this being their first impression of our school for many that don't come to pre-k, it's good for them the most...just because [it] is brand new.

She went on to share another chance at the beginning of the school year where families could get familiar with the school and their child's teacher:

We do have usually what's called "Meet the Teacher" at the beginning of the year. Class lists are out so that the kids can find their name and they can come meet us and they can come see the classroom. Open House is usually not right before school starts; it's usually about a week or so after school starts.

The Mountview teacher mentioned that this year the teachers had their class lists early and that it smoothed the way for children entering her room, "She let us have our list the last day of school so we know who our students are." She added, "Now, I can get a little more familiar and know their names before they come in."

Kindergarten and Pre-k Teacher Relationships. The kindergarten teachers talked about how they were able to build connections with the pre-k teachers. The relationships that

teachers developed allowed them to share information about incoming students. Background issues or concerns about children were communicated so the kindergarten teachers would be aware of problems they might face and be prepared. The Sage Brook teacher said:

Well we're a small school so I mean we all communicate really well together; we see each other all the time. We talk... about the kids and their needs and stuff like that all the day. It's good communication...She might give me a background if there's issues if there's things I need to be aware of, or difficulties the child might have, or strengths the child might have, and stuff like that.

Likewise, the Garfield kindergarten teacher saw the value of interacting with pre-k teachers. She believed it helped build positive transitions for the children who would be attending in the fall. "But I think that working with [the pre-k teacher] and working with [the child care centers] that everyone's kind of trying to...prepare the kids."

This teacher discussed working together with the pre-k teacher and developing additional transition activities that involved both children and parents:

We talked about having a picnic at the beginning of the year for pre k and kindergarten. Their new students coming in [and] our new students coming in doing something like grilling some hot dogs, having them come in just to see us, get a chance to see the school....It gives some of those parents that have some maybe really negative experiences in school, gives them a chance to see that it's not all negative.

Transition Camp. The kindergarten teachers all expressed their pleasure with participating in transition camp. They identified the experience as a positive means to prepare children for kindergarten and was an important step in helping children adjust to kindergarten. The three schools participated in a transition camp during the summer of 2013. Another

transition camp was to take place during the summer of 2015. The teachers talked about the benefits of the first camp and how they were anticipating the upcoming camp. One of the kindergarten teachers talked about the advantages she saw with doing the transition camps:

The main goal of transition camp is to just smooth them into what kindergarten is....Some of the kids think because they were at that school they know it all but they don't. They're very surprised that they have different teachers and it's a different room.

The Sage Brook teacher described her experience with transition camp:

During transition camp, I try to give them a little dose of how our daily routine will go. It's short; they're only here for three hours, and so it's kind of a condensed version of how the day will go. We've spent a lot of time going over rules and expectations, procedures.... [It] makes it a little bit easier when school starts if some of them are at least familiar with the procedures.

The Garfield teacher talked about her expectations for the camp that was planned for the upcoming summer. The camp was helpful in giving her an opportunity to prepare for the next school year. She felt the camp provided a better understanding on what to expect with the incoming children:

It's like having this transition camp that we're going to be having this summer, at least this gives you a week to get them away from their parents and see how they're going to do....And that to me could give you a sign as to...that child [who] struggles a little bit more going away from mom so you might be able to prepare yourself...with a way to help that child better on the first day.

The Mountview teacher also saw the camp assisting children and teachers with the transition to kindergarten. She believed it reduced children's anxieties. Also, teachers enjoyed having some insight into the students who would be in their classes during the coming year:

I think it gives the teacher a better understanding [of the children]...The transitioning [the transition camp] makes you see...the value of children getting...a preview of what kindergarten's about. I think the preview part takes away a lot of anxiety. It takes away a lot of anxiety on the children as well as their parents...If you can get a little glimpse of what it's going to be like, I think it [makes] your experience just much better and makes the first day [easier]. We even said, [the other kindergarten teacher] and I...we feel like we have an advantage too because we got to pre meet these children. It's really hard the first day of school when you get 23 new faces; it's really nice that you can sort of remember a little bit about these children from just a few days at camp. It made our [the teachers'] anxiety a little better but definitely the children that got to be a part of it. It definitely made less anxiety [about] something new.

She also described how the camp supported parents:

When your child starts school you're as anxious and excited as they are. You want it to be safe and smooth and happy, so I think those children had those feelings and their parents [too]. It was good to have those parent meetings at the end where we talked... They had a lot of questions about school.

Practices with Parents

Practices with parents consisted of kindergarten teachers working to build relationships and facilitate communication. The teachers saw parents as an important support to their children in school and making positive transitions. They recognized that parents were involved with their

children in pre-k and creating relationships with parents once they entered kindergarten built continuity between the two.

Welcoming Parents. Welcoming parents into school was seen as a method of building bridges between home and school. The teachers saw parents coming to school as a way to make connections between home and school. Establishing methods for parents to feel welcome was essential for parents to take part in the activities that were offered at the school. One kindergarten teacher talked about how some parents were not comfortable in coming to school but building relationships with parents helped to reduce that reluctance:

Some...parents come in and they seem like they have a chip on their shoulder about school....[My concern is] what we can do to make their chip get smaller and go away so that they know we're not out to get [their] child. We're out to help...whatever we can do to help them.

The Garfield teacher talked about activities to encourage parents to participate. She viewed these activities as a method to build relationships with families. This teacher recognized that parents were not always willing to participate in school activities. She expressed that it was important to provide a variety of opportunities where parents were invited into the school.

I know that [pre-k] does a lot of things where family is involved in the classrooms. I've seen parents in there many times, and we have stuff that's available for different grades at different times of the year where they'll have a family math night and a family reading night....Anything that we can do that includes the family in a positive way, that we're not just calling them because they've gotten too many biffs [demerits] and they've gotten in trouble too many times, but you're calling and saying, "Hey, we want you to come join us for some family reading time."

Sharing Information. Sharing information with parents was seen as an important step in establishing positive relationships with them. Communicating with parents and keeping them informed about what was happening in school made for a smoother transition from pre-k into kindergarten. When parents understood the expectations and worked along with the teacher, the kindergarten teachers found the children were better adjusted in school.

The Sage Brook teacher described how she connected with families. She believed it was important to have regular interactions with parents. She saw frequent communication with parents as a means to build positive relationships, which in turn helped matters go smoother in the classroom. She uses several different ways of contacting families:

I e-mail quite a bit. You know at the beginning of the year parents always want to bring them in and you know I talk to them for a few minutes to try to work them out of the routine of coming in and wanting to talk every day. I try to e-mail; I probably e-mail parents three-four times a week....I will call parents sometimes for good reasons; it's good to hear the good things. That makes the bad things that you have to call for much easier after you've already called about the good things. We have a lot of interactions, a lot of communication. I think it's important. It makes everything go a lot smoother.

This teacher also spoke about how she connected with parents before they started kindergarten. She found in many cases she was already familiar with the children or their parents before they started school:

A lot of times I already know them because of siblings or I've seen them in the building, or I know them just because I just know them from the community. Then I'll meet them when they bring them in for transition camp and stuff like that.

The Garfield teacher spoke about how she communicated with parents throughout the school year. Like the Sage Brook teacher, she felt regular communication with parents was necessary to making a smooth transition into kindergarten. “We call the parents before school starts to especially talk about orientation and the time and...to make sure they can get there.”

This teacher believed communication was vital during the kindergarten year. She thought that establishing patterns of positive communication in the early years of school might lead to long-term parent engagement in school:

I think good parent communication is very, very important for this age, especially. It seems like when they get older that kind of diminishes a little more, that the parents don't get as involved...I don't know if it's because this is new and exciting...But if we can start it now, keep it going, then maybe those parents will continue to be actively involved.

Barriers

This section addresses the Clifton kindergarten teachers' perceptions related to question number four and discusses what they perceived to be barriers and/or inducements relating to the implementation of transition practices. The teachers' insights related to the barriers that hinder transitions involved the upbringing of the students entering kindergarten, separation anxiety at the beginning of the year, pre-k and kindergarten utilizing different teaching styles, and in only one school, the lack of interaction that negatively impacted communication. The inducements for positive transition practices consisted of children attending pre-k programs, developing the readiness skills that will prepare them for kindergarten, and attending transition training.

Upbringing of Students. The kindergarten teachers in Clifton County perceived that the upbringing of many of their students had a negative impact on their transition into school. They were troubled about some of the environments children were exposed to, technology that curbed

social interactions, and parents not taking advantage of learning opportunities in the community. These issues were seen as barriers to having a successful start to school. One teacher shared her concern:

My biggest concern is that children are coming from environments [where] the drugs are very scary....I think a lot of young people that are doing these drugs [are] having drug babies and children that are addicted to drugs when they are in their pregnancies.

Another teacher had similar worries:

I have concerns that I see a lot more grandparents raising children and I have a lot more kids that have drug-related home issues and I have a lot more kids that come from neglectful or abusive backgrounds. Those are my type of concerns, but I don't have a concern as far as them being in my classroom, do you know what I mean? I'm more concerned about what happens to them when they leave school.

The Garfield teacher felt it was important for parents to understand the increased expectations and demands of kindergarten today. This teacher found it important that parents understand what children will be required to do once they enter kindergarten:

I found that the parents' role is extremely important in that...some of the parents still [are] not realizing what kindergarten involves. I think they're still into more what kindergarten *used* to look like instead of what we're more into now. That it's evolved a little bit, that I think if the parents could understand more what's expected in kindergarten and that it's the foundation for it all.

Separating from Parents. The kindergarten teachers believe that separating from parents at the beginning of the school year was a transition issue. The Garfield teacher talked about the impact it had in her classroom:

I've noticed...this year...the separation anxiety that some of them have had from being away from their parents. More than half of the kids came straight from home. So I had about four or five that were really emotional; it's their big change of being away from mommy or daddy, aunt, uncle, or grandma, whoever they're with, and that is like a big struggle there for the first couple weeks.

The Sage Brook teacher talked about separation anxiety as well. She found that it was not just the children who had difficulty separating but parents often had problems letting go as well. This teacher found herself helping both children and parents cope with the move into her kindergarten classroom:

Like I had one year...criers. They cried all the time and...when one of them started crying then the other would start crying. And then you have other years where they're like, "See ya!" They come in and they're A-Okay, you know, and then I have years when they might come in fine and then in the middle of the day they start missing mom. Once the parents are gone they're usually like, "Hmm, okay." I tell parents all the time, "You're going to cry when your kid comes to kindergarten." I know the feeling. Bring them to the door, smile, hug them, tell them to have a great day, wave to them with that smile on your face, go to your car.... Just don't let them see you crying about it. They don't need that stress, they don't need to worry about you.

Differing Teaching Styles. The differences in teaching styles between pre-k programs and kindergarten were seen as a possible obstacle to children as they began kindergarten. The perception of one kindergarten teacher was that the pre-k teachers were not allowed to engage in certain teaching methods:

I think one thing [we]...have talked about before is the...things that pre-k's not allowed to do. Like I've heard they're not allowed to get in and correct handwriting. Like if they see it's being written incorrectly it's supposed to be like just they're exploring and that's what they're doing, and we feel like that's one barrier. We feel like if they're able to get in there and help a little sooner maybe some of those habits that they get can be broken.

She also noted that some children entering kindergarten have difficulty with some of the kindergarten rules. This teacher recognized pre-k is not as structured an environment as kindergarten, so the behavioral expectations are different. In pre-k children are able to talk freely to their peers throughout the day. That changes when they enter kindergarten. It is an adjustment for the children:

I think a lot of them don't have...the ability to know when it's their turn to talk. I think it's because they've never had that before...In pre-k a lot of times there is unstructured time where they're allowed to talk to each other and... in daycare settings ...or when they're at home they can talk when they want.

Another kindergarten teacher had concerns about the pre-k curriculum. She saw the curriculum in pre-k as being very different from the kindergarten program. In her opinion, it did not prepare children academically for kindergarten.

I just think the curriculum in pre-k is so entirely different from kindergarten....They don't come in as prepared as you'd like them to be....Unfortunately I don't really know what they do in pre-k, but I know a lot of things they *can't* do in pre-k, so I'm thinking those kinds of things would prep them more to be ready to know what's expected in kindergarten.

Lack of Communication. One kindergarten teacher stated that she felt that she did not have a good line of communication with the pre-k teacher in her school. When asked if she had much communication with the pre-k classroom her response was “Not at all.” She went on to describe some of the issues that occurred in her school:

They start at a later time and we start so early and the minute your feet hit the floor at school you’re responsible [for the students]....They don’t use the bathrooms that we use.... So, really when we get the kids we start from the beginning with them even if they’ve gone to the public pre-k. Every pre-k is a little different....I’d say about half of them have gone to the public pre-k at our school, so the other half are brand new...In my ten years at [this school], no, there’s been no connection. In fact, they were kind of separated from us. The previous principal was there for eight or nine years and she kept them totally away from us, worrying about their safety I think. That wasn’t good.

Inducements

The kindergarten teachers identified the inducements for positive transition practices including the school readiness skills children had developed, children attending pre-k programs before beginning kindergarten, and the transition training they were involved in.

School Readiness Skills. The teachers observed that being ready for kindergarten consisted of children having specific skills and attitudes related to starting school. Teachers believed that having these skills enabled children to smoothly transition into kindergarten. They discussed the skills they thought children should exhibit upon entry into kindergarten. The Garfield teacher expressed it this way: “I think a big thing is a want to learn.” Another teacher talked about children being prepared and the skills she felt were important for children to have acquired in pre-k before transitioning into kindergarten:

A good transition would be when the students can come in unafraid, and not worried and are prepared for a different atmosphere...I'm not worried whether they can come to me being able to read. I'm more worried... do they know how to listen to a story, do they know how to answer questions about a story? Are they willing to learn; are they ready to learn new procedures? Are they ready to move on?

The Sage Brook teacher agreed. She noted that there were certain skills children should display when moving into kindergarten:

They should be familiar with the letters or a concept of a letter. Know some of the letters; at least know some of the letters in their name. If they can follow directions, behavior is more...and they can listen attentively for a certain amount of time and they know who they are, then they're ready.

She went on to discuss what she told parents when they asked if their children were ready to start kindergarten:

People ask me that all the time when they have children that are starting kindergarten....They'll ask me, "What do they need to know?" I say, "Do they know their name? Do they know how to respond to a person when they're talked to? Can they write their name?" I'm not really concerned on whether they know all their letters... I tell parents all the time, just leave me something to teach them. I mean it's okay, they'll be fine.

The Mountview teacher echoed those views. She also wanted children to have knowledge of letters and sounds:

When you talked about being ready for kindergarten, my biggest thing is I don't really care if they read but I do want them to have a knowledge of the alphabet and acknowledge that they make sounds and they go together to make words.

Attendance in Pre-k. Along with having developed a set of basic skills before entry into kindergarten, the teachers saw the advantage of children attending pre-k before they started kindergarten. The Garfield teacher put it this way:

I feel like it's very beneficial to us that our pre-k is right here. So, I think it helps these kids when you talk to them all year when they're in pre-k because we pass each other all the time, and every time that we pass each other [the pre-k teacher] says, "Oh look there's a kindergarten teacher watching you; she's looking to see who she wants to have in her class next year."...I'll point out kids that I see, or maybe if I had a brother, "Oh wait, isn't [that] your brother?" and they'll say yes so they get to know you and I think that helps because then when they come, the majority of them are coming from there.

The Sage Brook teacher noted the benefits as well: "I think they do a great job in preschool. Even the private church sponsored preschools in the area do a great job." The Mountview teacher agreed: "You want to see them adjust from being away from their parents and that's happening a lot more because of preschools. That's a good thing."

Transition Training. The kindergarten teachers found the transition training they participated in to be a valuable experience. It helped teachers to have a better understanding of transitions and what the process should entail. It further gave the kindergarten teachers a better understanding of what children were experiencing in pre-k. One of the teachers had this perception of the year-long transition training she attended:

When we were in there, there were teachers who were pre-k teachers too or people who have had experience in the pre-k class....It gives you a better idea of how, especially at the beginning of the year, getting them [to move] from maybe a more [play experience], because in my room, a lot of times there's not necessarily free play. They have play time, but they have to play with what it is I've got out for them, rather than in [pre-k] they may have the toys to go wherever they want....We [pre-k and kindergarten teachers] work in the same building, but a lot of times you don't get the opportunity to really discuss what's different about your classrooms, but when you go to a class like that where that's the purpose, you have [a] chance to ...say, "Hey, this is what we're doing" even if you're just down the hallway from each other.

Another teacher felt the training had been beneficial: "I think it gives the teacher the better understanding of what they're learning through transitioning. But definitely the transitioning [training]...makes you, the teacher, see the value of children getting...a preview of what kindergarten's about."

CHAPTER SIX: RESULTS FROM MERRITT COUNTY

In the previous chapter, findings from the Clifton County teachers were presented. This chapter includes the case findings from the six teachers from Merritt County. It focuses on how the teachers perceive and experience the practices involving the transition of children from pre-k into kindergarten. Chapter seven will be a comparative analysis of the teachers from the two counties, interpretation of the findings, discussion of potential flaws of the study, implications for practitioners and policy makers, and suggestions for future research.

In this chapter, the responses from Merritt County teachers have been aligned with the following research questions:

1. How do preschool teachers perceive the practices that support children in the transition from preschool into kindergarten?
2. What do they perceive to be the barriers and/or inducements relating to the implementation of transition practices?
3. How do kindergarten teachers perceive the practices that support children in the transition from preschool into kindergarten?
4. What do they perceive to be the barriers and/or inducements relating to the implementation of transition practices?

PRE-K TEACHERS

This section addresses preschool teachers' perceptions in relation to research question number one and discusses practices that support children in the transition from preschool to kindergarten. It conveys the teachers' observations and insights related to the practices of teachers, school practices, and practices with parents. Teacher practices included preparing children for kindergarten, children being actively engaged in the classroom, building on

children's interests, and using standards and curriculum as guides. The identified school practices included giving children opportunities to visit kindergarten classrooms and family events sponsored by the school. Finally, teachers identified practices with parents as pre-k teachers supporting parents to work with their children at home and teachers building rapport with families.

Teacher Practices

Preparation for Kindergarten. The pre-k teachers in Merritt County shared the methods they used to ensure children would be prepared for kindergarten. These were comprehensive in nature with the purpose of getting their students ready socially, emotionally, and academically. When the Bateman teacher was asked about preparing children for kindergarten, she noted there were several skills she hoped her children would accomplish during their year in pre-k: "You're constantly getting them ready...the social/emotional [components]. They learn to be part of a group, take turns, share...They can be independent, they can problem solve." She added there were other experiences provided which would prepare them for kindergarten: "It's also [seeing if] they have the foundation of shapes, colors; do they have what...our kindergarten teachers are requesting."

The teacher from Abbott talked about her approach to getting her students prepared for the transition to kindergarten:

They're ready to write their ABCs and I do that...especially for kindergarten, but for preschool, school readiness is that they can come in and they're ready to learn. Not that they have to know anything when they come but it's better if they're not attached to their mom's leg and we have to pry them off. That happens every year at the beginning of the year, but at least then they're learning and they're not doing that in kindergarten.

She continued by saying she wanted them: “To learn to play with other kids, and to share, and to learn the rules, and you know, get to where they can be learners [ready to learn].”

The Powell Park teacher agreed with her colleagues. She put a great deal of emphasis on children being ready socially and emotionally:

A lot of social-emotional [skills], being able to leave your mommy, your daddy, or whoever your caregiver is. I think when you’re able to socially and emotionally, you’re ready for stuff, your readiness, your pre-academic things sort of flow a little easier.

Active Engagement. The pre-k teachers all believed that keeping children actively involved in learning is important preparation for kindergarten. These teachers felt that it was important to make learning fun. One teacher described how she actively involved children in learning in her room: “If their basic needs aren’t met, how can I expect them to sit and listen to me? If I’ve got behavior [problems in my group time] and they’ve been sitting there for ten minutes, that’s my fault, not their fault.”

Another teacher, when asked how she thought children in pre-k learned, responded: “Through their play with other children.” She then explained: “We do fun activities....It’s not about sitting down with pencils and paper....She described how it looked in her room: “If we’re doing recycling we turn housekeeping into [a] recycling center and we build stuff in blocks out of boxes from recyclable materials.”

Yet another teacher told of the activities that happened in her classroom: “During our morning group circle we do a lot of singing, movement songs, dancing, we’re doing a lot of math because we do our calendar and patterning, and weather, head counting.” She shared her opinion on how children learn and how she facilitated that:

I think they learn a whole lot of different ways. I think they learn by being active learners. They're hands on. Some of my kids for whatever reason this year took the approach that they needed to see everything....We read tons of stories. I like to do a lot of activities from stories. A lot of playing.

Building on Children's Interests. The Merritt County pre-k teachers felt that building on children's interests and being child-centered were important teaching methods to support children's readiness for kindergarten. This meant children's interests were considered when teachers planned curriculum. When asked about her approach to teaching, the Powell Park teacher commented: "My approach is I try to do things that the kids are interested in....Then it's a lot easier for them; they don't think they're learning, but they are." The Abbott teacher depicted it this way: "Most of the strategies I use are through my centers, you know. I set up my centers to revolve around what we're learning about. Usually it's child directed."

When asked about her approach to teaching pre-k, the Bateman teacher described how she followed the children's interests: "It's child directed. We do an interest survey; we find out what they're interested in and we go with it. If it's half the class this...half the class this, then we're doing two areas, two project-based learning [studies]." She explained that one of her projects continued throughout the whole year. The children wanted to study trees. She was not enthusiastic about the topic but went along with what the children were interested in. Other projects grew out of the tree project; new interests in nature developed and the children began to be curious about flowers and another project emerged. The teacher commented: "They went with it... that's been the whole year. We've just built, and built, and we've taken stuff out and they bring stuff in." She found this teaching approach improved the outcomes for her students.

Her outlook on keeping the children actively involved in their learning is: “Meet their needs and find out what they’re interested in and go with it.”

Using Standards and Curriculum as Guides. These teachers use curriculum and standards to guide them as they prepare children for the move into kindergarten. In West Virginia the state has implemented the West Virginia Early Learning Standards Framework for pre-k, which is aligned with the kindergarten standards. They were developed to address school readiness, are used to guide instructional practice in all state-funded pre-k classrooms, and prepare children for the transition into kindergarten (WVDE, 2015). One teacher said: “Well, we have a curriculum to guide us.” She added that the standards were important in helping her decide what she needed to focus on in the classroom:

I know I need to accomplish this set of standards that’s put in front of me. I need to make sure these kids are getting that sometime throughout the year, several times throughout the year, but also based on their readiness for that skill.

Another teacher spoke about the curriculum and the standards as a means to build competencies and prepare her students for kindergarten:

The Creative Curriculum... the project-based learning, the *Handwriting Without Tears*, I mean, if we supplement all that, you know, with what we have....I think it all works together if you use it right....It’s made it easier by...just keeping it developmentally appropriate.

School Practices

Kindergarten Visits. The Merritt County pre-kindergarten teachers shared the transition activities that were done in their schools. There were events sponsored for the whole school as well as those that happened just between pre-k and kindergarten. The Abbott teacher believed

that the reoccurring visits to kindergarten throughout the year helped prepare her children for the move into kindergarten:

Once a month, starting at the beginning of the year, we do what's called a "Jamboree."

The first couple of times we come up to the kindergarten classes and we all meet together in one room and we sing songs from the white board;...then they're kind of based around the holidays....So, they get to come to the kindergarten room, see the rooms and see what they're doing in there. We also, usually at the beginning of the year, we play on the playground some with them....It's kindergarten and preschool together.

She went on to explain that regular meetings between the kindergarten and pre-k teachers helped to support the transition to kindergarten:

We also meet with the kindergarten teachers probably every other month. We have a PLC [Professional Learning Communities] meeting. We'll meet with them every other month during one of our PLC meetings and talk about different things. We also bring them [the children] at the end of the year to look around the room and see how they're doing things...We also eat lunch at the same time, so that's another thing.

The Powell Park teacher shared the transition activities done at her school to prepare children for the move to kindergarten. She talked about how she tried to establish links with the kindergarten classrooms to help her students prepare for the transition into kindergarten:

Sometimes we do a little impromptu meetings to go down to kindergarten just to go through, "Can we go through your door for outside recess?" Just trying to get them to see those teachers...make a connection. Throughout the year...we do...school-wide stuff, so it's easy....We're grouped with kindergarten to do things... we visit their rooms....They don't ever come to visit our rooms.

Family Events. Each of the schools in Merritt County sponsored events for the whole family. The Powell Park teacher talked about a successful event at her school: “Last year our principal did...a big community fair, like a back-to-school thing, and had a huge turnout, and it was really, really nice and you know...she wants to do it again.” She added that the school sponsored some specific transition activities as well:

I know our school sponsored like a family fun night for parents to come in... They asked the parents to come in with their kids and I think they had activities for the kids. They had the kindergarten teachers there to talk to. I think they mainly try to talk about expectations.

The Abbott teacher described an activity done in the fall that supported transitions for all children: “At the beginning of the year we have a back-to-school bash and they come and meet their teacher for the next year.”

At Bateman they had a specific program to support parents. They have a Save-the-Children Coordinator who works with families. Part of her job is preparing families for the transition to school. The teacher described the transition activity that was done by that individual:

She does her parent group once a month...She took them to the kindergarten classrooms for, like, five minutes. They just kind of stood at the door, “This is [a kindergarten] room” and [and the kindergarten teacher said], “Hi. This is my room,” that kind of thing. [The Save-the-Children Coordinator] made them a copy of their schedules so they could see how the day was going to be different than preschool, and...if the parents had any questions she went back to the room. They were all just happy to see the classrooms; they kind of wanted to see how different they were from the preschool.

Practices with Parents

Working with Children at Home. The pre-k teachers each talked about how information was sent home to help parents prepare themselves and their children for transition to kindergarten. Letters about what to expect in kindergarten, checklists, home visits, and activities for learning opportunities in the home were some of the ways teachers communicated with parents in order to support learning in the home. One teacher talked about the ways she let parents know about this type of information:

I try to tell them...especially at the last home visit...and I show them what they need to work on based on my observations and based on their progress reports. Then also at kindergarten registration they give them a sheet that kind of says what they need to be able to do for kindergarten.

She felt this was important information for parents to have: “When they have that list, if they see things their child can’t do, to work on it with their child at home so that they are ready when they come.”

Another teacher shared a kindergarten checklist that was sent home at a Head Start and school board parent meeting that gave parents an idea of the expectations in kindergarten. It stated: “If your child has acquired most of these skills on this checklist and will be at least five years old at the start of the summer before he or she starts kindergarten, he or she is probably ready for kindergarten.” Some of the items on the list included skills such as: “Control own behavior,” “Pay attention for short periods of time to adult-directed tasks,” “Manage bathroom needs without help,” “Listen without interrupting,” and “Identify letters in own name.”

Still another teacher spoke with parents about things to do at home to prepare their children and themselves to make the move to kindergarten:

I always talk to them about kindergarten....This is going to be different and this is what you can...expect at the beginning of the year. They're used to us and they're used to our schedule. That first week is going to be kind of scary. They're going to be tired, they're going to be...excited yet they're going to be scared. And you've got to encourage them and that kind of thing. But, then, and this is what you can expect.

To help with the transition into kindergarten, the Bateman teacher encouraged parents to engage in activities that would encourage learning. She suggested to parents that they work on skills during the summer that their children did not yet accomplish in pre-k. She suggested doing simple activities that could be integrated into shopping or tasks around the house that would promote learning and prepare children for kindergarten.

The Abbott teacher also agreed that parents should be working with their children over the summer to prepare them for the transition to kindergarten, "I think it's that parents need to work on...when they have that [readiness] list, if they see things their child can't do, to work on it with their child at home so that they are ready when they come.

Building Rapport. Building rapport with parents and establishing relationships was felt to be a way to help parents be comfortable with schools in general. When parents had a positive attitude about school it helped children make a better adjustment to kindergarten. The teacher at Powell Park told how it was important to establish good relationships with her parents:

I think my approach is probably that I'm very laid back....In the beginning I want all my families to be on board, so I take that very laid back [approach]. I want to establish a nice rapport with my families.

She added that she was: "Trying to get to know them and find out what was going on." She noted parents sometimes have concerns about coming to school: "You know, a lot of

parents...fear coming to school, [of] maybe being called out to ask a question or [to say they] have a concern.”

The Bateman teacher shared several stories about the families she had in her classroom and it was obvious she was committed to helping the children and their parents have a positive school experience. After talking about a family that lived in a very rural area which was quite isolated from their neighbors she shared that she would be available to help if it was needed:

I always send her [the mom] a note, “Is everything okay? You’ve got everything you need?” She’s never said, “I don’t, can you help me?” But she knows I would be, like, in the car and down the road. I mean...it just wouldn’t be a problem.

Barriers

This section addresses the Merritt pre-k teachers’ perceptions related to question number two and discusses what they perceive to be the barriers and/or inducements relating to the implementation of transition practices. The teachers’ insights related to the barriers that hinder transitions such as the economic challenges of families, increased expectations in kindergarten, and dissension among the teaching staff. An inducement for positive transitions was found to be that children had an easier time moving unto kindergarten when they had previously attended pre-k.

Economic Challenges. The pre-k teachers described Merritt County as an area that struggles with economic challenges. Due to the poverty in the area many families face hardship and deal with difficult circumstances. One of the pre-k teachers looked at the family situations and had concerns for the children. Isolation and poverty of families in rural areas with disadvantaged home lives led the teacher to worry about the wellbeing of the children when away from school. Her viewpoint was that the circumstances of these families may have an

effect on the children being ready for kindergarten. She talked about a family whose living situation made her uneasy:

A lot of those houses back in there, the ones I'm talking about, they're isolated. They are very isolated families. Usually the mother doesn't have transportation and their nearest neighbor may be two miles...maybe three miles, maybe more. And we have, like, one little guy in this room, the dad's on the boat. [The mother is] not allowed to have the car. He parks the car, so she has to have groceries for 30 days. I mean, they are really, really isolated.

When asked how these children do in school this teacher described some of the issues she observed when she had 12 Head Start children in her class:

They come in [with] very low vocabulary...Out of 20 kids, I had 12 Head Start kids. When we started out and I was just kind of assessing them at circle time, I think three of them could count over three...I had several that "What do you mean, count? I don't know what that is." No shapes, no colors, peeing their pants, no bathroom control, bowel movements. I mean it was— it was a hot mess in the beginning of the year.

Another challenge observed by the teachers was the variety in family structures. This was seen as a concern because the family situation often had an impact on how well the child succeeded in school. One teacher described the kinds of families she observed in her room:

We had five kids being raised by their grandparents. This year, I think four kids are in the home with the mother and father; and the rest are—it's a variety of makeup. Might be the mother, might be the father; one has shared custody, might be the grandparent.

Increased Expectations. The pre-k teachers all observed that the kindergarten teachers had heightened expectations for children entering their classes. These teachers feared that the

children entering kindergarten may not be ready due a variety of factors which included greater academic expectations in kindergarten, children having late birthdays, and behaviors children may exhibit at school. The Powell Park teacher described how higher expectations had an effect on children starting kindergarten: “It becomes this whole little world of academic pressure. It makes me nervous because...if they don’t meet...things in my room, they [the kindergarten teachers] don’t have time to re-teach that in kindergarten.” Moreover she worried about the teaching methods children would experience in kindergarten, “They’re all going to all be expected to all come have a seat at the table, and this is what our work is, or this is the worksheet.”

The Abbott teacher made observations that likewise dealt with children being prepared for kindergarten, “It’s a big jump from what you’re doing in preschool to what they’re doing in kindergarten...there’s definitely concerns whether they’re ready.” She described how the kindergarten expectations were different than pre-k expectations:

They are going into kindergarten and they have to know every letter of the alphabet within the first two weeks and they have to count to 100. It’s just a lot harder, I mean, it’s a big leap from preschool to kindergarten.

She went on to speak about her concern for children with birthdays near the kindergarten cut-off date. She feared that some of these children would not be ready for the rigors of kindergarten:

Sometimes it’s just the late birthdays, sometimes, you know, it’s that age and you can just tell that they’re younger than the other kids. If they don’t play with the other kids, if they aren’t listening or following the rules, if they can’t spell their name by the end of preschool they’re going to struggle in kindergarten. Those type of things. Usually if they

can't spell their name and they can't recognize any letters, they're usually not ready socially either.

The Bateman teacher expressed her worry that children with behavior problems might have a difficult time transitioning into kindergarten:

Sometimes, maybe there's a lot going on in a child's life, and I'm concerned that they're going to be looked at as a burden because there's so much going on and they have bad behaviors. But, they have bad behaviors because there's so much going on.

Dissension among Teachers. When discussing the topic of transition to kindergarten with the pre-k teachers, it became apparent that there was some tension in a few of these schools that could be considered a barrier to smooth transitions. One teacher shared how the strained relationship among the kindergarten teachers made it difficult for her to plan and carry out transition practices. The tension among these teachers made her uncomfortable and she was not able to accomplish what she believed would be best for her students around implementing positive transition practices. She explained how she viewed the situation. Initially when she approached the kindergarten teachers to plan for the transition to kindergarten she felt a lack of organization and inconsistency:

I want to say lack of organization because even though we're in PLC [Professional Learning Community] together twice a month, because kindergarten and pre-k are together, there's a lot of different personalities in there. It's not a priority. I mean, it's kind of like well, we do that, so we're covered.

Once they came up with a plan the pre-k teacher felt that the relationship between the kindergarten teachers made it difficult to complete the arrangements for transitions as she wished for it to go:

Here...we started visiting the [kindergarten rooms regularly] a couple of years ago. It's been inconsistent, which is frustrating because it really did help a lot. One of the kindergarten teachers—once they have been to her room once she doesn't want them back, so that's enough. And then the other ones said, "Well I'd kind of like them to keep coming, but if she quit then I should probably quit, too." There's not a unity there. I asked three times for us to begin this year and the one teacher told me no. They're not speaking to each other....But then when the other one found out this one told me no, she wondered why I didn't come to her. We did get them all in [the visits].

When asked if there were other supports in the school she replied, "I want to say the principal, but no, not really." She continued to reflect on what she believed to be the problem that made it difficult to implement a transition plan:

Well, the communication between me and each teacher as an individual is good. It's very good....But when we're all together it's like a power struggle between them, you know....I wish it was better....There's just some...dynamics in the school right now that aren't so great.

Another pre-k teacher was frustrated that the kindergarten teachers did not understand what the expectations for learning were in pre-k and the kindergarten teachers were unaware that there were standards for pre-k. She found they were surprised that students who had attended pre-k were introduced to content there that students were expected to know in kindergarten.

In the kindergarten wing...I saw they sent a thing home to parents that they were working on 3D shapes, and I said, "Oh, my kids are good at 3D shapes." And they're like, "What do you mean?" And I was like, "We covered 3D shapes this year; we do every year." And they're like, "Ohh." And then at the end of the year the same teacher said, "What all

do you all do?” I think they think we just sit down here and play, and I was like, “Oh, you know, you can get online and see what our early learning standards are.”

This teacher also expressed irritation with kindergarten teachers for not reading the transition reports she wrote on her children that would be sent on to the kindergarten teachers. These reports provide an overview of what the child has learned in pre-k and they are sent on to the kindergarten teacher to review (WVDE, 2010).

With our transition reports that we have printed off, you know they swear they’re not in their permanent folders....You’re trying to say...this kids loves math, this kid loves to talk and will tell you all these great things when he draws or paints, and then they don’t read them? That was just my conversation yesterday evening. “Oh we don’t get those.” “Yes, they’re in your permanent folders.” So that tells me once again, another year has gone by...but [the reports are] not being looked at. It bothers me.

She appeared to feel there was a lack of respect from the kindergarten teachers for what pre-k did and even for the teachers themselves.

Lack of Transportation. Another barrier to transitions was the lack of parents participating in transition activities. The Bateman teacher recognized that one of the reasons for parents not having greater participation in transition activities was that they did not have the transportation available to attend these events. She was talking about parents not attending the Move-up day activity:

I don’t think I’ve ever had a parent come. I know I haven’t. So, I really feel that...for the majority of them it’s a transportation thing. You’re going to come for 20 [minutes] ... then you’re taking your child home.

She thought that was the same reason parents did not attend the transition meetings offered by the school board:

And there's the [transition] meeting the [Pre-k Coordinator] held this year. It's held every year. But like I said it's always a poor turnout. That's probably for various reasons but I'd say transportation is part of that, too....But our area [turnout] was very low. I mean, some of them honestly...can't, you know. That might be their grocery money; that might be the gas trip to the grocery store and back.

Inducements

Attendance in Pre-k. The pre-k teachers observed that attendance in a pre-k program helped children and their families make an easier transition into kindergarten. Children who had attended pre-k were more prepared and ready to learn. Families were comfortable with the school and were more likely to partner with the school. The Bateman teacher talked about how she was preparing the children for kindergarten throughout the year in pre-k:

Everything is transitioning. You know, you're constantly...from day one we're transitioning. You're constantly getting them ready for something, you know, and each step of the way you might be in the middle, you might be at the end, but you're still- you're constantly getting them ready.

She went on to share what one of the kindergarten teachers told her after getting a group of students that had not attended a pre-k program and observed the children who had not attended pre-k were behind the children who had:

Two years ago [one of the kindergarten teachers] had four or five students that did not go to preschool and the rest of [her students] all came from [the pre-k rooms in this school]. And she said, "I really appreciate what you do. These [other] kids came in with no

preschool, no shapes, no colors, no sense of walking in a line, no sense of being part of a group.”

This is the same teacher discussed above, who had had a large group of children enrolled in her room who were Head Start eligible. She had been troubled in the beginning of the year that she was not going to be able to meet their needs. However she found that this group of children made amazing progress:

Wow, I don't know how this is going to go. And I was scared...But they were like sponges, and everything in here was so appreciated...It was the most rewarding year, and they were ready to go to kindergarten at the end of the year, because they had soaked up everything, and their families were excited about it and they were talking about it, you know. And I kept those send-home activities...in their little backpacks and they would do those activities. They just didn't have the resources...My gosh, what these kids...gained!

Reach Out to Community Pre-k Programs. Powell Park Primary School is located in one of the larger towns in Merritt County. Two day care centers in the community have pre-k classrooms that feed into the school. The pre-k teacher at Powell Park thought a way to encourage parents to be comfortable with school and foster their participation in transitions would be for the school to sponsor regular events throughout the year where they could come and participate in activities at the school:

It would be nice if we were able to do activities that brought those families that were going to be in our school, to our school...But it would be nice if we could just have something, not just the last of school when it's hectic, but have things you know

throughout the school year that would bring parents in...whether it be fun activities that they can just relax and be there, or maybe have information for them.

KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS

This section addresses the question of Merritt County kindergarten teachers' perceptions in relation to research question number three and discusses the practices that support children in the transition from preschool into kindergarten. It conveys the kindergarten teachers' observations and insights related to teacher practices, school practices, and practices with parents. The teacher strategies included instructional practices and home visits. The school-practices consisted of visits in school, school sponsored events, and communication with pre-k teachers. Practices with families involved communication methods with parents.

Teacher Practices

The kindergarten teachers in Merritt County discussed specific strategies that supported the positive transition from pre-k into kindergarten. First they discussed the instructional practices that were used for teaching in the kindergarten classrooms. Next they discussed how home visits were a way to build relationships with children and families as they were transitioning into kindergarten.

Instructional Practices. The Merritt County kindergarten teachers each talked about direct instruction as a method they found beneficial when teaching skills to children as they were starting kindergarten. These approaches were different from how children had been taught in pre-k in that they were more structured. A combination of direct instruction for literacy activities and the use of manipulatives for math, helped children adjust to the more structured type of teaching that happens in kindergarten. Using peer support gave children the chance to interact

with others while developing skills in reading and writing. One teacher described her teaching methods this way:

I'm big [with] direct instruction....I do a lot of "I'm going to do it first and you're going to follow me."...I do a lot of modeling....If somebody is still having trouble, then they help each other. We have peer buddies and they help each other if they're not right or working on something and somebody gets stuck.

This teacher went on to explain how teaching math skills was different than teaching reading. It was more hands-on and focused on the exploration of materials. She shared that her children really enjoyed math because they viewed it as play: "But math is exploring...unifix cubes, building blocks, your buttons, you know, comparing."

Another teacher described how...she, too, had a rather structured teaching environment where she engaged in direct instruction along with integrating some movement and exploration: "It's direct instruction....I love it because I think it helps so much with them learning to read. They have to watch [and] pay attention." She went on to explain other ways she had of teaching. She integrated movement and active learning alongside the structured activities throughout the day. This helped the children coming from pre-k to transition to new teaching styles. Direct instruction was a key teaching strategy for this teacher but she realized children needed to be active and have opportunities for fun:

They would practice writing letters, numbers, their name, whatever. Then...we would do opening...calendar... and then we would go directly into math workshop which most of the time was centers....We would take time to do large motor things, brain breaks, that sort of thing.

Yet another teacher explained her approach: “We don’t sit down at the tables very much....We do opening on the carpet, then they’ll go to reading centers and math centers and I just don’t like to have them confined in one area for very long.”

Home Visits. The kindergarten teachers in Merritt County conducted home visits with all of the incoming kindergarten children and their families before school started. When asked about transition practices, they all expressed that these visits were one of the key methods used to transition children into kindergarten. These visits helped the kindergarten teachers build relationships with children and their families at the beginning of the school year and helped make the adjustment to kindergarten easier.

The Bateman teacher voiced her feelings about home visits: “I’m thankful that we still do home visits because that way I get to see their home environment.” She went on to explain her approach to making home visits:

I love them [home visits] because I feel like the child has met me, “You’ve been to my house.” Throughout the year we’ll be talking about different things and then, “Do you remember when you came to my house and you looked at my bedroom?”...I go...and tell them that I’m the teacher and let them [the parents] know if there’s anything missing from their folder, like shots or birth certificate or whatever. Then I just let them know some things that we’ll be doing throughout the school year. And then we give them a packet of words that we’ll be working on and shapes and letters and numbers and...a cardboard piece of paper that tells them how to write their letters correctly.

The Abbott teacher believed that home visits were a positive aspect for the teachers and families and was pleased that her county supported these visits. She described how she went about carrying out home visits: “I think it’s really beneficial because we’re actually seeing the

environment those children are coming from. It's giving them a chance to see us on their home turf and talk to us." When asked how parents received the home visit she replied:

I think most are okay with that. They kind of know about it now....There's probably only been a handful of times for me that I wasn't invited into a house, and I don't think it was because they didn't want me there necessarily, you know...I don't push that. They can meet me in the yard, I'll talk to them in the yard, [or] we'll sit on the porch, I'm good.

The Powell Park teacher shared her experience with making home visits. During the home visit, she spoke with parents and children, giving them information concerning what children would be learning in kindergarten and about routines such as meals and the storage of their belongings. She described it this way:

Home visits, I usually try to make it about 15 minutes. We take a packet of...ABCs to trace, usually some paper with dotted lines on it to practice cutting, maybe numbers. We give them a list of vocabulary words, and...an idea of what we're going to be learning this year in a little packet. And I just talk to the kids and tell them I'm the teacher and tell them if they want to pack their lunch they can....We'll eat breakfast at school, [and] we have a snack. I always say we don't nap anymore....Then I just ask them if they have a question or is there something they want to know. I tell them we have lockers. We do have toys. You know, just kind of reassuring them.

She talks about the first day of school during the visit so the children and parents know what to expect. She recognizes it may be scary for children and their parents:

On the first day of school mom can bring you down to the room, but then after that [she's] not allowed in....[You] have to come all the way down the hallway, then all the way down the other hallway to get down to kindergarten.

School Practices

The Merritt County kindergarten teachers explained how each school implemented transition practices. One school, Abbott, had a formal transition plan that was implemented throughout the school year. The other two schools had family events and visits between pre-k and kindergarten towards the end of the school year. Each school also sponsored family events at the beginning of the school year.

Visits in School. At Abbott the kindergarten teacher described how the pre-k and kindergarten classes got together monthly for a fun activity. “We started a few years ago...with our preschoolers, we did Jamboree once a month.” She went on to describe the activities that took place during the year together:

Once a month near the end of the month we would bring preschool...down here. A few times we went to their room too because our kids like going back and seeing that. We would sing songs together for about half an hour. We did our field trip in December....We have lunch basically at the same time; we’re in there a little earlier than they are.

She went on to share how she saw benefits for the children entering kindergarten from engaging in these joint activities:

We’ve talked about [it]...I think it’s helped, at least with our preschool group, because they’re seeing us more. I don’t think we’re seeing quite as many tears and they’re not as upset when they come in because I think they’re used to seeing us, and they’ve been to the rooms, and they’re excited....They know we have things in here that they want to see.

At Bateman, the pre-k students came to visit the kindergarten classrooms at the end of the school year to help with the transition to kindergarten. The teacher said there were several

different events that helped with the transition. A visit to kindergarten classrooms happens before the end of the school year. She described how the visits from the pre-k classrooms occurred: “We started probably six weeks ago and all the kids that are in preschool now, that are going to kindergarten, they visit my class and they visit the other kindergarten class. So, that’s a form of transition.” Another activity that took place was the pre-k and kindergarten groups joining together for an outdoor field-day on the playground. The teacher described what happened during that event:

We had our water day/field day. On the whole back playground we had all the kindergarten and all the preschool. We played water games and bounce houses and all this stuff. At that point, the preschool parents were there and the preschoolers and they got to talk with us and you know, play games.

Another activity was “Move-up Day” during the last week of school. The same teacher went on to explain what happens during “Move-up Day.”

[The] kids that are in preschool now that are going to be in my class next year, they come and visit and we just talk for a few minutes. Sometimes I read them a book but we’re only going to have 15 minutes for that...It’s good for them to see where they’re going to be when they go home for summer, you know. They know that’s the room I’m going to be in, that’s my teacher, that kind of thing.

In observing “Move-up Day” I was able to see how the pre-k children handled it. The children came in and sat on the carpet. The teacher went around and found out the name of each child. She went on to tell them they will come to her room in the fall. She talked about the classroom environment and told the children, “We have puzzles and blocks. In my room we have Legos and do science. When you come back to school this will be where you play.” She

then read a story and had the children act out some animal movements from the book. The teacher was smiling, laughing, and interacting with the children and made them feel comfortable in the new setting. At the end of 15 minutes the children lined up to return to the pre-k room but not before the teacher took a picture of each child.

At Powell Park the teacher shared how the pre-k children visited the kindergarten rooms toward the end of the school year. “We have a day that preschool comes to visit us...but they don’t know their teacher so it’s just kind of like you visit everybody’s room.” She spoke of a visit from one of the local pre-k classrooms located in a childcare center: “When [one of the child care centers] came down, we went to the cafeteria and they met the gym teacher and they met the music teacher.”

Back-to-School Bash. The teacher from Abbott described a family event held before the opening of school. She contacted incoming students during the summer and invited families to attend:

We have a “Back-to-School Bash” also here right before...our home visits. We send out post cards to all the kindergarten kids...in the summer....We don’t tell them who their teacher is but we tell them to come to the “Back-to-School Bash” to find out. We always have little things pertaining to our theme for them and everything, and we give the parents a post card then, telling them when their home visit will be and which day of school they’re going to start because we start on a staggered schedule.

The Bateman teacher talked about the Open House at the beginning of the school year where, like Abbott, they meet with parents to schedule home visits, and families have an opportunity to meet with teachers and staff at the school: “We do have Open-House at school

before the kids come to school....And if parents have questions or concerns they come and talk with us.”

The Powell Park kindergarten teacher described a similar event as an opportunity to become familiar with the school and the teachers and to help with the transition into kindergarten:

We had a time that all the kids came to school...and they met their teachers. We were outside and they had some older kids, high school kids, and they would take them in the classrooms so they could see the building.

Communication with Pre-k. Communicating with the pre-k teachers was seen as a way to improve transitions. The Bateman teacher talked about how she could go to the pre-k teachers and let them know if she had a concern about a content area and they would do their best to incorporate an area she saw lacking, into the pre-k curriculum. She provided this example:

Two years ago my kids had a lot of problems with counting and with the Dibels testing, which is one of the assessments we have to do, [where] they have to be able to count to 100...by January. That’s what I just told them, [that] they have not had enough practice counting. Well, this year they were doing much better with their counting.

She also talked about how they had regular meetings together, “We do PLC [Professional Learning Community] meetings with the preschool teachers. They’re, like, twice a month.” The Abbott teacher shared how they had opportunities to share information about children:

Well this past year we didn’t have our PLCs together but we talk a lot. We are out front in the mornings; we all gather our kids there before we bring them to the rooms, and so we talk out there, and we see each other at lunch. Sometimes we’re on the playground

together; our times will overlap out there. They told us things that they were concerned about, some of them who...they did not feel were ready to move on.

Practices with Parents

Communication. During home visits discussed above, parents received information from teachers and teachers received information from parents. One of the kindergarten teachers talked about another way she informed parents about kindergarten expectations. During registration for kindergarten she provided parents a letter. This letter included 20 items that children were expected to accomplish before beginning kindergarten. She felt it was important that parents understood what would be expected of the students in kindergarten before they began school. This is what she said about the “*Is my child ready for kindergarten?*” letter:

This year we made a letter at our school and we passed it out at kindergarten registration...We had...taken it and tweaked it from an article we had seen on...“*Is your child ready for kindergarten?*” It’s not saying don’t send them; it’s just saying basically, this is totally your decision, but these are the things we do, these are the things coming in they should have some recognition of.

Some of items included on the list were: “Is eager to learn/asks questions,” “asks for help when needed,” “can hold a pencil and write letters or draw pictures,” “listens and follows directions,” “knows the alphabet: upper and lower case letters,” “is ready to read,” and “ is able to trace over lines.” This letter also told parents how kindergarten has changed over the years and that children are frequently tested and they learn to read. It ends with a statement from the teachers telling parents, “When it comes down to it, only you in your heart and gut know whether your child is ready to start kindergarten.” The kindergarten teachers also indicate their willingness to sit down with parents to discuss their child’s readiness for school.

Another kindergarten teacher shared how she communicated with parents other than home visits. She said she did provide parents with a paper that described expectations: “We also give them, like, an expectations paper of what we think, or what you’re going to need to know, or what to expect.”

Barriers

This section addresses the kindergarten teachers’ perceptions related to question number four and discusses what they perceive to be barriers and/or inducements relating to the implementation of transition practices. The teachers’ insights related to the barriers that hinder transitions involved the family circumstances of the children enrolled in kindergarten, the lack of parent participation, the location of classrooms in the school, heightened kindergarten expectations, and issues that arose when scheduling pre-k visits. The inducements for positive transition practices included the children having the basic school readiness skills in place and attendance in pre-k.

Family Circumstances. The kindergarten teachers in Merritt County recognized that many of the children in their classrooms were being raised in poverty. They saw that as a barrier because it had a potential negative impact on the children’s quality of life and entering kindergarten being ready to learn. One teacher made this observation concerning the circumstances of many of the families in Merritt County, “I just think that our county doesn’t have a lot of jobs and a lot of our people live on pay from Wendy’s or pay from McDonald’s and things like that.” Another teacher saw how the home environments children were living in could present challenges: “It’s rural. I think there’s a lot of poverty in this area. I think we have a lot of people, several probably, who don’t work...it’s kind of a generational thing.” Still another teacher talked about the students in her school:

I worry about them being taken care of. Are they fed? A lot of them have clothes at the beginning of the year but then... Things that concern me are their basic needs. Are their basic needs being taken care of when they are at home? I'm already starting to worry about some of them for the summer. Are they going to have food to eat?

When asked how the children from these challenged backgrounds did in school, the teacher explained that some problems were evident:

[They are] very standoffish, backward, hesitant to get involved. It just takes a lot of time and patience to get them familiar to where they feel comfortable. I...just have to take care of them while they are here as best as we can.

Another issue that was expressed by the kindergarten teachers that had an impact on the children entering kindergarten and their families was the prevalence of drugs in the county. The Abbott teacher noticed these matters had an effect on students being ready to learn. When asked if it was affecting their performance in school she replied: "I think it does, especially when they're coming from families...with the drugs and everything. It's in this area too, a lot. We're seeing that now; we're seeing the results of that."

The Powell Park teacher talked about the situations that were occurring in her classroom due to the number of children who had been exposed to drugs:

Drug babies. Which, you know, that's never been a problem before. But I probably have five in here that are drug babies. And I think all of them have overcome it pretty well except one. And he was retained in kindergarten...I've got one little guy; he has...spots in his brain that will never develop—he is underdeveloped. He is blind in one eye....He lives with his grandparents. They're very caring. He's done fine in kindergarten. One of my little boys' mom is in jail. My other guy, his dad's in jail. You know, just all these

different people—mommies are in jail, daddies are in jail. They're being raised by the other mom, or the dad, or grandparents, like, 12 of these guys are being raised by grandparents.

Parent Participation. A barrier noted by one teacher was the lack of parent participation in activities to help parents prepare for kindergarten. When asked about parents being involved in transitions she said, "I don't think they think anything about it, actually." She went on to express her disappointment that no pre-k parents showed up for the Move-up day meeting sponsored by the school:

Okay, so, a couple of weeks ago, we had our Move-Up [meeting]. So, if you were in preschool, you could have come and talked to our kindergarten teachers. All five of us were here. You could come and talk about what you need next year. Not one single parent came. We had zero. Out of however many preschools kids are coming, maybe 100, not one single parent came to find out about kindergarten for next year. None.

When asked why she thought that happened she was somewhat perplexed:

Before, we've had parents who've come and asked us about Dibels testing, about...but we didn't even have anybody to come and ask us questions. Before, we've had parents who were asking questions and involved and wanted to know about report cards...how are they going to know who their teacher was going to be and different things like that. But not this year.

Classroom Location. The teacher from Powell Park spoke about a barrier that made transitions challenging in her school—the kindergarten rooms and pre-k classrooms are located at different ends of the school. When asked about communication between the pre-k and kindergarten, she said:

Even though [the pre-k teachers] are here, I might go back and ask her a question about somebody that she's had in class, or she might tell me that they were sick and had missed a lot, or this or that. Maybe their parents are getting divorced [and] we would talk about that. Just how they did or what they did, we don't really discuss that.

She went on to say, "That's not my end of the hallway, so I don't venture down there unless I specifically need to talk to [the pre-k teacher]. This is our kindergarten end, so for me to go down there I have to discuss something." She did remark that several years ago, when her classroom was located near the pre-k classrooms, she would have regular interaction with the pre-k and saw that as beneficial for transitions:

Because we're so far away. When I was on the end where [pre-k] is...my kids would go in to read to her kids as we were learning to read little stories and things. My kids...would partner up with...preschool and we would read together. I like doing that, but we haven't done that...I liked having buddies. It worked out well, but can't do that anymore. That helped with their transition because sometimes they would come to kindergarten and sometimes we went to preschool.

Kindergarten Expectations. Expectations for what must be accomplished in kindergarten have changed over the years. These kindergarten teachers complied with the changes but were not always comfortable with the high academic expectations that were being put on children in kindergarten. The teacher from Abbott put it this way: "I just think we expect too much. And I don't like it, but it's like, we are in the position where we don't have a lot of choice. You know, we do what we're supposed to do with them."

The Powell Park teacher echoed that same concern. She had taught kindergarten for over twenty years and had seen how kindergarten had changed. She described how kindergarten used to be and how it is now:

To get out of kindergarten, in the beginning you needed to know your ABCs, your capital and lowercase [letters]. You needed to count to 30, probably write them to 20, and know your color words and know your number words. So, we'd like you to do that. And then, as long as you could identify your ABCs and you knew your sounds...you were ready. We weren't reading words; we weren't spelling or anything at all like that. Now, this year, they had a word list of 32 words. I mean, it just goes on and on. You write sentences; you have to have the correct punctuation. You have to have spelling; we do a spelling test. You have to be able to add, subtract, tell time, you know, geometry, algebra, the beginnings of all of that. It's totally, totally, totally different.

When asked how she felt about those changes she replied:

Very sad. Because I just think there's not enough time for them to just be a kid and play. Because we did learn our ABCs; we did learn our sounds; but we also could cook...we just did lots of like hands-on things. They got to play more. They did a lot of building blocks, [and had] a lot of...time in the kitchen center. We did puzzles, we had a lot more time for art; you know, we had our sand table we could take outside; we had more time for recess; we had a nap where they could rest. We don't have any of that anymore.

Scheduling of Pre-k Visits. All of the kindergarten teachers had transition visits from the pre-k classrooms in their buildings along with the community-based pre-k classrooms located in childcare centers. The logistics of getting these visits arranged was sometimes problematic and viewed as a barrier to positive transitions. The teacher from Bateman talked about what occurred

at her school, “Sometimes it’s hard to get it worked out, to get it all scheduled. Because if I have other kids coming, what do I do with the rest of the kids? That’s a barrier, definitely.”

The Powell Park teacher conveyed how the visits from the pre-k classes in her school and the childcare centers went. She felt those students from the childcare centers were at a disadvantage when it came to the transition into kindergarten:

We have a day that preschool comes to visit us. We just had that, but they don’t know their teacher so it’s just kind of like you visit everybody’s room. When [the child care center] came down, we went to the cafeteria and they met the gym teacher and they met the music teacher. But the thing about that is I just think that preschools that are in your own school are at a much greater advantage because they eat in our cafeteria, they know our cooks, they know how to get their trays, they know how to get their silverware. They’re ready to go. And all of the kids that are coming in from other preschools...[it’s] just at the beginning, I think intimidating for the little kids who have not been here.

She went on to express some hesitation how overall these transition visits went:

When preschool was going to come visit...it was very unorganized. I think they were supposed to go to each teacher but they didn’t. Like, I had one class that came in and then I just took them around and showed them and then they went outside to play. I really don’t even know what they [the school administrators] want transition to be.

When asked how the transition visits could be improved this teacher had some ideas that she believed could improve the transitions for all the children and their families:

They need to come more than just once, especially if they are coming to a new building. If this is going to be their school, they probably need to come more than one time. I know at [the child care center] their kids might go over to [another school]. So, if you’re in that

[school] then...coming to our school it's not going to help you one bit. But, I do like to think about where we have the night parents can come and they can see our classroom and they can come in and see the room and talk to you and, you know, they can just see what it looks like.

She described how the visits with those programs went:

I just let my kids talk to them. I said, "Tell them what we do in school." Maybe that's better than just listening to a teacher. So my kids just told them. We stood up and did the *Popcorn* [song]. We sang and we danced just so they could see it... And then I took them on a tour of the building. But it might be nice if they could come a couple of times to the school where they're going to go. And maybe each time they could meet a different teacher.

When asked if she felt the principal would support that she replied, "Oh, yeah, our principal is very flexible. Yeah, it wouldn't be a problem to do that. The thing is, you've got to get on a bus because they're going to have to ride a bus here." The transportation issue was seen as a problem in preventing more visits from occurring.

Inducements

School Readiness Skills. The teachers observed that being ready for kindergarten consisted of children having mastered specific skills upon entering school. They observed that when children entered kindergarten with these skills, they were ready to learn and starting school was not such a frightening experience. They described what they thought children should be able to do when starting kindergarten. The Bateman teacher commented:

I appreciate kids coming in and knowing their name and being able to tell me that. Like, know their birthday, just so they can verbally tell me things. So many kids can't do that;

so many of them are scared to death and will say hardly boo....They [should] know some kind of order. They [should] know how to line up.

The Abbott teacher thought that the social and emotional skills were important, along with the academics, and being ready to learn:

...To sit for [a]period of time, to listen attentively, and basically [be] ready...to learn....I think it should be socialization, learning to get along with each other, working together with other students, following directions, being in lines, you know, learning to do more for themselves, and recognizing the letters....I think they should know the letters and sounds, counting and numbers, things like that.

The Powell Park teacher thought the most important thing children needed to begin kindergarten was to easily separate from their parents. Her outlook was different than the other teachers interviewed. She felt if children were at ease in attending school, she could facilitate the development of academic skills:

The child is ready for kindergarten when they can make the break from their parents. I don't expect anything else. You can't write your name, you can't count, you don't know your ABCs? Okay, we're good to go. Doesn't matter. You can come to my room and be ready, to be happy to be here, and [if] you're not crying for your mom and having that terrible, horrible separation thing, you're ready. Now, if you know extra stuff to go with it, that's great because it's probably going to give you a bit of a head start, because you're not so upset... I will teach you. As long as you can just come in with a happy little mind, that, "Oh boy, here we are in school!" we'll be fine.

When asked about other skills that children needed to be ready to start kindergarten she replied:

"Write your name, you've got a good idea about your ABCs, your numbers, you can take care of

yourself, follow the directions, when I say line up you can get in a line, wait your turn, be patient.”

Attendance in Pre-k. The kindergarten teachers perceived an inducement for positive transitions were children attending pre-k programs before entering kindergarten. They saw this as one of the best ways to prepare children for school. They understood that many of the skills described above were developed in pre-k. The Abbott teacher had this perspective on the importance of children attending pre-k: “In preschool, they’re learning to stand in line, they’re starting to get...introduced to the letters, they’re getting introduced to counting, they’re getting introduced to the shapes and colors, and things like that.” The Bateman teacher saw similar benefits from children attending a pre-k program:

The kids that go to preschool or daycare or Head Start, they’ve come in and they know some kind of a routine. They know some kind of order. They know how to line up. I mean, some don’t even have a clue how to line up...I don’t think people realize what preschool and kindergarten [is] all about because it just takes a lot of time and teaching and drilling with them.

She went on to talk about how the children without that experience had a harder time transitioning into kindergarten: “The kids that don’t have that, they’re really lacking a lot. I think this year I’ve had...four. I’ve had a heck of a time getting them to talk to me.”

The Powell Park teacher remarked on how she appreciated what the pre-k teachers accomplished. She recognized that attending pre-k prepared children to enter kindergarten with some basic skills:

I think preschool [teachers]...work hard. I know they’re counting, they’re writing names, I know they’re doing ABCs. They are doing what we used to do...counting to 100,

counting to 20. I don't know if that's in their curriculum but I know they're working on it. I think preschool is doing a good job. I don't do their job. I wouldn't want to do their job; I think they're doing a good job with what they're doing.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CASE STUDY ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

This study was conducted to explore the factors that regulate the implementation of transition practices from pre-k into kindergarten from the perspective of pre-k and kindergarten teachers in two West Virginia school systems. The participants' perceptions were explored in relation to teacher practices, school practices, and practices with families in both pre-k and kindergarten classrooms. The study investigated what teachers perceived to be barriers and/or inducements relating to the implementation of transition practices. Findings were based on interviews with pre-k and kindergarten teachers from the two counties. Pre-k and kindergarten teachers in Clifton County had participated in a year-long professional development intervention project which focused on transitions. The teachers in Merritt County did not have this experience. Chapter Four included information about the two counties, characteristics of the schools and the teachers, and a description of the year-long professional development intervention and the transition camps the one county was involved in. Chapter Five featured findings based on interviews with pre-k and kindergarten teachers from Clifton County. Chapter six included findings based on interviews with pre-k and kindergarten teachers in Merritt County. Results in both chapters were organized around the four research questions. In this chapter the results of a comparative case study analysis between the two counties will be presented. Additionally, interpretation of two overarching themes in relation to current literature on transition practices, and implications for practitioners and policymakers will be discussed. This chapter will also provide suggestions for future research, limitations and strengths of the study, and final conclusions and significance.

An overarching theme that emerged from the study was that in both counties it was evident that spending time together and talking together resulted in positive rapport and relationships. Smoother transitions occurred for the children and their parents when teachers

spent time together and talked with other teachers. When teachers spent time talking with children it prepared them for the move to kindergarten. Communication and interactions with parents was another factor that supported positive transitions. This study provides evidence that the teachers who participated in the transition intervention project had more enabling factors that led to positive transitions for children moving from pre-k into kindergarten than the teachers who did not have the training. The teachers in Clifton County recognized the importance of implementing transition practices and understood the merit of pre-k and kindergarten teachers working together to ensure that it occurred. The kindergarten teachers in Merritt County used home visits as a strategy to engage in positive transition practices but there was a lack of ongoing collaboration between pre-k and kindergarten teachers to make certain transition practices were consistently carried out.

**SPENDING TIME TOGETHER AND TALKING TOGETHER = POSITIVE
RELATIONSHIPS AND SUCCESSFUL TRANSITIONS**

In both counties, spending time together encompassed visits by pre-k children to kindergarten classrooms, home visits to the children who would be transitioning into kindergarten, and school events like kindergarten enrollment and orientation. In Clifton County transition training and transition camps were an additional opportunity for teachers to spend time with other teachers as well as interact with children and their families. This type of experience allowed teachers, children, and parents to get to know each other.

Visits to the kindergarten classrooms were done by the schools in both counties. These visits helped teachers develop a connection to the children before they began kindergarten. The children were more familiar with the classroom environment and they had a chance to see what a typical day in kindergarten would be like. The Clifton County pre-k teachers would have liked

their children to have more than one visit to the kindergarten classrooms. The one school in Merritt County that had several visits occur throughout the year had teachers report that there were fewer problems with transitions as children had numerous opportunities to spend time with the kindergarten teachers. This is consistent with prior research showing visits to kindergarten classrooms to be an effective transition practice that can support children in the move to kindergarten (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008, Rous et al., 2008, Schulting et al., 2005). Other studies have suggested that transition practices should provide opportunities for personal contacts, be planned, and happen before the first day of school (Pianta et al., 1999, Early, Pianta, Taylor, and Cox, 2001, and Nelson, 2004). These practices are especially true for children from economically disadvantaged homes (Schulting, et al., 2005). As many of the children in this study come from low income environments, transition activities which involve intentional planning of kindergarten visits is a practice that supports positive transitions to kindergarten.

The current study's findings indicate that multiple visits to kindergarten classrooms helped children to be better prepared for kindergarten. Kindergarten teachers having frequent contact through home visits and ongoing contact with pre-k children in schools was another factor that positively benefited children to make the transition into kindergarten.

Another practice that supported the transition to kindergarten and involved time spent together was when teachers made home visits. Pre-k teachers in both counties and kindergarten teachers in Merritt County did home visits with their students and their parents. They saw these visits as a positive way to start the year with the children enrolled in their classrooms and they established relationships with the children and their parents. They perceived these visits as a way to gain an understanding of the home environment. This is consistent with the literature that finds home visits to be a beneficial means of establishing connections between home and school.

Prior studies found teachers gained an appreciation of the influence a child's home environment had on their behavior and performance in school. Meyer, Mann, and Becker (2011) surveyed teachers who participated in making home visits and found teachers viewed home visits as a way they could gain knowledge about stressors that were occurring in the home or they might become aware of an unfulfilled need such as a child being hungry or tired that could influence behavior at school. Lin and Bates (2010) reported similar results when they studied visits made by Head Start teachers. This study adds to the limited research on the value of home visits in relation to transition practices. The participants in my study became more compassionate and empathetic towards families as a result of making home visits. It was concluded that home visits can be a valuable tool for teachers to take part in and is a tool teachers can use to build relationships and lines of communication. Further, the findings suggest that when teachers understand the environments children are raised in, they are better able to meet their needs in school and support children as they transition into kindergarten.

An additional transition practice that was reported by teachers that connected children and families to school were events such as orientation and enrollment. They provided families an introduction to the school and the teachers. These type of activities are described in the literature as low intensity events that are more generic and do not facilitate personal relationships (Pianta et al., 1999). However, the transition camps that were conducted in Clifton County were perceived by both the pre-k and kindergarten teachers to be an effective method for helping children and families ease the transition. Children and parents were provided the opportunity to spend time with the teaching staff and became familiar with the school environment. Consistent with the literature, high intensity activities such as this were more individualized and utilized personal contact (Pianta et al., 1999). Ideal transition practices for children cited in the research

consisted of approaches that were individualized and engaged the child, the family, and the preschool setting before the first day of school (Early et al., 2001). Spending time at the school with both the pre-k and kindergarten teachers was a way to bridge the move from pre-k into kindergarten. The collaboration between teachers helped children and parents move from the familiar pre-k setting to the new and different kindergarten classrooms.

The current study adds to the previous research as there are few studies on summer transition programs. This study documented positive benefits for the children, families, and teachers who attended the transition camp. It was felt that the transition camps made a difference for the children who participated. Maxwell et al. (2013), reported on the findings from a summer school-readiness program in Georgia. Study authors found that children were better prepared for kindergarten after participating in that program. The focus in the Clifton County transition camp was on helping children adjust to the change in setting, new procedures, and new teachers. It was perceived to make the transition smoother for the children and families. Teachers in this study found that the transition camps gave them the opportunity to meet the children and families before the first day of school. They were better prepared to meet children's needs and had some familiarity with any problems they might encounter once school began in the fall.

Talking together was found to be a key element that supported the development of positive rapport and relationships among teachers. In both counties, the pre-k teachers felt that collaborating with the kindergarten teachers allowed them to prepare their children for the move into kindergarten. Talking on a regular basis helped the pre-k teachers know what would be expected from their students in the coming year. They would include into the curriculum skills that they understood to be necessary for children to be successful in kindergarten. Ongoing

communication between grade levels resulted in children being better prepared to move into kindergarten. A study by Ahtola et al. (2011) found cooperation on curricula between pre-k and kindergarten emerged as one of the most effective predictors of later school achievement. It was thought that the continuity between pre-k and kindergarten offered uninterrupted learning experiences. This current study adds additional information related to the development of positive relationships among teachers. For example, frequent communication allowed pre-k teachers to share information about incoming students with the kindergarten teachers so they would be aware of any problems students had and they could adequately prepare for them. It provided opportunities for teachers to share ideas and concerns that would give teachers insight into the children and families that would be entering into their classrooms.

Another instance of teachers having opportunities to meet together and develop relationships was during joint professional development meetings. In Merritt County both pre-k and kindergarten teachers discussed the benefits of the Professional Learning Community meetings in which they participated. These were perceived as a means to increase communication and build relationships within their school. Clifton County teachers all believed that the year-long training on transitions not only built relationships among teachers, but also led to a better understanding of what was required to ensure positive transitions for children and families. There was a greater focus on transition practices and purposefully implementing them. Having greater insight into both the pre-k and kindergarten standards and collaborating with the other teachers in their school ensured better transitions for children and families.

The findings of this study are consistent with the previous literature regarding training in transition practices. Boyle and Petriwskyj (2014) found building relationships between pre-k and kindergarten teachers adds to the continuity of transition practices for children. Early et al.

(2001) found training in transitions resulted in a greater number of transition practices being implemented. A study by Rous, Hellam, McCormick, and Cox (2010), where a survey was conducted with public preschool teachers on transition practices, found fewer than half the teachers surveyed had received guidance on ways to enhance transition services. Teachers who received training reported using a higher number of transition practices. The current study adds more specific information about the benefits of training teachers in transition practices.

Kindergarten teachers had a better understanding of what children were experiencing in pre-k and how they could support children in their new learning environment. They also saw the value of preparing children for the move into kindergarten. There was a better understanding of the importance of working with pre-k teachers and giving children a preview of what kindergarten was about.

The kindergarten teachers in both counties found that being aware of issues or concerns that related to learning or family situations could help them plan and meet the needs of the students entering their rooms in the fall. Positive relationships between pre-k and kindergarten teachers helped to facilitate this knowledge. In both counties, parents' information was shared from pre-k to kindergarten teachers on what concerns they have about the children entering kindergarten. When teachers welcomed families to school, they began to develop relationships with them. Parents who attended events in Merritt County such as the Back-to-School Bash and who participated in home visits had the chance to meet and talk with their child's teacher before school began. During the transition camps in Clifton County parents met the kindergarten teachers and became familiar with the new classroom setting their child would be in. These were opportunities to establish a relationship with the kindergarten staff.

This study is consistent with prior research that found transition practices that place an emphasis on involving family members in the transition and enhancing the communication between home, preschool, and kindergarten make it easier for children to move from pre-k into kindergarten (Pianta et al., 1999; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003). A study by Ahtola et al. (2011) found similar results where personal meetings between families and kindergarten teachers before school starts were identified as positive transition practices. The current study concluded it was important to include families in the transition process through home visits and school activities including transition camp. The teachers who were interviewed saw that by providing parents with an understanding of what would be expected of children in kindergarten, they would be better prepared for the move; parents and teachers working together helped with the adjustment to school and there was less anxiety about starting school.

DIFFERENCES, DISTANCE, AND DISSENSION

The second overarching theme involved issues of differences, distance, and dissension that appeared to result in making the move into kindergarten challenging for children, families and teachers. Differences in curriculum and teaching styles were found to be an impediment to achieving smooth transitions into kindergarten from pre-k. Another concern was the matter of distance. This included the physical location of pre-k classrooms in relation to the kindergarten classrooms, families living in isolated communities, and classrooms located away from the elementary school building. Dissension among teachers proved to be another difficulty in providing positive transition practices.

Across both counties, all of the teachers described differences in both teaching approaches and expectations between pre-k and kindergarten. The children in pre-k were building the skills necessary for kindergarten but the instructional methods used were different

than those used in kindergarten. Pre-k teachers in both counties placed an emphasis on learning through play and exploration. Kindergarten was viewed by all the teachers, both pre-k and kindergarten, as more academically rigorous with a big jump in expectations. When children moved into kindergarten, instructional methods changed and direct instruction, with an emphasis on modeling through example, became the primary method of teaching. Pre-k teachers were not confident that all their students were prepared for this change.

Prior research has shown that kindergarten and pre-k curricula are vastly different. Miller and Almon (2009) report that kindergarten programs have radically changed over the past two decades and there is a high emphasis on academic skills and highly prescribed curricula. In the current study, teachers in both counties also reported children who had not attended pre-k had greater difficulty entering kindergarten. They experienced more separation issues and difficulty forming relationships with teachers. A study by Bassok, Latham, and Rorem (2015) shows that the current trend in kindergarten classroom instruction features a heightened focus on literacy and math instruction and a decrease in children-selected activities. This study adds information to the challenges children face when they begin kindergarten. Specifically, the study documented that behavioral expectations are different in preschool and in kindergarten children can have difficulty making the adjustment. A more structured setting with fewer opportunities for choice and higher academic expectations made the move to kindergarten problematic for some children. Teachers worry about children being prepared for this move, especially if they had not attended a pre-k program.

The current study found the issue of distance between classrooms appeared to be a concern. Teachers in both counties found that when pre-k and kindergarten classrooms were located in close proximity to each other successful collaboration between teachers occurred and

the transition was smoother for the children. Teachers in both Clifton and Merritt County voiced a concern that communication broke down when classrooms were physically separated in the building and the teachers found it to be a barrier to positive transitions. Furthermore, this finding has not been found in other research and supports the need to have pre-k and kindergarten classrooms located in close proximity to each other in the school. Additionally, when pre-k classrooms located in community programs were at different sites completely, difficulties arose with the transition process. Little research has been done on the effects of transitions regarding the coordination among community programs. Rous et al. (2010) found transition practices that require coordination with other agencies or the community were less likely to occur. Merritt County teachers felt children from community programs needed to be familiar with the school setting and needed more than one visit to the school. Clifton County teachers found visits to the elementary schools were not authentic if children were not visiting the school where they would be attending kindergarten.

Dissension among teachers also was found to hinder transition practices. Some pre-k teachers found dissension between the kindergarten teachers hampered efforts for smooth transitions. One pre-k teacher felt that what she was doing in pre-k was not necessarily valued by kindergarten teachers. This finding is consistent with prior research that shows mutual respect between pre-k and kindergarten teacher is needed to ensure the positive collaboration between the two sets of professionals (Dockett & Perry, 2008; Skouteris, Watson, & Lum, 2012). When dissension does occur or teachers do not feel valued, relationships may be strained and result in making it challenging for teachers to collaborate and support positive transitions for children and their families (Hopps, 2014; Petriwskyj, Thorpe, & Taylor, 2005).

The current study adds information related to the relationships between pre-k and kindergarten teachers. When teachers were able to build a sense of community in their school and allow the children to make connections with the kindergarten teachers, the transitions for children and parents were smoother. Dissension created barriers that reduce collaboration and may make it difficult to facilitate positive transitions for children and their families. Transition events can be difficult to arrange. This study found underlying tensions between teachers makes it likely that patterns of communication will be negatively impacted and information about children's development may not be shared.

LIMITATIONS AND STRENGTHS OF THE STUDY

Due to the nature of qualitative research, findings cannot be generalized. However, an argument could be made that other pre-k and kindergarten teachers had similar perceptions concerning transition practices. Also, these teachers were interviewed toward the end of the school year when multiple transition activities were taking place in their schools. While being interviewed during the time of year when transition activities were actively happening, the teachers were mindful of what they were doing to support positive transition practices. If interviewed at the beginning of the school year, the teachers may have had different perceptions of transition. The pre-k teachers might have been more concerned about the transition of the younger children starting in their classrooms rather than the children they were sending on to kindergarten. The kindergarten teachers may have been preparing for the children entering into their class in the fall and may not have considered what transition practices could have helped children adjust to school.

This study discussed the impact positive transition practices had on families. A limitation was I did not interview parents to find out how effective they felt the transition practices were.

Interviewing parents about the transition camps and other transition activities could have provided insight into what parents felt about this type of experience and what practices are helpful in easing the transition into kindergarten.

A strength of this study was my past experience with the teachers. I was acquainted with all the pre-k teachers as the result of my previous employment. Likewise, having done participant observations during the transition training in Clifton County those teachers were familiar and comfortable with me. All the teachers readily shared their thoughts and opinions regarding their views on the transition of children from pre-k into kindergarten. Another strength of this study was having been present during the transition camps. I was familiar with that experience and the teachers were eager to share their views on how the camps turned out.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The current study explored factors that regulate the implementation of transition practices from pre-k into kindergarten. The perceptions and experiences of pre-k and kindergarten teachers were examined in two West Virginia school systems in relation to teacher practices, school practices, and practices with families regarding the implementation of transition procedures. The study also looked at barriers and inducements that teachers perceived made an impact on transition practices. From this study an overarching theme was that talking together and spending time together resulted in positive rapport and relationships. Few research studies have focused on the collaboration between pre-k and kindergarten teachers in order to enhance transition practices. This study also shows that dissension among teachers can have a negative impact on transition practices. A future qualitative study might examine what resources are available to teachers to build positive relationships and overcome difficulties when they arise. As leaders in schools, principals play a role in promoting positive transitions, as evidenced by their

role in transitions training in Clifton County, and help to decide what resources to make available to teachers that will support positive transition practices in their schools. A future qualitative study might similarly investigate the role principals play in supporting the transition from pre-k to kindergarten along with what kind of supports they provide teachers.

This study provides evidence that training and summer transition programs need to be implemented in schools on a regular basis. Providing teachers and administrators training on transitions seems to build knowledge that leads to the implementation of stronger transition practices. A future qualitative study might explore how teachers who are participating in transition trainings perceive the relevance of the training and consider if they are willing to participate in other kinds of transition programs throughout the summer. The study could examine what kind of incentives would encourage teachers to take part in these kind of programs and if they felt there would be obstacles.

Building rapport between teachers and parents was part of this research. The study identified practices such as home visiting and transition camps as positive activities for promoting successful transitions to kindergarten. Few studies have looked at these particular practices in regard to promoting positive transition experiences. A future qualitative study might investigate how parents perceive such practices as home visits, transition camps, and other personalized interactions and to what extent they help with the preparation to kindergarten and result in a smoother transition for their child and themselves.

A part of this study examined the transition of children from community programs into the public school system. Teachers located in elementary schools expressed concerns about how to best transition these children into kindergarten. Few studies have looked at the transition of children who are coming into public schools from programs located outside of public schools.

Interviewing teachers who work in community programs may provide greater understanding of what practices could be used to build stronger relationships along with enhancing transition practices for those entering the elementary school setting for the first time.

CONCLUSIONS AND SIGNIFICANCE

The findings in this study add knowledge about the strategies used to enhance transitions practices from pre-k to kindergarten and the actions that create barriers and or inducements to effective transition practices. The teachers involved in the transition training believed that their awareness about the importance of transitions increased as a result of this training and effective transition procedures were put in place. Planning for transitions was purposeful and collaborative. My study is evidence that when resources are provided that allow teachers to engage in collaboration with each other, transition practices will be enhanced and issues with differences, distance, and dissension can be reduced.

Additionally, this study provides new information and adds to our understanding on how summer transition programs prepare children and parents for the move into kindergarten. The teachers saw the summer camps as a program that relieved the anxiety of children and families by helping them to become familiar with the school environment, routines, and personnel. Teachers were better able to get ready for the upcoming school year as a result of spending time during the summer with children and their families.

This study adds important information in an area where there is inconsistent information related to transition practices in community-based programs. The results of this study show it is important for community-based pre-k programs and elementary schools to collaborate so that the transitions for the children enrolled in those programs are positive and meaningful. Coordinating transition practices with community programs can be challenging due to distance

and insufficient resources. The ability to provide schools the means to provide support for the collaboration between community programs and elementary schools would provide more children the chance to experience a positive transition to kindergarten.

The data from this study provide policy makers and school administrators more information regarding the importance of developing positive kindergarten transition practices and the need to provide resources to ensure that transition procedures are consistently being implemented. Study findings suggest that opportunities for pre-k and kindergarten teachers to meet and have training together results in smoother transitions for children and families than would have occurred otherwise. Further, the study suggests including community-based pre-k personnel in training on transition practices alongside those based in elementary schools may help to build relationships that improve transition practices for a greater number of children. Furthermore, providing resources to offer summer programs annually at elementary schools for all children entering kindergarten will likely make for better transitions. Bottom line, the research indicates the importance of investing the resources of time and funding into implementation of transition practices for the benefit of children who are leaving pre-k and moving into a school-based kindergarten.

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Office of Research Integrity

Institutional Review Board
One John Marshall Drive
Huntington, WV 25755

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#00003206

May 11, 2016

Ruthann Arneson, Ed.S.
Early Childhood Education, MUGC

RE: IRBNet ID# 730470-2

At: Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral)

Dear Ms. Arneson:

Protocol Title: [730470-2] Preschool to School: Transition through the Eyes of Teachers

Expiration Date: May 18, 2017

Site Location: MUGC

Submission Type: Continuing Review/Progress Report APPROVED

Review Type: Exempt Review

The above study and informed consent were approved for an additional 12 months by the Marshall

University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Designee. The approval will expire May 18, 2017. Since this approval is within 30 days of the expiration date, the fixed anniversary date of 05/18 was maintained. Continuing review materials should be submitted no later than 30 days prior to the expiration date.

If you have any questions, please contact the Marshall University Institutional Review Board #2 (Social/Behavioral) Coordinator Bruce Day, ThD, CIP at 304-696-4303 or day50@marshall.edu. Please include your study title and reference number in all correspondence with this office.

APPENDIX B: Research Questions

The following are the questions that were used to interview the pre-k and kindergarten teachers in the qualitative study. Each Teacher was interviewed once using this set of questions as a guideline.

Pre-k Teachers

How long have you been teaching?

What do you think your role is in preparing children for kindergarten?

What kinds of concerns do you have about sending children to kindergarten?

How would you describe school readiness?

How would you describe your approach to teaching in pre-k?

What kind of transition activities do you participate in with your students?

What kind of information is provided to families about transition?

What kind of concerns do you have regarding transition activities?

What kind of barriers do you see to carrying out transition activities?

What kind of supports in place to help you to carry out transition activities?

What do you think parents should be doing to prepare their children for kindergarten?

What kinds of information do you receive, if any, in regards to transitioning children to kindergarten?

Kindergarten Teachers

How long have you been teaching?

How would you describe your approach to teaching kindergarten?

How would you describe school readiness?

How do you know a child is ready for kindergarten?

What kinds of concerns do you have about children entering kindergarten?

Can you describe transition activities for children entering kindergarten?

What kind of barriers do you see to carrying out transition activities?

What kind of supports in place to help you to carry out transition activities?

How does the school provide activities for children before entering kindergarten?

How does the school provide activities for families before their children entered kindergarten?

What kinds of information do you receive, if any, in regards to transitioning children to kindergarten?

What kind of concerns do you have regarding transition activities?

Marshall University

Informed Consent Template

Informed Consent to Participate in a Research Study

Preschool to School: Transition through the Eyes of Teachers

Ruthann Arneson, Ed. S., Principal Investigator

Introduction

You are invited to be in a research study. Research studies are designed to gain scientific knowledge that may help other people in the future. You may or may not receive any benefit from being part of the study. Your participation is voluntary. Please take your time to make your decision, and ask your research investigator or research staff to explain any words or information that you do not understand.

Why Is This Study Being Done?

The purpose of this study is to understand preschool and kindergarten teachers' experiences with and insights on transition practices and what they perceive as barriers or supports that influence their implementation of transition activities, especially in their work with low income and rural families.

How Many People Will Take Part In The Study?

About 12 people will take part in this study. A total of 12 subjects are the most that would be able to enter the study.

What Is Involved In This Research Study?

Preschool and kindergarten teachers will be interviewed by the researcher.

How Long Will You Be In The Study?

You will be in the study for about one month, until the interview is transcribed.

You can decide to stop participating at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study we encourage you to talk to the study investigator as soon as possible.

The study investigator may stop you from taking part in this study at any time if he/she believes it is in your best interest; if you do not follow the study rules; or if the study is stopped.

What Are The Risks Of The Study?

There are no known risks to those who take part in this study.

Are There Benefits To Taking Part In The Study?

If you agree to take part in this study, there may or may not be direct benefit to you. We hope the information learned from this study will benefit other people in the future. The benefits of participating in this study may help to develop an increase in the knowledge about transitions and provide insights to administrators and school personnel to enable them to implement positive transition experiences for children and families.

What About Confidentiality?

We will do our best to make sure that your personal information is kept confidential. However, we cannot guarantee absolute confidentiality. Federal law says we must keep your study records private. Nevertheless, under unforeseen and rare circumstances, we may be required by law to allow certain agencies to view your records. Those agencies would include the Marshall University IRB, Office of Research Integrity (ORI) and the federal Office of Human Research Protection (OHRP). This is to make sure that we are protecting your rights and your safety. If we publish the information we learn from this study, you will not be identified by name or in any other way.

What Are The Costs Of Taking Part In This Study?

There are no costs to you for taking part in this study. All the study costs, including any study tests, supplies and procedures related directly to the study, will be paid for by the study.

Will You Be Paid For Participating?

You will receive no payment or other compensation for taking part in this study.

What Are Your Rights As A Research Study Participant?

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You may choose not to take part or you may leave the study at any time. Refusing to participate or leaving the study will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled. If you decide to stop participating in the study we encourage you to talk to the investigators or study staff first.

Whom Do You Call If You Have Questions Or Problems?

For questions about the study or in the event of a research-related injury, contact the study investigator, Ruthann Arneson, 304-696-6478 or 304-633-6827. You should also call the investigator if you have a concern or complaint about the research.

For questions about your rights as a research participant, contact the Marshall University IRB#2 Chairman Dr. Stephen Cooper or ORI at (304) 696-4303. You may also call this number if:

- You have concerns or complaints about the research.
- The research staff cannot be reached.
- You want to talk to someone other than the research staff.

You will be given a signed and dated copy of this consent form.

SIGNATURES

You agree to take part in this study and confirm that you are 18 years of age or older. You have had a chance to ask questions about being in this study and have had those questions answered. By signing this consent form you are not giving up any legal rights to which you are entitled.

Subject Name (Printed)

Subject Signature

Date

Person Obtaining Consent (Printed)

Person Obtaining Consent Signature

Date

VITA

Dr. Ruthann Arneson
Marshall University
One John Marshall Drive
Huntington, WV 25755
304-523-8740-h 304-696-6478-w 304-633-6827-c
arneson1@marshall.edu

Professional Objective: To teach courses in early childhood education and child development at an institution of higher learning.

Education	Doctorate in Education, Marshall University, Huntington, WV Curriculum & Instruction with an emphasis in Early Childhood Education.	<i>2016</i>
	Education Specialist, Marshall University, Huntington, WV Curriculum & Instruction with an emphasis in Early Childhood Education	<i>2013</i>
	Masters of Education, University of Virginia, Charlottesville, VA Curriculum and Instruction Concentration in Elementary/ Early Childhood Education	<i>1984</i>
	B.A. Degree in Early Childhood Education <i>Hood College, Frederick, MD</i>	<i>1977</i>
	Instructor Academy for Apprenticeship for Child Development Specialist, Marshall University, Huntington WV	<i>1992</i>

Career History

Assistant Professor, Marshall University, Huntington, WV	<i>Fall 2014-present</i>
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Teach undergraduate classes in early childhood education.• ECE 101 Wellbeing• ECE 322 Language and Literacy• ECE 323 Early Childhood Assessment• ECE 324 Science Math and Technology• ECE 325 Play and Creativity• ECE 102 Early Childhood Programs• ECE 204 Parenting• ECE 215 Family Relationships• ECE 420 Infant Toddler Relationships and Environment	

Education Specialist, *Southwestern Community Action Council, Inc., Huntington, WV* 1995-2014

- Supervise education staff at designated Head Start sites. Consists of daily mentoring and coaching
- Assist teachers in implementing curriculum and individualization.
- Formulate policies and plans to support Head Start Performance Standards.
- Work collaboratively with staff and community to ensure quality early childhood programming.

Adjunct Instructor, *Mountwest Community and Technical College, Huntington, WV* Fall 2009-Spring 2013

Instruct students pursuing an AA in early childhood

- EDUC 101- Healthy Environments for Young Children: Fall 2009, Fall 2012
- EDUC 204- Parenting Spring 2010, Spring 2011, Spring 2012
- EDUC 215-Child, Family, & Community, Spring 2013

Adjunct Instructor, *Marshall University, Williamson, campus, Williamson, WV* Fall 2010

Instruct students pursuing a BA in early childhood.

- ECE 204 Parenting

Social Service/Parent Involvement Coordinator, *Southwestern Community Action Council, Inc., Huntington, WV* 1994-1995

- Supervised Family Service Specialists who provided social service support to families in assigned communities.
- Facilitated family involvement in selected public schools in Cabell and Wayne counties.
- Worked collaboratively with staff and community to ensure quality programming.

Director, *St. Joseph's Nazareth Home Day Care Center, Huntington, WV* 1993-1994

- Supervised teachers, aides, and substitutes
- Developed and assisted in implementing developmentally appropriate curriculum.
- Responsible for budgeting, collecting fees, and daily bookkeeping.
- Coordinated parent activities.

Instructor for Apprenticeship for Child Development Specialist, *Cabell, Wayne, and Lincoln Counties, WV* 1992-1996

- Instruct apprenticeship students in child development, early childhood curriculum, behavior management, management techniques, parent communication, diversity, and professional development ethics.

Lead Teacher, *Early Learning Child Development Center, Huntington, WV* 1986-1992

- Lead Teacher in pre-kindergarten classroom
- Supervised aides, cooks and volunteers
- Administrative duties as assigned
- Edit center newsletter

<p>Education Coordinator for Parents in Education Project, Monticello Area Community Action Agency, Charlottesville, VA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Facilitated home/school relations with parents by providing support and encouragement to assist them to be involved in their child's education. Collaborated with the Charlottesville City School personnel to increase parent involvement. Coordinated contacts with family service agencies 	1985-1986
<p>Parent Involvement Coordinator, Head Start, Monticello Area Community Action Agency, Charlottesville, VA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Coordinated parent activities at seven Head Start centers. Developed and conducted parent trainings on child development, job skills, and parenting. Coordinated volunteer program Served in an advisory capacity to the Policy Council 	1983-1985
<p>Teacher, Westminster Child Care Center, Charlottesville, VA</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan and implement a developmentally appropriate curriculum for four year olds. Staff representative to the Westminster Child Care Center Board of Directors 	1980-1983

Related Activities

Member of the West Virginia Early Childhood Advisory Council This committee is responsible for revising Training and Technical Assistance Competencies for West Virginia Early Childhood Educators	May 2016-present
EarlyEDU Meeting, West Virginia Team, Seattle, WA	June 2016
EarlyEDU Meeting, West Virginia Team, New York, NY	May 2015
Attended NAEYC Professional Development Institute, Baltimore, MD	June 2016
Attended North American Reggio Emilia Alliance, Pittsburgh, PA	June 2015
Presented workshop at the Huntington Area Early Childhood Conference: "ABC's of Observation and Assessment"	April 2014
Completed CLASS training with reliability rating	December 2015 December 2014 December 2013
Member of the West Virginia Professional Development and Early Learning Standards Committee. This committee is responsible for revising the Core Competencies for West Virginia Early Childhood Educators.	2012-present
Attended the 11 th Head Start Research Conference, Washington, DC	June 2012
Presented workshop at the Huntington Area Early Childhood Conference: "Watch, Listen, & Learn". An overview of observation and assessment	April 2012
Submitted for publication ""mind AND heart" Caring Learning Communities Bridge the Testing Divide" to <i>Journal of Educational Change</i>	October 2011
River Valley Child Development Services Providers Training: Observation and Reflection: The Key to Responsive Teaching with Dawn LeGrow	April 4, 2011
Appalachian Studies Association Conference Presented a summary of research: Creating a Caring Learning Community in an Appalachian School, Richmond, KY with: Dr. Linda Spatig, Cheryl Jeffers, Ashley Stephens	March 13, 2011
Marshall University Early Childhood Outreach Program: Inquiry Approach for Parents, Parkersburg, WV, with Dr. Janet Dozier	March 4, 2011

Association of Teacher Educators: An Approach to the Classroom that Models Compassionate Accountability, Orlando, FL with: Dr. Calvin Meyer, Cheryl Jeffers, Georgia Porter	<i>February 15, 2011</i>
Presented workshop at Huntington Early Childhood Conference, Huntington, WV "Fostering Friendships"	<i>April 2010</i>
Published "Fostering Friendships" in <i>West Virginia Early Childhood Quarterly</i>	<i>Spring 2010</i>
Completed CLASS training with reliability rating, Charleston, WV	<i>April 2008</i>
Attended "Supervision for Education Managers", Charleston, SC	<i>September 2007</i>
Presented workshop at Huntington Early Childhood Conference, Huntington, WV "I am Moving, I am Learning"	<i>April 2007</i>
Attended Teaching Strategies Summer Institute, Las Vegas, NV -Guiding , Evaluating, and Sustaining Curriculum Implementation -Literacy: The Creative Curriculum Approach	<i>June 2006</i>
Attended Region III Head Start Training "I am Moving, I am Learning" Charleston, WV	<i>December 2004</i>
Presented at the West Virginia Head Start Association Meeting: "Linking the Creative Curriculum' Developmental Continuum to Child Outcomes, Charleston, WV	<i>October 2004</i>
Presented workshop "Curriculum and Ongoing Assessment", Lincoln County Pre-k staff, Hamlin, WV	<i>October 2004</i>

Memberships & Affiliations

- Member, National Association for the Education of Young Children
- Member, Southern Early Childhood Association
- West Virginia Association for Young Children
- Member of local ACDS council, Cabell/Wayne County
- West Virginia STARS Trainer
- Member of West Virginia STARS Advisory Committee