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Transition voices: Perspectives, concerns, and discontinuities expressed by children, parents, and teachers as children transition from a university-affiliated kindergarten to a public school first grade

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Transition voices: Perspectives, concerns, and discontinuities expressed by children, parents, and teachers as children transition from a university-affiliated kindergarten to a public school first grade

Abstract
Transition encompasses the events and experiences that occur as a child moves from kindergarten to first grade. Transition marks the time when children are separated from a familiar routine and environment and placed into an environment of uncertainty, changing roles, and expectations. Children who experience continuity with earlier educational experiences show increased motivation, improved relationships with peers and adults, and higher achievement.

Using a constructivist grounded theory approach this study documented the perspectives, concerns, and experiences of ten children and their parents as children transitioned from a University-affiliated kindergarten program to a public school first grade. Data were gathered using observation, participant observation, interviews, and correspondence with study participants. While continuities emerged from these data, discontinuities were numerous and included school culture, teacher, social adjustment, pedagogy, rules and routine, communication, information sharing and parent involvement.

Teachers expressed concern about information sharing and the format and content of kindergarten assessments. Parent concerns included teacher disposition; instructional approaches; learning environment; social adjustment; and children's fatigue, stress, self-esteem, and body image. Children's concerns included teacher expectations; increased academic demands; school rules and routines; friendships; and a loss of voice, choice, and control over their learning. First grade teachers attributed children's transition difficulties to readiness skills, academic preparation, and social immaturity.

Four underlying complexities of transitions emerged in my data (a) the importance of children's microsystems; their home, their pre-school and kindergarten, and their first grade public school world; (b) the transferability of previously acquired competencies, skills, and learning behaviors in the first grade learning environment; (c) conformity; the loss of voice, choice, and control over children's learning; and (d) the tension between beliefs about DAP and compliance with legislative mandates such as NCLB.

To promote successful transitions recommendations were made for parents, teachers, and administrators. Recommendations include advocacy for children; information sharing between sending and receiving teachers; and on-going communication between teachers and parents, and parents and children. To prepare and alleviate anxiety in children and parents practices, routines, and schedules should be established; along with on-going discussions prior to school entry in September.

Keywords
Education, Early Childhood, Education, Elementary
Transition Voices: Perspectives, Concerns, and Discontinuities Expressed by Children, Parents, and Teachers as Children Transition from a University-Affiliated Kindergarten to a Public School First Grade

BY

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DISSERTATION

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Doctor of Philosophy in Education

December, 2005
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5/31/05 Date
DEDICATION

For children, and all who teach them.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It is with sincere appreciation and gratitude that I acknowledge the following people who have helped me complete this dissertation. I want to begin by thanking all of my study participants. Through their willingness to share their perspectives, concerns and experiences with me, they are helping to make a contribution to the field of early childhood education and their voices will be heard throughout the world. Through my work with them, I have gained experience and confidence as a researcher and new insights about my beliefs and values regarding excellence in teaching.

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ABSTRACT

TRANSITION VOICES: PERSPECTIVES, CONCERNS, AND DISCONTINUITIES EXPRESSED BY CHILDREN, PARENTS, AND TEACHERS AS CHILDREN TRANSITION FROM A UNIVERSITY-AFFILIATED KINDERGARTEN TO A PUBLIC SCHOOL FIRST GRADE

by

Laurie J. Harper

University of New Hampshire, December 2005

Transition encompasses the events and experiences that occur as a child moves from kindergarten to first grade. Transition marks the time when children are separated from a familiar routine and environment and placed into an environment of uncertainty, changing roles, and expectations. Children who experience continuity with earlier educational experiences show increased motivation, improved relationships with peers and adults, and higher achievement.

Using a constructivist grounded theory approach this study documented the perspectives, concerns, and experiences of ten children and their parents as children transitioned from a University-affiliated kindergarten program to a public school first grade. Data were gathered using observation, participant observation, interviews, and correspondence with study participants. While continuities emerged from these data, discontinuities were numerous and included school culture, teacher, social adjustment, pedagogy, rules and routine, communication, information sharing and parent involvement.

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Four underlying complexities of transitions emerged in my data (a) the importance of children's microsystems; their home, their pre-school and kindergarten, and their first grade public school world; (b) the transferability of previously acquired competencies, skills, and learning behaviors in the first grade learning environment; (c) conformity; the loss of voice, choice, and control over children's learning; and (d) the tension between beliefs about DAP and compliance with legislative mandates such as NCLB.

To promote successful transitions recommendations were made for parents, teachers, and administrators. Recommendations include advocacy for children; information sharing between sending and receiving teachers; and on-going communication between teachers and parents, and parents and children. To prepare and alleviate anxiety in children and parents practices, routines, and schedules should be established; along with on-going discussions prior to school entry in September.
1.0 INTRODUCTION

Transition refers to the process of change that is experienced when children move from one setting to another (Fabian & Dunlop, 2002). Transition includes all those events and activities that occur during the change from one environment to another. The different environments in a transition may be childcare settings, preschools and primary schools, or even homes (California State Department of Education, 1996; Stief, 1994). Transition includes the length of time it takes a child to make the change and adjust to the new environment, encompassing the time between the points of awareness that a transition is going to occur, to settling-into the new environment, to the time when the child is fully established as a member of the new setting. Transition is a time of intense and accelerated developmental demands that are socially regulated (Fabian & Dunlop, 2002). Transition success is defined as the absence of major problems (Entwisle & Alexander, 1989). Successful transitions include emotional, social, and cognitive aspects.

A common transition for many children is the transition from pre-school to kindergarten or from kindergarten to first grade. A growing number of pre-school aged children participate in out-of-home early care and educational settings. These settings may be public schools or private schools and childcare centers. Although kindergarten is a common experience for young children in the United States, it is not a uniform one (Zill, 1999). The kindergarten experiences of children are diverse. Some attend kindergarten half a day, while others attend a
full day. In addition, a substantial minority of students attend private kindergarten programs, then shift to public schools to attend first grade (Zill, 1999). Children also differ in their educational backgrounds and degrees of preparation that they bring to the kindergarten experience.

These programs differ in more than just the setting; they also differ widely in philosophy, curriculum, structure, and practice. Public school kindergarten and first grade programs have become increasingly academic in focus (Broström, 2002; Steif, 1994). This is in direct response to school policy makers who continue to implement legislation and standards which endorse higher curriculum expectations among educators and place developmentally inappropriate demands on young children (Bredekamp & Shepard, 1989; Elkind, 1987; National Association for the Education of Young Children [NAEYC], 1990) to achieve proficiency in the core areas of reading, writing, and mathematics. The increased academic focus in first grade makes the transition to public school first grade difficult for families and children, especially from private school settings. Many children may experience failure, which may compromise their future success in school and later in life (Stief, 1994).

Transitions are influenced by socio-cultural ideas of childhood, early schooling experiences, academic expectations, and parental expectations (Fabian & Dunlop, 2002). Socio-economic, temperamental, and personal competencies may also be factors associated with transitions (Yeboah, 2002). Schools are the primary institution in the United States for instilling a sense of accomplishment and encouraging life-long learning experiences (Ramey &
Ramey, 1994). This sense of accomplishment and success develops in the early childhood years and can either be supported or disturbed during the transition to public school.

Transitions can be seen as a normative process since all children must experience them several times throughout their lives. During transitions children may experience discontinuity. Sanchez and Thorpe (1998) suggest that discontinuity is not something to be avoided, provided that appropriate scaffolding is given to children. Children can learn how to cope with the feelings they may have, and how to develop effective strategies to deal with new or stressful situations. Transitions include physical, social, and philosophical changes that may impact the emotional well-being of children and may impede their learning. While transitions can be viewed as exciting learning opportunities, there are risks for children who experience difficult transitions. Kagan and Neuman (1999) suggest that children who had difficult transitions, will have difficulties in school adjustment, making friends, and may have additional health and emotional problems.

Children's experiences during the early years are critical determinants of future progress and attainment educationally, economically, and as a member of their social community (Bertram & Pascal, 2002). Each early experience is likely to effect children and their capacity to adjust and learn in future situations. How children negotiate the transition to formal schooling has important and potentially long-lasting effects on their school careers (Davis, 1995; Entwisle & Alexander, 1989; Ramey & Ramey, 1998). Children who have academic and social
difficulties in the early school years are likely to continue having problems throughout their school careers and in their later lives (Ladd, 1990; Maxwell, 1993; Parker & Asher, 1987). For both children and parents, early transitions set the stage for all future transitions by setting the tone and direction of a child’s school career (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 1999), and developing a sense of place for parents in the educational system (Deitz & Warkala, 1993).

School entry is a pivotal time in a child’s development because parents’ beliefs about their child’s abilities are forming and children’s own academic self-concepts emerge (Zill, 1999). This is a time when children begin to acquire a reputation among peers, teachers, and principals; it is also a time when written achievement, performance, and conduct records emerge to follow children throughout their school careers (Alexander & Entwisle, 1988; Early, Pianta & Cox, 1999).

The transition to school is a life transition for children and its critical nature for early development is largely overlooked by the public and policy makers (Entwisle & Alexander, 1999). In recent years, however, there has been a growing recognition among teachers, parents, and researchers that experiences prior to elementary school and in the early years of elementary school are important, and may have a profound influence on children’s’ later achievement (Bertram & Pascal, 2002; Davis, 1995; Entwisle & Alexander, 1989; Ladd, 1990; Ramey & Ramey, 1998). During the early years children acquire basic skills and knowledge, which serve as the foundation for further learning. The transition to public school is a crucial period for a child in that the first contact with school is of
vital importance in how the child will experience school as an arena for learning and social development in the future.

This study documents the expectations, perspectives, and concerns of children, parents, and teachers during the transition process from a progressive pre-school setting to traditional public first grade setting. It identifies critical elements and areas of concern in the transition process, and recommends specific practices to make transitions smooth and successful for children (Figure 1.0-1).
FIGURE 1.0-1 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Constructivist Grounded Theory
- Process theory
- Meaning from the data
- Analytical interpretations
- Simultaneous data collection and analysis
- Emerging themes
- Subjective emphasis

Transition to School

Perspectives and Concerns of Parents, Children and Teachers

Factors Affecting Transition

Preparation and Practices of Parents, Teachers and Schools

Research Question #1
What are the perspectives, expectations and concerns regarding transition for children, parents and teachers?

What are the continuities and discontinuities of transition?

Recommendations and Implications for Policy and Practice

Research Question #2
How do children and their parents experience the transition?

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1.1 Purpose of My Research

The purpose of my research was to identify the specific elements of transition that contribute to successful transitions from the perspectives of children and parents. An accompanying secondary purpose pivotal to this understanding was an awareness and identification of the underlying perspectives and concerns made by children, parents, and teachers involved in the process.

My inquiry examined and documented the transition experiences of children and their families as they moved from a private University-affiliated Kindergarten program into a first grade public school program. Through parent and child interviews, those practices, elements, and events that contributed to continuity and discontinuity in the transition to school were identified. Furthermore, my research uncovers the complexities of the transition process for young children and their families, and in so doing gave children and their families' voice.

My inquiry will not only inspire a re-conceptualization among educators and policy makers of what the transition to public school means for children and their families, but will also spark a re-examination of the transition policies associated with early education in public schools. This re-examination may lead to concrete changes in the ways that educators and administrators approach the transition process and to a reformulation of transition policies and practices in public schools.
1.2 Situating the Problem

My own experience as an early childhood teacher suggests that a dismissive attitude toward the transition of children from home or early childcare to school exists. The roots of this dismissive attitude stem from the fact that virtually every adult made the transition to school and lived to tell about it. An attitude of "I did it and I turned out" okay prevails among many adults. Educational professionals exacerbate this dismissive attitude by failing to take action to ease the transition for children and families. A climate exists in which teachers, administrators, and society in general dismiss the chaotic and often traumatic process of transitioning into school for children and their families since it is viewed as a rite of passage or as part of growing up and becoming independent and learning about their place in the world.

Although society views schooling as a rite of passage for young children, it is a period of transition and adjustment for both children and their parents. Discontinuity is an essential feature of transition and life. Changes can bring new possibilities, opportunities, and experiences; new developmental capacities, as well as challenges and set backs. If the demands of a changed situation are not fulfilled, or resources are not sufficient, stress occurs (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987). Although Schultz & Heuchert (1983) suggest that "stress can help children successfully meet life events and thus become an important source of self-confirmation, an indication of self-control and personal power" (p. 62); too much stress can be harmful. Stress brought on by a difficult transition brings irreversible changes and memories that may have implications for the rest of a
child’s life. For some children it marks the time when they are separated from a familiar routine or schedule in an environment dominated by the home, early care provider or preschool, and placed into an environment of unknown context and uncertainty.

For children there is fear and excitement of the larger world of unknowns, and they sense that their life will be different from this point forward. For parents, it is a time of hope coupled with uncertainty. Many parents look forward to their child’s entry into school. It is an exciting and meaningful ritual, however, it has been my experience that parents worry that their child’s needs may not be met and are reluctant to hand their child over to those in the school system. In some instances, it may be their first contact with the school system since they were themselves students.

As I look beyond the immediate scope of my direct experiences and observations, to the ideas and work of others, I am particularly struck by the work of Entwisle and Alexander (1998). These early childhood researchers use hospital admission as an analogy for understanding and appreciating the shock of transition to public school that young children endure. Entwisle and Alexander (1998) note:

First graders, like hospital patients, lose control over life’s small daily routines of eating or elimination. They have little control over when they can get a drink of water or use the bathroom. First graders, like hospital patients, cannot leave the room without permission. They take a
prescribed curriculum, move through a preordained daily schedule and are evaluated according to criteria they do not understand (pp. 355-356).

Although adults don’t generally think of children entering school in this framework, it is indeed remarkably similar. Many parallels are evident. Perhaps the most disturbing parallel is the child’s lack of control and sense of powerlessness over his environment and circumstance. Young children are powerless to make decisions about school entrance. They have very little control over their schedules, teacher routine, and school policies; they are dominated by adult concerns and decisions that directly affect control over them, their actions, their speech, and their bodies. Children vary in the degree of this feeling of loss of control, as the transition process is an individual process for each child and parent dependant on many variables and prior experiences.

Children’s entrance into public school involves taking up a new role as student, identifying with new peers and teachers, adopting new reference groups and classmates (Entwisle, et al., 1987; Kakvoulis, 1994), and developing new academic standards by which to judge themselves and others (Entwisle, et al., 1987). During these transitions children must cope with many new demands; experiencing an abrupt change in school environment (Kakvoulis, 1994). They must embrace and accomplish new academic challenges (Bogat, Jones & Jason, 1980; Holland, Kaplan & Davis, 1974; Kakvoulis, 1994), learn new school and teacher expectations (Bensen, Haycraft, Steyaert, & Weigel, 1979; Kakvoulis, 1994), and gain acceptance into a new peer group (Ladd, 1990; Ladd & Price, 1987).
The relationship between teachers, parents, and school is an important factor in a child's transition. It is particularly important given the fact that the point of entry to school is the point at which the two great socializing influences in a child's life, the family and the school community, first meet (Ramey & Ramey, 1999). This first meeting is likely to have great impact on the child's future schooling. Nonetheless, in many instances, parents and their children don't have any say or control over whom their teacher will be, let alone their routine. Parents may not be consulted or have any input into the process of matching their child with a teacher. This is surprising given the range of abilities, attitudes, and experience among teachers. In her study on the transition to school at age five, Renwick (1984) found that the personality and skill of New Zealand teachers were major factors contributing to the ease with which a child settles into school. Parents' single most important criterion for making a judgment about the school was the quality of the teacher responsible for their child (Renwick, 1984).

The powerlessness that children face may be tied to social acceptance by peers and teachers, accepting and conforming to the demands of classroom routine and organization, the physical restraints of the classroom, and unrealistic expectations of the child (Renwick, 1984). A child may become anxious because they don't want to get into trouble, and they do not know what is expected of them. It is not uncommon for a child to be frightened of breaking the rules because they don't completely understand the context of the rules or the rules themselves. Some children may be troubled by rules that they cannot understand or see a reason behind. For instance, why they cannot talk to...
friend during lunch; or why they must ask before going to the bathroom, getting a
drink, or reaching for a tissue. A child may become confused by teacher
demands such as eat all of your lunch, or wait to go to the bathroom, or you can
get a drink after the story, when s/he is accustomed to making such autonomous
self-help decisions without adult permission. Additionally, young children
typically lack a thorough understanding and knowledge of time. This may
perpetuate uncertainty about being at the right place at the right time leading to
further anxiety.

Transition is an important, fundamental issue not addressed in the United
States educational system. The National Transition Study (Love, Logue,
Trudeau & Thayer, 1992) suggests that few schools focus on transitions despite
the understanding of the need to promote continuity between effective practices.
As children begin their formal schooling, its critical nature for early development
has largely been overlooked by the public and policy makers. Its significance as
a life transition has not warranted sufficient attention or research (Entwisle &
Alexander, 1999). Yet in first grade, children assume the full role of student, with
a new set of teachers, supervisors, and peers; and role obligations. While there
has been concern to make children's transitions from preschool to primary school
smoother, studies have generally focused on transition planning (Shotts,
Rosenkoetter, Streufert, & Rosenkoetter, 1994); collaboration among parents,
educators, and community agencies (Rosenkoetter, Hains, & Fowler, 1994); and
continuity and discontinuity in transitions (Curtis, 1986; Hubbell, Plantz, Condelli,
An important aspect regarding transition research that has not been adequately addressed is transition from children's perspectives. The lack of transition information from a child's perspective is an important factor in transition planning. Most of what educators know about children's transition to school is based on the perspective of schools and teachers. In general, most studies have focused on only one perspective, that of the teacher (Early et al., 1999; La Paro, Pianta & Cox, 2000a, 2000b; Pianta & Cox, 1998, 1999; Pianta & La Paro, 2000). A few studies have focused on the perspectives of the parents (Peters, 2000; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 1999; Yeom, 1996).

Children experience transition most directly, yet little research has been conducted on transition issues from the perspectives of children experiencing transition (Corsaro & Molinari, 2000; Peters, 2000; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 1999; Yeom, 1996, 1998). Most studies and policy recommendations fail to include or consider the perspectives of children, or to document the transition experience during the period of adjustment. A documented scope and sequence of the transition period for children and their families does not exist. What are missing in the analysis of the predictors of successful and unsuccessful transition to school are data involving families' perspectives (Belsky & MacKinnon, 1994). To gain a better understanding of the transition process, parents, and especially children, will be interviewed. Interviewing children can provide vital information about children's experiences, successes, and challenges during transition. This information can promote child-centered transition policy in public schools.
A second problem with transition concerns teacher access to transition information, teacher training, and transition program development. Studies have concluded that in general, teachers don't possess information on transition planning or implementation plans, and professional development opportunities related to the transition process for children and their families do not exist for most teachers (Early et al., 1999; Pianta & Cox 1998, 1999). Additionally, there is a lack of acknowledgment on the part of administrators that teachers don't have information or formal training on effective transition planning. While school districts are mandated to have transition plans and practices for children identified with special needs, they fall short of having or providing these same transition services to children and their families who are not identified as having special needs or requirements.

A third transition problem is advocacy for children and their families during the transition to school. Within the educational community, general acceptance that teachers do not engage in transition practices directly with children and families outside of the school setting and in advance of the beginning of the school year prevails. Educators do not reach out to provide support to children and their families beyond the occasional newsletter or open house (La Paro et al., 2000a, b; Pianta & Cox, 1998). There is lack of evidence of direct effort to ease transition and acclimate children to their new school surroundings, student and peer roles, and teacher expectations. The constraints on teachers' time, lack of transition plans within the district, and an inadequate school budget...
prevent teachers from reaching out to children and families (Pianta & Cox, 1998, 1999).

Home visits are problematic and rarely occur for students that are not identified with special needs because they are time-consuming and teachers are not paid during the summer. Teachers work a ten-month schedule beginning in September and ending in late June. Even if teachers were available to conduct home visits during the summer months before school began, most districts could not afford to pay them for their time (Pianta & Cox, 1998). This suggests that policy makers don’t regard the transition of children to school as an important process and/or they do not recognize the role transitions may play in overall academic success or success in later life.

In contrast to this view, early child educators, psychologists, and social workers increasingly view transition planning as a crucial component of all school programs (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1997). Current best practice dictates that transitions be seen as a continual process rather than a periodic one. Researchers Lazzari and Kilgo (1989) have identified transition practices and responsibilities as reaching far beyond the simple physical transfer of children and their records. They argue for increasing teachers’ and administrators’ sensitivity to the effect on children and families of changes in status, new professional personalities, novel expectations, and unfamiliar peer groups.

Studying transitions is important because (a) transitions have been found to have a long-standing impact on the student’s school success; (b) studying
transitions from the perspective of children and parents could provide teachers and administrators with a greater understanding of the factors that cause stress, anxiety, academic, and behavioral problems in children; and (c) identifying the elements of smooth transitions could lead to the development of transition protocol including guidelines with broader application.

The transition to public school warrants examination and further study because of the potential long-term negative consequences when difficulties arise. How children negotiate the transition to formal schooling has important and long-lasting effects on their school careers (Entwisle & Alexander, 1989). After the family, the school is likely to be the most profound influence in a child's life (Ramey & Ramey, 1994, 1999). Schools are the primary institution in our society for instilling a sense of accomplishment and encouraging life-long learning experiences. Early transitions set the stage for all future transitions; in the early years families develop long-lasting beliefs about their autonomy, power, and status within the educational system (Deitz & Warkala, 1993).

A study of young children's transition to school is important because during the phase of early childhood, children progress through a critical period of development in self-concept, language, degree of self-control, and independence (Love, 1992). Many researchers have pointed to the transition to school as a critical component of long-term school success (Alexander & Entwisle, 1988; Cairns & Cairns, 1994; Entwisle & Alexander, 1993) and to early schooling as a critical period phenomenon (Entwisle & Alexander, 1989). Entwisle and Alexander (1993; 1998) identified the first years of formal schooling as having
considerable consequence for the child's academic trajectory. Students who had difficulty adjusting to school from the beginning had an especially difficult time catching up. Additionally, children with academic and social problems early in their school careers are more likely to exhibit problems throughout their schooling (Belsky & MacKinnon, 1994; Ladd & Price, 1987).

Because academic difficulties have been traced back to problems of underachievement that began during transitions to school during the first years of early schooling (Belsky & MacKinnon, 1994), a thorough understanding of the elements of the transition to school process is needed.

1.3 Identifying and Understanding Transition Elements

Transitions are often difficult for children, their families, service providers, and teachers because of the changing environment, roles, and expectations for all involved. Because preschool or in-home care environments are often different in philosophy, practice, and environmental factors from those of public schools, it is important that public school teachers build on children's prior experiences and help ease the transition between these two environments. The identification of the factors that cause anxiety and academic or behavioral problems may lead to the development of transition strategies. These transition strategies may encompass the areas of environment; roles and expectations of children and parents; and seek ways to minimize children's anxiety, behavioral and academic problems, and other adjustment difficulties that are known to have a profound influence on the academic and social success of individual students.
This study of the transition process will identify those elements, practices, and structures that produce anxiety, stress, and challenges for students, teachers, and parents. Identifying the most difficult elements of the transition process from the perspective of the child is a critical step in developing strategies to smooth these transitions. Smoothing these transitions fosters a cooperative atmosphere and accelerates a child's readiness for learning. Because transitions also have a long-term impact on a child's overall academic and life-skill success, developing such strategies could have social and academic benefits beyond the elementary school setting.

Researchers indicate that the transition from early childhood programs to elementary school programs can be difficult for young children due to many changes from program to program (Mangione, 1992; Yeom, 1996, 1998). Especially difficult for some children are changes in teaching styles and learning styles (Honig, 1978); social, physical, and emotional stresses (Bohl, 1984); and high expectations for children from parents and teachers (Mayfield, 1983).

Documenting the transition setting and identifying the elements of smooth and successful transitions will further our understanding of the transition process from the perspective of children and help administrators and policy makers develop strategies to help parents, teachers, and students cope with changes in the learning environment and the emotional climate. As part of a study of transitions, the structure, process, and content of the learning environment must be documented and analyzed for a thorough understanding of the dynamics involved for children and their parents during the transition to school. For
example, some private kindergarten programs tend to be based on learning through play. This learning through play uses imagination and focuses on discovery and movement. Many public school grade one classrooms tend to be more structured and focus on learning academic subject matter through traditional methods of worksheets and seatwork. These differences can result in children having difficulty socially, emotionally, and physically as they transition from one program to another (Yeom, 1998).

### 1.4 Current Educational Policy on Transitions

Recent legislation, including our National Goals for Education (Executive Office of the President, 1990), and the Improving America's Schools Act (1994), have emphasized the importance of transitions and targeted certain children for transition assistance. Our first national educational goal, "By the year 2000, all children will start school ready to learn," emphasizes the role that early experiences play in preparing children for successful schooling. Quality preschool programs build on the growth which takes place in a child's earliest years; just as exemplary early elementary programs build on the learning and development that have taken place in the home and through earlier educational experiences. Because the family's influence is fundamental in children's early years, it is critical to link subsequent steps in a child's education to earlier experiences, and to involve parents and families in these linking activities (California State Department of Education, 1996).

The Improving America's Schools Act also recognizes the importance of transitions and of providing continuity for children. Title I, Part A, Section 1114,
requires school-wide projects to plan children's transitions from early childhood programs such as Head Start, state-funded child development programs, and Even Start (a federally funded program) to local elementary school programs. In addition, Section 1115 requires Targeted Assistance programs to assist preschool children in their transitions to elementary school.

While these goals and policies clearly recognize the importance of transitions, they fail to ensure successful transitions for all students, instead providing provisions for children with special needs and at-risk children, but doing nothing for children who do not fall into these categories. Most children would benefit from transition planning and programs. A study of transition practices should examine the guidelines established in this legislation and determine if it can be modified for wider application to all students.

1.5 Need for Additional Research

Longitudinal research that follows children from preschool to elementary school is needed to develop our understanding of transitions, a period often neglected in children's lives (Corsaro & Molinari, 2000). Relying primarily on surveys, questionnaires, and correlational analyses, researchers who have examined this period report statistical relationships between educational outcomes and a variety of categorical variables such as the existence of formal transition policies in school districts, transition practices of sending and receiving teachers, and the role of parents in preparing children for the transition to school. However, quantitative studies have difficulty documenting key processes of continuity and discontinuity in children's transition from one setting to another.
More descriptive qualitative research is needed of the transition into kindergarten (Ladd, 1990; Ladd & Price, 1987; Love & Logue, 1992) and into first grade (Entwisle & Alexander, 1993, 1998; Reynolds, 1991, 1994; Reynolds & Bezruczko, 1993) to document the key elements of transition, and to identify those elements that breed anxiety and those that lead to successful transitions.

Additional research should focus on transition issues from the perspectives of children, an area of little current research (Corsaro & Molinari, 2000; Peters, 2000; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 1999; Yeom, 1996, 1998). In addition to a lack of information from the perspectives of children, is a lack of information from the perspectives of families (Belsky & MacKinnon, 1994). To gain a broader understanding of the transition process, parents, and especially children, will be interviewed.

1.6 Research Questions

The specific questions that guide my research stem directly from the purpose, justification, and conceptual arguments presented previously and are fundamental to my proposed inquiry:

1. What are the transition perspectives and concerns for children and their parents?

2. How do children and their parents experience the transition?
   What is the role of parents, teachers and the school before and during the transition?

3. What are the continuities and discontinuities associated with transition?
It is important for me as an educator to understand the transition process from the perspectives of children and their parents. I believe that many parents, teachers, and administrators make the assumption that it is a rite of passage and part of growing up, and in time, most young children will make the transition, regardless of negative experiences. Hence, the transition to public school for young children receives little attention. I hope to construct an understanding of what meaning children and parents make of this process, and how children and their parents experience the transition to public school. This understanding may (a) inform teachers’ and administrators about the effects of transitions on children and their families; (b) illuminate the factors that provide continuity or discontinuity during the transition process; and (c) facilitate efforts and policy to make transitions smoother and more productive for children, their families, teachers, and administrators.

My dissertation research focuses on the experiences of children and their parents during the transition from a private University-affiliated Kindergarten program into a first grade public school program child through observation, participant observation, and interviews in a constructivist grounded theory approach. In this study I describe the perspectives and document the experiences of participants during the transition; review current transition policy; discuss relevant studies and literature on transition; and suggest strategies that can be employed by parents, teachers, and administrators that will ensure success during transition. This knowledge may inform teachers’ and administrators about the effects of transitions on children and their families;
illuminate the factors that provide continuity or discontinuity during the transition process; and facilitate efforts and policy to make transitions smoother and more productive for children, their parents, and teachers.
2.0 REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of my research is to identify and document the perspectives, concerns, and experiences of children and their parents during the transition process, and to identify and document the continuities and discontinuities experienced by these study participants during their transition from a private University-affiliated Kindergarten program into a first grade public school program. Since the study of transition to public school from kindergarten can be viewed from several perspectives, I conducted a literature review on child development and school entry, developmentally appropriate practice, developmentally appropriate curriculum, transition planning, and transition studies.

2.1 Development and School Entry

Shifts in a child's development (cognitive, social, and emotional) mean that they are typically expected to be ready for the challenges of formal school. Historically, the structure of "formal school" is the result of both the needs of social class and of society to train workers for an industrialized society. More recently and less intentionally, the result of formal schooling meets the developmental potential of this age-group.

As knowledge structures and concepts continue to develop, children become increasingly able to engage in more complex, reason based problem solving tasks. This neurological maturation provides the resources that permit more advanced problem solving include an increase in information processing
capacity, storage, memory, retrieval, and increased strategic competence (Flavell, Beach, & Chinsky, 1966; Flavell, Miller & Miller, 2002). Memory strategies include rehearsal, organizational strategies including clustering, and elaboration. Organizational strategies and elaboration are later-developing strategies than the simpler forms of rehearsal (Schneider & Pressley, 1997). Older children are more flexible in the allocation of their attention to tasks, looking at all the information, able to make judgments. Other developing skills including mental representation of the problem, use of external representations such as sketches or models to plan out possible approaches, culturally given cognitive tools such as language and a writing system, and analogical or scientific reasoning to generate or test possible solutions (Flavell et al., 2002). These resources help children apply their knowledge and skills to solve more challenging problems as they make the shift from preschool to the primary school years.

Children display an increased capacity for self-monitoring and self-regulation as they mature. Self-regulation includes planning, directing, and evaluating one's own behavior. Metacognitively, children are busy analyzing new problems, judging how far they are from a goal, allocating attention, selecting a strategy, attempting a new solution, monitoring the success or failure of current performance, and deciding whether to change to a new strategy (Flavell et al., 2002).

During development, infancy gives way to early childhood and typically refers to the time a child reaches the age of eight as defined by the NAEYC.
This period is marked by the emergence of language, and the communicative
tasks accomplished in infancy on the behavioral plane must now be learned on
the more abstract, linguistic plane (Segal, 2004). Language serves important
intermental functions, as it is used as a tool for social influence and cooperation.
It also effects transformation of intramental functions, which become abstract,
conceptual, logical, measured, and selective (Vygotsky, 1978). Children have
not yet internalized their own voice, their attention is two-dimensional and fluid,
and they are unable to assume executive control of their own thought—they must
rely on the authoritative voice of others (Wertsch, 1991).

Children’s transition to middle childhood begins at about grade three and
is characterized by greater communicative competencies and stability of thought.
During this time inner speech becomes fully internalized and provides a means of
self-organization and influence (Vygotsky, 1978). Inner speech also serves more
than simply a cognitive-organizational function. Children appropriate the voices
of authority for themselves, acquiring the values and language that confer power
and a sense of grounding (Vandenberg, 2004). Their self-organizing values
embody the authority derived from the appropriated voices. It is also during this
time that children become involved in a context that shapes thought and behavior
in ways highly valued by the culture: school. In pre-school, children gain self-
confidence, self-control, the ability to cooperate, and an eagerness to learn. In
primary school, children learn to decontextualize experiences, acquire skills of
literacy, and think rationally in increasingly sophisticated ways, all of which are
critical for participating in the realities of the culture (Wertsch, 1991).
Domains of children’s development-physical, social, emotional and cognitive are closely related with development in one domain influencing development in other domains. Development proceeds in a predictable and relatively orderly sequence with later abilities, skills, and knowledge building on those already acquired toward greater complexity, organization, and internalization (Bredekamp & Copple, 1996, 1997). However, it is important to remember that children vary in their cognitive capacities because development proceeds at varying rates from child to child, as well as unevenly within different areas of each child’s functioning. Moreover, competencies may become linked with other competencies to form larger systems of interrelated knowledge and skills. Competencies may also become more accessible to conscious reflection and verbal expression (Karmiloff-Smith, 1992), so that children can explain how they solve problems.

Development and learning (a) result from interaction of biological maturation and the environment, which includes both the physical and social worlds that children live in; (b) are influenced by multiple social and cultural contexts; and (c) are optimal when children are in the context of a community where they are safe and valued, their physical needs are met, and they feel psychologically secure (Bredekamp & Copple, 1996, 1997). In addition, children are active learners, drawing on direct physical and social experiences as well as culturally transmitted knowledge to construct their own understandings of the world around them (Bredekamp & Copple, 1996, 1997). Different sociocultural contexts create different memory-relevant learning environments and
consequently enhance different skills (Rogoff, 1998). Remembering is a socially situated activity. Schooling appears to underlie some of the cultural influences on memory (Cole, 1996; Rogoff, 1998).

The transition to school is seen as a period of change generally associated with stress and anxiety (Erikson, 1985). During transition, children experience changes in their environments, roles, and expectations (Mangione, 1992; Yeom, 1996, 1998). Transitions are difficult for children. Especially difficult for children are social and emotional stresses (Bohl, 1984; Griebel & Niesel, 2002), changes in teaching styles (Broström, 2002; Honig, 1978), and increased academic expectations (Broström, 2002; Mayfield, 1983; Steif, 1994). Too much change, inappropriate expectations, or abrupt change may interfere with development (U. S. Department of Health and Human Services, 1997).

2.2 Developmentally Appropriate Practices

The NAEYC adopted the first definitive position on Developmentally Appropriate Practice (DAP) in 1986. It was defined in terms of two dimensions: age appropriateness and individual appropriateness (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). With the development of NAEYC's new accreditation system, came the realization and genuine need for a specific developmentally appropriate practice definition and accompanying guidelines for educators to create and offer quality early childhood programs. Guidelines were also responding to trends such as (a) more formal academic instruction of young children; (b) the "push down" of academic skills, teaching practices, and materials from the public school curriculum to preschools; and (c) testing, retention, and placement practices that
assigned greater numbers of children to transition classes, retained them in
grade, or denied them enrollment (Raines & Johnston, 2003). With the
publication of Elkind’s *Miseducation* (1987) and *the Hurried Child* (2001), came
the realization of the dangers of “push down academics” and the resulting stress
that children may endure in school. Recently, there has been a greater push for
accountability in schools through formal and standardized testing and the No
Child Left Behind legislation (NCLB). Consequently, there is additional pressure
on the idea that children should be prepared for school entry ensuring that
children are ready for mandated grade level expectations and associated tests.

In response primary teachers may approach children from a diagnostic

In July 1996, NAEYC adopted a revised DAP position statement. This is
the most current statement and states that three kinds of information and
knowledge form the basis of professional decision making: (a) what is known
about child development and learning that permits general predictions within an
age range about what activities, materials, interactions, or experiences will be
safe, healthy, achievable, and also challenging to children; (b) what is known
about the strengths, interests, and needs of each individual child in the group to
be able to adapt for and be responsive to individual variation; and (c) knowledge
of the social and cultural contexts in which children live to ensure that learning
experiences are meaningful, relevant, and respectful to the participating children
and their families (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).
DAP is an educational framework and a philosophy for working with young children based on current educational research, theory, and practice (Gestwicki, 1999). DAP is built on the foundational work of fundamental theorists including Dewey, Piaget, Erickson, Vygotsky, Rogoff, and Gardner (Raines & Johnston, 2003). Knowledge regarding how children learn, develop, and grow informs developmentally appropriate practice guidelines. Educators rely on DAP to develop an integrated approach to curriculum, to plan instruction, and to create learning environments that match children's abilities and developmental tasks.

Since no two children are identical in maturation, environmental and genetic factors, background and early learning experiences, children are at variable developmental levels. In addition, early experiences have both cumulative and delayed effects on individual children's development, optimal periods exist for certain types of development and learning, and children demonstrate different modes of knowing and learning and different ways of representing what they know (Bredekamp & Copple, 1996, 1997). The challenge facing early childhood teachers today is identifying a child's level of readiness in academic areas and then providing a learning environment that best matches the child's current status and future growth. Building on this challenge is the need to plan for individualized instruction and scaffolding a child's learning to include active, real world, hands on opportunities, and developmental objectives to maximize success. A developmentally appropriate approach should reach out to individual children, asserting their right to be treated fairly, flexibly, and with
knowledge of the developmental differences implicit in their early school and life experiences.

   Children are natural learners, and they learn best when they interact with others and work actively with materials, they are given opportunities to learn skills through meaningful and interesting activities, and they are able to work at their own developmental level. Children shouldn’t be expected to learn the same things in the same way and at the same time (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997).

2.3 Developmentally Appropriate Curriculum

   In their joint position statement on curriculum, assessment, and program evaluation for children birth to age eight, NAEYC and the National Association of Early Childhood Specialists in State Departments of Education (NAECS/SDE) suggest that curriculum is (a) thoughtfully planned, (b) challenging and engaging, (c) developmentally appropriate, (d) culturally and linguistically responsive, (e) comprehensive, and (f) promotes positive outcomes (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 2003).

   According to this document, whatever the child’s age, curriculum goals should be thoughtfully planned and linked to important developmental levels, families and cultural contexts, language and culture. Curriculum should support educational equity for children who are learning a second language and make cultural connections with children. Curriculum should attend to a broad range of developmental and learning outcomes across domains and subject matter areas increasingly focused on helping children acquire deeper understanding of information and skills in core subject areas. A major shift as children move from
kindergarten into the primary grades is toward a greater focus on subject matter areas, without ignoring their developmental foundations. Curriculum should help children recognize the connections between and across disciplines and domains and include experiences that promote children's conflict resolution.

Teaching strategies should be tailored to children's ages, developmental capacities, individual characteristics, and abilities or disabilities. Teaching incorporates a variety of active strategies in which individual and small groups of children explore, inquire, discover, demonstrate, and solve problems. For all ages, the curriculum should lead children from where they are to new accomplishments while maintaining their interest and active involvement. Content that is engaging for children of different ages changes with their development and new experiences, requiring careful observation and adaptation. Whatever the child's age, curriculum should promote positive outcomes including immediate enjoyment, nurturance and long term benefits known to be essential for later academic success.

A child's initial adjustment to school is influenced by the characteristics of the pre-school and kindergarten classrooms, in particular, the developmental appropriateness of learning experiences and the consistency among kindergarten teachers and primary school teachers. Children's adjustment to kindergarten depends on the curriculum, activities, and approaches to learning used in the classroom (Maxwell & Eller, 1994). These characteristics can be placed on a continuum from developmentally appropriate to developmentally inappropriate. The same case can be made in regards to children transitioning
from a private kindergarten program to a first grade public school classroom. According to NAEYC guidelines, developmentally appropriate activities emphasize small groups of children rather than large groups, child-led rather than teacher-led activities, and manipulative materials rather than worksheets (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Meisels (1992) states that effective programs are child and family focused, individualized, flexible, and developmental in orientation. They view growth as multidimensional, reflecting the child’s culture, family, environment, natural variability, and the impact of early experiences. They are not maturational in orientation, but are responsive to individual variability, being based on reciprocal interchange between the child and the educational milieu.

Although developmentally appropriate practice discussions are philosophical and based on beliefs about children and their capabilities including theories of child development and theories of learning, the harmful effects of developmentally inappropriate practice have been documented (Burts, Charlesworth, & Fleege, 1991; Burts, Hart, Charlesworth, Fleege, Mosley, & Thomasson, 1992; Dunn & Kontos, 1997; Hart 1991; Hart, Burts, Durland, Charlesworth, DeWolf, & Fleege, 1998). Burts, Hart, Charlesworth, and Kirk (1990) and Burts et al. (1992) examined children's stress related behaviors in kindergarten classrooms that varied in their developmental appropriateness. Children in developmentally inappropriate classrooms exhibited more stress related behaviors than did children in developmentally appropriate classrooms.
The activities found to be most stressful for children were workbook and worksheet activities and assignments (Burts et al., 1992).

Transitions can be more successful if developmentally appropriate practices are employed (Love & Logue, 1992; Mendez, 2003; Ramey & Ramey, 1994). The California State Department of Education (1996) also outlined developmentally appropriate practices in preschool, kindergarten, and first grade programs. They suggested that (a) these practices offer a full range of rich curricula and experiences to all children, in modes and levels that take the developmental levels of each child into consideration; (b) teachers challenge and guide each student through successive levels of development; and (c) teachers engage in a common set of experiences that enable them to experience success and to develop confidence for accomplishing tasks in the future. These experiences should (a) respond to children's natural curiosity; (b) affirm their sense of self as they attempt to be competent learners; (c) help build increasingly complex skills in language use, problem solving, and cooperation; (d) promote positive dispositions for school and learning; (e) encourage active exploration of their environments and materials; (f) build on earlier experiences to help children make sense of their world; and (g) encourage interactions with adults and other children.

2.4 Transition Planning and Practices

Early child educators, psychologists and social workers increasingly view transition planning as a crucial component of all school programs. Current best practice dictates that transitions be seen as continual process rather than a
-periodic one. Transition programming provides children and their families with a bridge between the comfortable and familiar program, and the new and unfamiliar program. The transition journey can be one of excitement, filled with new opportunities and experiences and successful if pre-planning occurs.

Elements of successful transitions have been widely examined by researchers, theorists and educational departments across the country (Lazzari & Kilgo, 1989).

General approaches and specific practices have been identified to smooth transitions and to address the concerns expressed by teachers, parents, and children. Current and recommended transition practices for teachers' have been well documented. Successful teacher practices include a letter to parents before school begins, a talk with parents after school starts, and an open house for families a few weeks after school begins (Pianta & Cox, 1998). Recommended teacher practices include providing continuity in the curriculum (La Paro et al., 2000 a, b), inclusion of developmentally appropriate practice (California State Department of Education, 1996; Love & Logue, 1992; Mendez, 2003; Ramey & Ramey, 1994), on-going and continuous communication with parents (California State Department of Education, 1996; La Paro et al., 2000a; Love & Logue, 1992; Mendez, 2003; Ramey & Ramey, 1994), parent involvement (California State Department of Education, 1996), child preparation (California State Department of Education, 1996; Love & Logue, 1992; Mendez, 2003), school visits by children, parents and teachers (La Paro, et al., 2000a, b; Love & Logue,
Successful transitions promote (a) placement decisions that meet individual needs; (b) uninterrupted services; (c) non-confrontational and effective models of advocacy that families can emulate throughout their children's lives; (d) avoidance of duplication in assessment and goal planning; and (e) reduced stress for children, families, and service providers (Shotts, et al., 1994). The California State Department of Education (1996) outlined necessary actions teacher must take to ensure successful transitions (a) provide developmentally appropriate practice, (b) maintain communication, (c) prepare children for transition, and (d) involve parents in the transitions.

Clarification of expectations is a key step in building bridges between parents, preschool, and elementary school teachers. Love and Logue (1992) and Mendez (2003) identify the following options to strengthen communications and collaboration among participants that may make the transition from preschool to primary school easier for children: (a) primary school teachers should work closely with preschool teachers during the last months of school year to learn more about the children who will enter their kindergarten or first grade classroom; (b) primary and preschool teachers should visit one another's classroom to meet and familiarize themselves with new children entering their classrooms; (c) schools and programs should encourage and facilitate visits by children and teachers; (d) teachers should share expectations with parents and coach them on ways to support their child's transition to school; (e) classrooms
should have materials familiar to children and use activities that are familiar to
children; (f) preschool and primary teachers should share curriculum, material,
and other ideas that children are familiar with; (g) teachers should allow enough
transition time for children (at least two weeks) so that they can adapt to their
new environment; and (h) teachers should maintain a constant flow of
communication concerning children, practices, and programs between one
another and with parents.

Transition strategies can be employed by teachers, parents, and
administrators to support a successful transition to public school. Transition
strategies that benefit teachers, parents, and children were identified by the
California State Department of Education (1996) in their report: Continuity for
Young Children: Positive Transitions to Elementary School.

Teachers

Teachers who prepare children to make smooth transitions (a) design
optimal learning environments, (b) provide developmentally appropriate activities
for the children, (c) encourage and facilitate continuous communication with
parents, (d) convey to parents an understanding of the critical skills necessary for
young children's success, and (e) encourage children and their parents to visit
the new learning environment numerous times before and during the period
school begins (California State Department of Education, 1996; Ramey &
Ramey, 1994).

Optimal learning environments promote children's development and foster
positive attitudes towards learning (Ramey & Ramey, 1994). Positive learning
environments (a) are warm, friendly, and nurturing; (b) foster an atmosphere of respect and care; (c) take into account children’s diversity, needs, preferences, and individual development; (d) capture and sustain a child’s attention; (e) include rich and responsive language and communication; (f) are stimulating and promote learning; (g) involve the child as an active agent; and (h) utilize developmentally appropriate practices to ensure that children will have opportunities to engage in meaningful and interesting learning a daily basis.

Ramey and Ramey (1994) specify the "essential and minimal" fundamentals of learning environments to include: (a) the child sees that he or she has an effect on the environment, (b) the child be embedded in a responsive environment, (c) the environment be one that is sufficiently interesting and complete to capture and hold the child’s attention, and (d) the environment be trustworthy and comprehensible from the child’s vantage point.

All transitions will be more successful if developmentally appropriate practices are employed (Love & Logue, 1992; Mendez, 2003; Ramey & Ramey, 1994). The California State Department of Education (1996) also outlined developmentally appropriate practices in preschool, kindergarten, and first grade programs. They suggested that: (a) these practices offer a full range of rich curricula and experiences to all children, in modes and levels that take the developmental levels of each child into consideration, (b) teachers challenge and guide each student through successive levels of development, and (c) teachers engage in a common set of experiences that enable them to experience success and to develop confidence for accomplishing tasks in the future. These
experiences should (a) respond to children's natural curiosity; (b) affirm their sense of self as they attempt to be competent learners; (c) help build increasingly complex skills in language use, problem solving, and cooperation; (d) promote positive dispositions for school and learning; (e) encourage active exploration of their environments and materials; (f) build on earlier experiences to help children make sense of their world; and (g) encourage interactions with adults and other children.

Those teachers who reach out to young children and their families to ease their transition to school (a) know the child more completely, (b) are better able to meet the child's needs, (c) establish good rapport with parents, and (d) tend to experience a renewed sense of professionalism (California State Department of Education, 1996).

Parents

The transition to school begins before a child enters the classroom and commences formal instruction. In fact, parents and families may set the transition process in motion before a child begins school by preparing a child for school. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways: (a) discussing concerns and fears about school with children; (b) visiting and re-visiting the school; (c) discussing what school will be like (routines, teachers, classmates, curriculum); (d) establishing friendships through play groups and dates prior to school entry; and (e) preparing children for the academic demands of school by providing opportunities to listen to stories, ask questions about literature, exposing children to educational games, puzzles, books and other quiet activities, and teaching
basic readiness skills such as listening, talking in turn, manners, and other social conventions (Ramey & Ramey, 1994).

The California State Department of Education, (1996) found that parents play a critical role in their child's adjustment to new school situations. Active parent participation in positive transitions sets the tone and establishes a partnership with teachers and administrators. Parents whose children make smooth transitions tend to (a) expect success for their child; (b) provide support and encouragement; (c) recognize their child's ability to complete tasks; and (d) initiate opportunities for their children to interact with familiar and unfamiliar peers in large-group community settings.

Parents whose children are successful in their transition to school (a) gain confidence in their children's ability to succeed in new settings, (b) learn to communicate effectively with educational staff, and (c) acquire a greater knowledge and appreciation of the early childhood staff (California State Department of Education, 1996). Parents can further help their child transition throughout their educational lives by (a) sharing what they know about their child with teachers, (b) learning about new settings and experiences, (c) communicating regularly with teachers, (d) staying involved with the child's school, (e) networking with other parents, and (f) speaking out and advocating for all children (Administration for Children, Youth, and Families, 1998).

Transition practices performed by parents are not well documented, although many practices are recommended. Parents who wish to facilitate smooth transitions for their children should acknowledge and communicate their
concerns, fears, and expectations with children (California State Department of Education, 1996; Ramey & Ramey, 1994); visit the new school with the child (Ramey & Ramey, 1994); establish friendships through play groups prior to school entry (California State Department of Education, 1996; Ramey & Ramey, 1994); and prepare children's readiness skills such as listening, talking in turn, manners, and other social conventions (California State Department of Education, 1996).

Children

Research on young children's adjustment to new school situations shows that children who are able to make smooth transitions share some important abilities (Hubbell, et al., 1987; Love, et al., 1992). They are able to (a) interact with peers in a positive and cooperative manner, (b) engage in make-believe involving cooperative roles, (c) successfully enter into other children's play, (d) speak to peers directly, (e) focus their attention on others in group situations, and (f) respond to the initiations of others.

Corsaro and Molinari (2000) introduced the notion of priming events in an analysis of a transition, by a group of Italian children, from preschool to elementary school. Priming events involve activities in which children, by their very participation, attend prospectively to ongoing or anticipated changes in their lives. Results identified events and activities that served to plant and nurture the children's representations of their coming transition to the first grade. Events included routines, rules, and schedules of pre-school; and trips to visit the elementary school.
Children develop these characteristics when they are given opportunities to play and interact in group situations in a preschool program. Hence, the preschool experience and environment can prepare children for success in kindergarten and first grade, but these programs must build on earlier experiences by providing continuity in their approach (California State Department of Education, 1996). Children who are able to make smooth transitions are able to interact with peers in a positive and cooperative manner, engage in make-believe involving cooperative roles, enter into other children's play, speak to peers directly, focus their attention on others in group situations, and respond to the initiations of others (Hubbell et al., 1987; Love, et. al, 1992). Children who experience continuity with earlier educational experiences through smooth transitions show an increase in motivation and trust for new experiences, as well as improved relationships with peers and adults (California State Department of Education, 1996).

Transition to first grade is a difficult period of adjustment for both children and their parents. The relationship between teachers, parents, and school is an important factor in a child's transition. It is particularly important given the fact that the point of entry to school is the point at which the two great socializing influences in a child's life, the family and the school community, first meet. In addition to the individual child's readiness, the parent's involvement, and the teacher's role in preparing children for the transition to school; the family, the educational system, pre-school programs, and the community share the responsibility for successful transitions.
Early childhood educators, psychologists, and social workers increasingly view transition planning as a crucial component of all school programs. Recent legislation and educational practices have emphasized the importance of transitions and have targeted children identified with special needs for transition assistance. Current best practice dictates that transitions be seen as continual process rather than a periodic one. The goal of successful transitions promote (a) placement decisions that meet individual needs; (b) uninterrupted services; (c) non-confrontational and effective models of advocacy that families can emulate throughout their children's lives; (d) avoidance of duplication in assessment and goal planning; and (e) reduced stress for children, families, and teachers (Ramey & Ramey, 1994). Successful transitions reduce stress for children, families and teachers, and may have profound implications for success during the rest of a child's life (Shotts et al., 1994).

2.5 Transition Studies

Although my study is about transition from a University-based kindergarten to a public school first grade, the following studies describe various dimensions of transitions from one program to another in the same school district to one program in one district to another program in a different district or town. These variations include private school to public school, preschool to kindergarten, and kindergarten to first grade. Transition refers to the events, activities, and experiences that occur during the move from preschool or home to kindergarten and the grades beyond (California State Department of Education, 1996). Transition success is defined as the absence of major problems (Entwisle
& Alexander, 1989). Successful transitions include emotional, social, and cognitive aspects.

Bronfenbrenner argued (1979, 1986, 1989) the importance of studying development in context, perceiving interrelated ecological systems on a number of levels. Each level is related to and influenced by the others with the microsystems of day to day experiences. In educational transitions, children occupy three environments or microsystems: their home, their pre-school, and their school world. Although each contains the developing person, there is a need to look beyond the single setting to the relationships between them. These interconnections can be seen as important for the child as events taking place within any one of the single settings. Bronfenbrenner (1979) calls these settings mesosystems.

Lave and Wegner (1991) argue for social and contextual learning, which happens in a specific shared social practice. Thus learning is rooted in a specific situation; learning is situated. This contextual view sees the child's learning as shared social knowledge and skills learned in and related to a shared social practice. The child's competence is social in two ways: the child shares, learns, and masters his knowledge and skills together with others; and these are tied up in the context within which they are learned.

Transitions are difficult for children, families, and teachers because of the changing environment, roles, and expectations that accompany the change from one program to another (Mangione, 1992; Yeom, 1996, 1998). For children, transition marks the time when they are separated from a familiar caregiver,
routine and environment, and placed into an environment of uncertainty. This uncertainty creates stress and anxiety for all involved. Especially difficult for children are social and emotional stresses (Bohl, 1984; Griebel & Niesel, 2002), changes in teaching styles (Honig, 1978; Broström, 2002), and increased academic expectations (Mayfield, 1983; Steif, 1994; Broström, 2002). This literature review summarizes the perspectives and practices of teachers, parents and children during the transition to school.

Teachers

Several studies have documented the concerns and practices of teachers during transitions (Early, Pianta & Cox, 1999; La Paro, Pianta & Cox, 2000a, b; Pianta & La Paro, 2000; Pianta & Cox, 1998, 1999) conducted a mail survey of kindergarten teacher’s use of kindergarten-to-first grade transition practices. The respondents included 3,595 public school teachers and 176 private school teachers. The research was conducted to systematically investigate the transition practices in use in public and private American schools. Previous studies indicated few schools use transition practices, and those that do, use only a few of the available transition methods (Pianta & La Paro, 2000; Pianta & Cox, 1998, 1999). The authors identified 11 transition practices: (a) continuity in the curriculum, (b) placement of children, (c) individual progress reports, (d) activities for individual children, (e) practices related to K-1 transition, (f) first grade class visits, (g) future first grade teacher visits, (h) first-grade visits to kindergarten, (i) first grade teacher visits to kindergarten, (j) first grade information sent to parents, and (k) placement information sent to parents.

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Over half of teachers reported using transition practices related to the transition to first grade (La Paro, Pianta & Cox, 2000b). More teachers in private schools used these practices than in public schools. No differences in use of practices were found for rural, urban, or suburban schools. As minority representation increased, use of practices decreased. Of the 11 transition practices listed on the survey, the most commonly used were meeting to discuss continuity in the curricula, and meeting to discuss individual children's progress. In general, fewer teachers used transition practices in districts with a greater number of families below the poverty line. It's interesting to note that teacher transition practices were focused on teachers and their students, and infrequently involved parents (over 75% of teachers surveyed reported they do not send parents information about first-grade placements) (La Paro, Pianta & Cox, 2000b).

Additional studies conducted by the same authors, (La Paro, Pianta & Cox, 2000a) reported practices related to teachers with special needs students in their classrooms. Fourteen transition practices were identified for teachers with children with special needs. Practices included (a) keeping reading records, (b) home visits, (c) letters to parents, (d) talks with parents before and after school, (e) meeting with families before school, (f) sending flyers and letters to children, (g) visits to community preschools, (h) contacts with preschool teachers, (i) preschoolers visiting kindergarten, (j) conducting an open house, (k) kindergarten registration, (l) meetings with community, (m) coordinating curriculum, and (n) facilitating parents' contact.
Teachers most frequently reported sending letters to parents after school began and arranging visits to first grade classrooms. The least frequently reported transition practices were home visits and meetings to discuss the kindergarten to first grade transition (La Paro, Pianta & Cox, 2000b). Reported transition practices were similar for teachers who had children with special needs in their class. However, teachers with children having special needs generally reported using more individual transition practices before school began and arranging meetings to coordinate personnel. These findings were discussed in terms of adherence to legislation and recommended practice for children with special needs (La Paro, Pianta & Cox, 2000a).

Additional studies (Early et al., 1999; Pianta & Cox, 1998, 1999) explored teachers’ education and experience and their training on facilitating transitions to kindergarten. Findings revealed that kindergarten teachers have a lot of education and experiences, but lack specific training and strategies for facilitating transitions.

Pianta and Cox (1998) conducted a national survey of 3,900 kindergarten teachers, which identified teachers’ areas of concern regarding transition to school and looked at transition practices and asked teachers what barriers they see to implementing more transitions practices. Teachers reported that 48% of children experience moderate to serious problems in their transition to school. Additional results revealed that teachers’ are most concerned about children’s skills in following directions and academics. The most common practices teachers use to help children as they enter into kindergarten are (a) a talk with
parents after school starts, (b) followed by a letter to parents after the beginning of school, and (c) an open house after school begins. Teachers reported that major barriers to their helping children's transitions into kindergarten are (a) late access to class lists because they are generated too late (lists are received, on the average, 15 days before the first day of school), (b) that involving parents before school begins means working in the summer without pay, and (c) that transition plans are not available in their districts (Pianta & Cox, 1998).

Mayfield (1980, 1983) examined children's orientation to public school and aspects of the transitions within kindergarten to grade one. Questionnaires were administered to teachers and principals. A stratified random sample of parents and results were ranked using a five-point Likert scale. Findings included that transitions from kindergarten to grade one are a problem for children, although teachers, parents, and principals had different opinions on the causes of these difficulties. Nearly half of grade one teachers (48%) and kindergarten teachers (43%) attributed difficulties in the transition due to immaturity of children resulting from late (October to December) birthdays. Half of parents (50%) reported the increased expectations for children in grade one caused problems, and the responses of principals (32%) were split equally between health reasons and general readiness of the child.

In summary, teachers attributed transition difficulties to children's lack of academic preparation and readiness skills (Pianta & Cox, 1998), or their inability to follow directions and perform well academically, and their general immaturity resulting from late (October to December) birthdays (Mayfield, 1980, 1983).
Teachers also reported that difficulties arose due to administrative problems such as late access to class lists, working in the summer without pay, and a lack of transition plans in their districts (Pianta & Cox, 1998).

Parents

The concerns of the families with children in transition have been studied by Hains, Rosenkoetter, and Fowler (1991) Deitz and Warkala (1993), Corsaro and Molinari (2000), Peters (2000), Pianta and Kraft-Sayre (1999), and Renwick (1984). Parents' concerns with their children's transition include teacher skill, quality, and dispositions (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 1999; Renwick, 1984); increased social and academic expectations (Corsaro & Molinari, 2000; Mayfield, 1980, 1983; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 1999; Renwick, 1984); lack of communication with teachers (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 1999); separation anxiety (Deitz & Warkala, 1993; Hains et al., 1991); discontinuity in curriculum, activities, or philosophy (Hains et al., 1991); social acceptance and friendships (Hains et al., 1991; Peters 2000); changes in educational services (Deitz & Warkala, 1993; Hains et al., 1991); parental involvement (Peters, 2000); a sense of powerlessness (Deitz & Warkala, 1993); and a child's adjustment to school (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 1999).

Hains et al. (1991) described five major family concerns regarding transition including: (a) the transfer of friendship from the very close, trusting early relationships with service providers who support families through a vulnerable period is often difficult, even if the new service is next door; (b) changes in service delivery can cause difficulties because families often express confusion when a type of service is altered in terms of curriculum, activities, or
philosophy; (c) discrepancy in eligibility that occurs if a child overcomes a risk status (such as a language or motor delay) may be perceived by a family as loss of services and lack of support; (d) variations in labeling occur when one program uses a categorical label and another uses a more generic label; and (e) social acceptance in a new setting, particularly in a larger school.

Deitz and Warkala (1993) report on the Lighthouse Child Development Center families’ concerns about transition to the public school system in terms of emotional difficulty. Results indicate that parents face (a) fears about health, safety, and new services; (b) anxiety about working with a new agency; (c) uncertainty about what constitutes appropriate services; (d) separation anxiety in leaving a group of known professionals with whom they have a shared history; and (e) a sense of powerlessness over decision making within a vast new bureaucracy.

Corsaro and Molinari (2000) reported that parents expressed different feelings about the possible difficulties their children might encounter in the transition. Specific concerns were (a) the amount of time children would be required to sit, be quiet, and listen to the teacher; and (b) the adequate development of children’s literacy skills to ensure success in first grade.

Renwick (1984) reported findings of the Going to School Research Project, a study that attempted to document what happens when a New Zealand five-year-old starts school. In the course of the research, children, parents, and pre-school teachers and the new-entrant teachers were questioned via questionnaires and interviews. Underlying and overt tensions between parents
and teachers, and preschools and elementary schools concerning school readiness, parental involvement, pre-school partnerships, parent attitudes toward child's school and administrative issues and school age entry were examined. Additionally, thirty parents kept diary records of their child's experience. Results indicate that small rural schools had an advantage over urban schools. Urban schools were generally viewed as large, impersonal, and lacking in close links with the local community. The number one factor that parents attributed to their child's success or lack of it in the transition to school was the personality and skill of their child's teacher.

Peters (2000) examined the multiple perspectives of children, their families and their early childhood and primary teachers on the transition to school. Methods included use of basic interviews and detailed observations in early childhood centers and new entrant classrooms in New Zealand. Study participants consisted of seven children and their families. Each participant and their parents, were visited a number of times from the age of four until they turned eight years old. Observations and interviews were conducted with parents of the case study children at school entry, two months later, and 18 months later. Parents' perspectives included the importance of (a) children maintaining friendships, and (b) continued parental involvement in school.

Pianta and Kraft-Sayre (1999) examined parents' observations of their child's adjustment during the first weeks of kindergarten. Parents of 261 children entering kindergarten in Arkansas, North Carolina, and Virginia were contacted by phone in the weeks following their children's entrance. In an open-ended
format, descriptive information about the transition to school was elicited from parents. Results indicated that approximately two-thirds of parents viewed their child's transition to kindergarten as generally smooth. Between 6% and 35% of these parents indicated some concerns related to their child's kindergarten entrance. The concern most frequently mentioned was the degree to which a child's transition to kindergarten created disequilibrium for the family. Nearly 35% of parents mentioned a disruption to family life (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 1999).

A second analysis of Pianta and Kraft-Sayre's (1999) study was conducted on parents' responses on aspects of the transition. Anecdotes contained positive and negative features of the transition to kindergarten. More than half the anecdotes (53%) contained positive features; 23% involved positive psychosocial characteristics of the child; eight percent reflected value in an ongoing relationship and familiarity with the school as an effective strategy for successful transition; seven percent emphasized the importance of preschool experience in enhancing the child's adjustment to school; seven percent focused on the importance of effective communication by the school and their responsiveness to a child's needs; four percent reflected on formal and informal visits to the school prior to the start of kindergarten as important strategies; three percent highlighted the value of teacher quality, that is a teacher who made a good connection with their child, and one percent (one anecdote) alluded to the benefits of the classroom curriculum or instruction. Of the remaining anecdotes, 47% contained negative features of Kindergarten transitions, which reflected difficulties during the transition; 27% described a wide range of behavioral or
emotional difficulties children experienced in the first several weeks of school; eight percent of the anecdotes described the impact that their child's entry into kindergarten created on the family overall; five percent identified adjustment concerns specifically related to their child's reluctance to attend school; five percent expressed frustration that the school's or teacher's expectations were not consistent with their child's ability to succeed; and one percent reflected a lack of organized communication between home and school.

*Children*


In Peters' (2000) New Zealand study, seven case study children were interviewed to obtain their reflections about first grade during their third year of school, when they reached eight years old. Children reported (a) less freedom, (b) more teacher direction, and (c) the need to be "right." This study had a relatively small sample size. Additionally, children were not interviewed about their experiences during their transition to school; they were asked to reflect on the experience three years later, shortly after their eighth birthday.

Yeom (1996, 1998) conducted a 2-year study in Alberta, Canada on three children's learning experiences as they began Kindergarten and moved into grade one. Interviewing was used as a research tool to capture the meanings of the children's experiences in more holistic ways and to understand their
experiences within their contexts. The stories of children's experience were
shared in narrative form revealing the continuity and discontinuity of their
transition. Positive factors making the transition period easier included (a)
visiting the first grade classroom, (b) developing friendships, (c) family support,
and (d) the teacher's help. Negative factors included (a) extended school days,
(b) different physical environments, (c) formal instruction, and (d) high teacher
expectations.

Although this transition study is one of the most comprehensive to date, it
is limited by its small sample size of three children's perspectives concerning
their transition experiences from kindergarten to grade one. The factors related
to the continuity and discontinuity of children's transition to school was identified
but the children's stories were not revealed in their entirety.

Dockett and Perry (1999) in their Australian Starting School Project,
interviewed children about their perceptions, expectations, and experiences as
they began primary school. Their findings included that children expressed
concerns (a) regarding being with friends and making new friends, (b) about rules
in order to function well and stay out of trouble in school, and (c) about "big kids"
and their interactions with them.

Corsaro and Molinari (2000) studied preschool children in an Italian
preschool and followed them into primary school. They found that children (a)
viewed school as a place to do lessons and receive homework, (b) characterized
primary school as more work-focused than play-focused, (c) viewed the ability to
read and write as an important precursor to the transition, (d) were

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unaccustomed to time segmented into instructional periods, and (e) commented on the sharp dichotomy between work and play. Children were also concerned about the lack of time for play and the number of new rules.

In summary, children's concerns have been found to include high teacher expectations and increased academic rigor (Corsaro & Molinari, 2000; Yeom, 1996, 1998), and their ability to sustain friendships (Yeom, 1996, 1998), as well as a concern over having less freedom (Peters, 2000). Perhaps the most difficult aspect of transition for children is a sense of powerlessness. This powerlessness may be tied to social acceptance by peers and teachers; accepting and conforming to the demands of classroom routine, structure, and organization; the physical restraints of the classroom; and unrealistic expectations of the child (Entwisle & Alexander, 1998; Renwick, 1984).

Little research has been conducted on transition issues from the perspectives of children as they experience the transition (Corsaro & Molinari, 2000; Peters, 2000; Pianta and Kraft-Sayre, 1999; Yeom, 1996, 1998). What's missing in the analysis of the predictors of successful and unsuccessful transition to school is data involving family's perspectives (Belsky & MacKinnon, 1994). To gain a broader understanding of the transition process, parents, and especially children, must be interviewed.

Relying primarily on surveys, questionnaires, and correlational analyses, researchers who have examined this period, report statistical relationships between educational outcomes and a variety of categorical variables such as readiness skills, transition practices and policies, and curriculum. However,
quantitative studies have difficulty documenting key processes of continuity and discontinuity in children's transition from one setting to another because they fail to include or consider the perspectives of children, or to document the transition experience during the period of adjustment. Interviewing children and parents can provide vital information about children's experiences, successes, and challenges during transition. More descriptive qualitative research is needed on the transition into kindergarten (Ladd & Price, 1987) and into first grade (Entwisle & Alexander, 1989, 1993; Reynolds, 1991, 1994; Reynolds & Bezruczko, 1993).

In conclusion, the transition to school is seen as a period of change generally associated with stress and anxiety (Erikson, 1985) as well as excitement and enjoyment (Elliot & Lambert, 1985). Transition success is defined as the absence of major problems (Entwisle & Alexander, 1989). Successful transitions include emotional, social, and cognitive aspects. If children make successful transitions to school, they are likely to experience academic success (Fabian, 2003; Ramey & Ramey, 1994, 1998; Shotts et al., 1994; Yeboah, 2002), success throughout their primary school years, and success later in life (Broström, 2003; Gresham & Elliott, 1990; Ladd & Price 1987). Not all children experience success during the transition to school (Kienig, 2002; Pianta & Cox, 1999).

Transitions can be seen as a normative process since all children must experience them several times throughout their lives. During transitions children may experience discontinuity. Sanchez and Thorpe (1998) suggest that discontinuity is not something to be avoided, provided that appropriate
scaffolding is given to children. Children can learn how to cope with the feelings they may have, and how to develop effective strategies to deal with new or stressful situations. Transitions include physical, social, and philosophical changes that may impact the emotional well-being of children and may impede their learning. While transitions can be viewed as exciting learning opportunities, there are risks for children who experience difficult transitions. Kagan and Neuman (1999) suggest that children who had difficult transitions, will have difficulties in school adjustment, making friends, and may have additional health and emotional problems.
3.0 METHODS

This study employed a constructivist grounded theory methodology. This chapter describes qualitative research methods and the underlying ontological, epistemological, and methodological framework for this study. Next I describe the study site, participants, and my role as a researcher. Lastly, I describe the research methodology I used to explore my research questions: how do children experience the transition from a private University-affiliated Kindergarten program into a first grade public school and what meaning making do children, parents, and teachers make of the transition.

3.1 Qualitative Research

This study is a qualitative investigation. Qualitative research methods accentuate the socially constructed nature of knowledge and reality (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, 2000; Wolcott, 1992). In qualitative research a variety of methods exist which share epistemological, ontological, and methodological assumptions (Creswell, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, 2000). An ontological perspective seeks the form and nature of reality and what can be known about reality. This leads the researcher to seek an emic or insider's perspective, with thick description (Geertz, 1973; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Wolcott 1999). Epistemological perspectives seek the nature of the relationship between the knower and the would-be knower and what can be known (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Therefore, the knower is subjectively and interactively linked in relationship to what can be known. Methodological perspectives guide the researcher in finding out what
she believes can be known. Thus the researcher engages in an inquiry process that creates knowledge through interpreted constructions dialectically transacted, thus aiming for more informed and sophisticated consensus construction to provide a reconstructive understanding of a phenomenon (Annells, 1996). In this study, a constructivist grounded theory methodology was employed to explore the research questions outlined above.

3.2 Grounded Theory

Grounded Theory, as introduced by Glaser and Strauss (1967), stresses discovery and theory development that addresses a sequence of actions and interactions among people and events that occurs over time and that pertain to a substantive topic while identifying the researcher as the primary instrument of data collection and analysis. Emphasis is placed on recognition of the interactive nature of data collection and analysis, and on the qualitative tradition of studying people through their lived experiences. Grounded theorists engage in an inductive construction of abstract categories, constantly comparing data with an emerging explanation or theory (Charmaz, 2003). They further assimilate categories into a theoretical framework that specifies causes, conditions, and consequences of the studied process. Throughout the research process, grounded theorists develop analytical interpretations of their data to focus further data collection, which is used to reform and refine their developing theoretical analysis (Charmaz, 2000). The end result is a theory that emerges from, or is grounded in, the data. This grounding in the data gives rise to the term grounded

Constructivists (Charmaz, 2003) study how participants construct meanings and action, and they do so from as close to the inside of the experiences as they can get. Human beings act on the basis of meaning, which is defined and refined through social interactions within the social environment. Reality is constructed and negotiated through interactions with others and is dynamic, changing, and evolving over time.

My approach to grounded theory builds upon a symbolic interactionist theoretical perspective with constructivist methods (Charmaz, 1990, 1995, 2000). I make the following assumptions: (a) multiple realities exist, (b) data reflect the research participants and my mutual constructions, and (c) I enter and am affected by the research participant's experiences and worlds. Constructivist grounded theory also, rests on an interpretive framework while emphasizing the relativism of culture, the active participation of those being studied, and the importance of giving children and their parents' voice (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). This approach recognizes both data and analysis as created from the shared experiences among children, parents, and teachers in the school culture during the transition process and my relationship with them as the researcher. It allowed me to view data analysis as a construction that locates the data in a specific time, place, culture, and context, while reflecting my thinking. This approach provided my interpretive portrayal of transition.
Using a constructivists’ grounded theory approach allowed me to place priority on the process of transition while observing and participating in the classroom setting during transition. Hence, I was able to construct an account of transition from specific multiple realities, while recognizing the mutual creation of knowledge by children, parents, and teachers. This approach granted me greater significance as a researcher because I defined what was happening in the data (Charmaz, 2003) in the process of participating in and interacting with those in the study environment in order to create a shared view of the transition process. I achieved a greater interpretive understanding of transition through co-constructing study participants’ shared meaning-making processes and interactions of their lived experience (Charmaz, 1995, 2000; 2003; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Schwandt, 1994).

The method of grounded theory using interviewing allowed me to reveal the lived experience of children during the context of transition, they grant children and their parents an opportunity to voice their experiences, and because those experiences and contexts are dynamic in nature. This inductive dimension made constructivist grounded theory a powerful approach for exploring the dynamic and complex nature of transition.

3.3 Sample and Setting

This study is about the transition from a private learning environment framed by social-constructivist theory to a public learning environment framed by federal mandates and state curriculum standards. This investigation took place in the northeastern United States. Study participants’ names and the settings
have been changed to protect their identity. Initially, all of the study participants were enrolled in a kindergarten class at a laboratory preschool located on a University campus. The class was composed of 18 children; ranging from ages five to seven reflecting the socioeconomic and ethnicity of the geographic area in which data was collected. Only ten of the eighteen children and their parents volunteered to participate in this study. In the fall of 2004, these children were placed at area elementary schools and dispersed throughout several first grade classrooms.

The kindergarten classroom examined in this study is The Child Center (TCC). The TCC is a University-affiliated non-profit center that has strong roots in collaboration with the University starting in 1929. The current facility was constructed in 1988. TCC offers year-round full day programs for children of campus and community families from six weeks to seven years of age. The TCC also serves as a complete child development laboratory to prepare University students for teacher certification and as a site for both internal and external research.

The Pine Plains School District, established in 1954, is one of the oldest cooperative districts in the state. Made up of three separate towns, it contains two elementary schools housing children in kindergarten through grade four. Students are assigned to the school in proximity to their residence. Pseudonyms for the elementary schools that TCC children have been assigned for first grade have been created to maintain the confidentiality of study participants. The first grade classrooms examined in this study were located in the Mountain View
Elementary School, one of the two elementary schools that receive children from the TCC kindergarten.

Five of the ten study children were placed in first grade at Madison, the second elementary school in the Pine Plains School District. Although their teachers choose not to participate in this study, these five children and their parents were interviewed again in the fall to document their experiences, concerns, and discontinuities in the first grade setting. Those teachers who chose not to participate expressed concerns about the time commitment, observation and interview schedule, and about the presence of another adult in their classrooms. Opinions about the increasing number of professional responsibilities and expectations above and beyond teaching were strongly voiced by these first grade Madison teachers. For these reasons, in addition to “wanting to send a message to the community” about the growing number of responsibilities associated with teaching were cited as reasons to not participate.

The characteristics of the children, the degree of involvement of the parents, and the teaching experience of the teachers were all recorded in this study. The age of children in this study during their kindergarten year, ranged from five to six and a half years. The average child’s age was 5.7 years old (Table 3.3-1). Eight of the children were female and two were male. Seven of the ten children were white, two were Asian and one was Latino. One child spoke Chinese as his first language. Of the seven children that had siblings, two were first born, and five were second born. Three additional children in the study
had no siblings, meaning they were the first child of the family to experience transition with their parents.

Five of the ten sets of parents had previous experience with transitions, having experienced it with an older child (five children were second-born children). Although these individual families experienced both positive and negative aspects of transition with previous children, parents focused their attention on the child who would be transitioning to the public school first grade. The other five sets of parents had no previous experience with transition, either because their child was an only child or because their child was the oldest in the family. According to administrative staff, reported income data for families of the TCC program during the spring of 2004 were: 8% below $30,000.00, 14% between $30,000.00 and $60,000.00, 47% between $60,000.00 and $105,000.00, and 31% above $105,000.00. The median for the county was $53,000.00.

All study participants' names and schools have been changed to protect their identity. Teachers who participated in this study included two teachers, Sue and Nancy, from the kindergarten program at The Child Center. TCC teachers are referred to as “sending teachers” because they send children from one environment to another. Three first grade teachers, Barb, Jill, and Jackie, participated in this study from the Mountain View Elementary School. Mountain View Elementary School teachers are referred to as “receiving teachers.” There were no participating first grade teachers from the Madison Elementary School, the other elementary school in the district which receives children from the TCC.
Both sending and receiving teachers were experienced classroom teachers, certified by the state’s Department of Education in Elementary Education and held Master’s Degrees in Elementary or Early Childhood Education. Sending teachers Sue had taught for 12 years, while Nancy taught for 10 years. Receiving teacher Jill taught for 28 years, while Barb taught for 14 years, and Jackie taught for 25 years.
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<td>1</td>
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<td>White</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
3.4 Researcher Access

Prior to the start of any data collection, permission to carry out this study was obtained from the Human Subjects Committee, Office of Sponsored Research located within the University of New Hampshire (Appendix A). The Internal Review Board reviewed my interview questions and methods to identify any potential benefits and risks to participants who volunteered to participate in this study. Informed letters of consent describing the risks and benefits of this study were given to each of the participants and their parents for their signatures (Appendices B and C).

I obtained consent from the Program Director and kindergarten teachers at the preschool in order to conduct my pre-transition investigation and interviews. Initially, I met with the Director of the preschool to voice my interest in the preschool as my research site. After securing permission to conduct research at the preschool, I met with the kindergarten teachers to explain my research, answer related questions and to discuss their concerns. In the fall, I met with the first grade teachers and principals of Mountain View Elementary School and Madison Elementary School to obtain permission to conduct my transition investigation and interviews. As previously noted, only Mountain View Elementary School teachers chose to participate in this study; however, all ten study children and their parents continued to participate in this study.
3.5 Data Collection

In grounded theory methodology, data collection and analysis proceed simultaneously (Charmaz, 2000). Five sources of data were collected and analyzed: (a) observations, (b) participant observation, (c) interviews, (d) document analysis, (e) miscellaneous meetings, and (f) journals and e-mails (Tables 3.5-1 and 3.5-2).

The importance of using a combination of multiple sources of data in research is well voiced in the field of qualitative research because it is difficult for any single data source to capture fully the richness of human experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Eder & Fingerson, 2002; Seidman, 1998). In my study, data was collected through observations, participant observation, interviews (Appendices D and E) document analysis, miscellaneous meetings, and journals and e-mails. Demographic information on children was also collected using a Demographic Information Form (Appendix F).
### TABLE 3.5-1 PHASE I (SPRING 2004) DATA COLLECTION MATRIX

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Frequency &amp; Amount Projected</th>
<th>Actual Frequency &amp; Amount Completed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interviews</td>
<td>2 kindergarten teachers 10 sets of parents 10 students</td>
<td>A minimum of one 30 minute interview per participant during the month of May and June 2004</td>
<td>Interviews totaled 19 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>Teachers and classroom environments</td>
<td>15 hours during the months of May</td>
<td>Observation hours totaled 14.5 hours</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participant Observation</td>
<td>Children</td>
<td>50 hours participating in the context of classroom and school activities during the months of May and June</td>
<td>Participant observation hours totaled 53 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artifact &amp; Document Analysis</td>
<td></td>
<td>5 hours reviewing and analyzing student and school documents</td>
<td>Document review and analysis totaled 10 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Miscellaneous Meetings</td>
<td>Parent, teachers, administrator</td>
<td>10 hours participating in discussions related to transition concerns</td>
<td>Miscellaneous meetings totaled 5 hours</td>
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<tr>
<td>Journals &amp; E-mails</td>
<td>Parents and teachers</td>
<td>10 hours reading and responding</td>
<td>Hours spent reading and responding totaled 7 hours</td>
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</table>
TABLE 3.5-2 PHASE II (FALL 2004) DATA COLLECTION MATRIX

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Frequency &amp; Amount Projected</th>
<th>Actual Frequency &amp; Amount Completed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Interviews        | Kindergarten and First Grade Teachers  
|                   | 10 Sets of Parents  
|                   | 10 Students                                                  | A minimum of one 30 minute interview per participant during the month of  
|                   |                                                                  | September, October and November                                                     | The number of actual interview hours totaled 43 hours                   |
| Observations      | Teachers and Students in their classrooms          | 25 hours during the months of September, October and November                              | The number of actual observation hours totaled 31 hours                 |
| Participant       | Children                                          | 50 hours participating in the context of classroom and school activities during the months of September, October and November | The number of actual participant observation hours totaled 2.5 hours    |
| Observation       |                                                  |                                                                                             |                                                                          |
| Artifact & Document Analysis |                                              | 5 hours reviewing and analyzing student and school documents                        | The number of actual document review and analysis totaled 16 hours    |
| Miscellaneous     | Parent, Teachers, Administrator                    | 5 hours participating in discussions related to transition concerns                      | The number of actual miscellaneous meetings totaled 5.5 hours          |
| Meetings          |                                                  |                                                                                             |                                                                          |
| Journals & E-mails | Parents and Teachers                              | 25 hours reading and responding                                                          | The number of actual hours spent reading and responding totaled 19 hours |
3.5.1 Observations

Observations are an effective method for gathering information on children and adults in authentic situations since they don’t place children in anxiety-producing situations, thus increasing the likelihood of obtaining reliable information (Pellegrini, 1996). My initial observations, conducted both in the spring (19 hours) and in the fall (31 hours), served as a precursor to a smooth entry and transition to active participation in the classroom. These observations provided written accounts of important background knowledge for later entry into peer activities, participant observation, interviews, and meetings, and eventual data analysis and interpretation. Observations allowed me to observe the children, teacher and their interactions; the classroom setting, practices, and routines in order to gain a sense of the learning atmosphere and to document the school culture. My observations occurred in the initial days of data collection and during those times when participant observation was not appropriate, feasible, or possible due to the nature, time, or place of classroom activities.

3.5.2 Participant Observations

Once my presence as an observer and researcher was established, I was able to become actively involved in the classroom as a participant observer. Participant Observation is a qualitative research approach where a researcher enters in to a social setting and gets to know the people present. The researcher participates in the daily routines of the setting, develops ongoing relations with
the people in it, and constantly observes what is going on around them
(Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 1995).

During my two years of research (2003 pilot study and 2004 dissertation
research), I established and developed relationships with my study participants
through observations and participant observations in both the spring (pre-
transition) and the fall (transition). My goal as researcher was to become an
active participant in classroom activities and to establish the "least adult role" with
children to gain their trust (Fine & Sandstrom, 1988; Mandell, 1988). Mandell
(1988) defines the "least adult role" in studying children as one in which the
fieldworker exerts no authority over the children and establishes a trusting
relationship that is modeled after the friendship bond. Fine and Sandstrom
(1988) identify key components necessary for a researcher to achieve the
friendship role as (a) the ability to express positive feelings, (b) a desire to be
with children, (c) the failure to deliver discipline, and (d) treating children with
respect. An example from my data highlights the bond that I attempted to
establish with my participants.

On one occasion, at the request of two kindergarten participants, Mary
and Nicole, I joined morning meeting, sitting between the children. They were
delighted and gave me hugs, played with my long hair, and held my hand (as
they often did with other kindergarten friends). Mary leaned toward my face and
gave me three pecks on the cheek. She then asked for a kiss back. I gave her a
peck on the cheek (exactly as she had given me) and winked at her. She asked,
"Why do you wink so much?" I told her it was my way of smiling and sending
kisses to someone to let them know that they were my friend. Mary immediately winked at me.

My intellectual aim as a researcher was to develop positive rapport with children to allow for open discussions and on-going communication. During the spring in the kindergarten setting, I spent 14.5 hours observing the classroom setting, children, teachers, and their interactions, and 53 hours engaged in participant observation. I attended school each day with children from 8:00 AM to 5:30 PM. During this time, I observed and participated in activities, morning circle, playground, field trips, center activities, project work, and special after school events or projects such as the wedding project and the graduation. I ate lunch with children, played games, and told jokes and riddles.

Some of my fondest memories of time spent with the study of children are those times spent in the kindergarten setting when I let every adult urge to discipline, teach, model, or explain go, not following through as a teacher, disciplinarian or parent. For example, on the playground I routinely joined children's play and assumed suggested roles, such as dog catcher or dog, shark or pirate, sand digger, or guitarist. The theme of the dog catcher and the loose, mischievous pack of barking dogs was repeated for months on end. At times I was assigned the role of dog catcher and then would be told to reverse roles and be the dog. I would run around the playground (sometimes on all four legs, as the other children did) barking and howling at the moon, hiding behind the fort or under the slide, or leaping through the air as I was chased by the dogcatcher. When caught, I would resist the dog catcher's attempts by rolling on the ground,
whining, or by pulling at the imaginary leash or scratching at the imaginary muzzle placed on me by the dog catcher. At other times, my role would alternate and I would be the dogcatcher, chasing the wild pack of dogs, placing them in cages, and recapturing them as they escaped, all the while being bitten and clawed at as children hung from my legs or waist.

In the fall, observation allowed me to re-establish a trusting relationship with study participants while re-familiarizing myself with the children in the new first grade classroom settings. I spent 31 hours observing the three classroom settings, children, teachers, and their interactions, and 2.5 hours engaged in participant observation. After allowing an initial period of three weeks for children and teachers to get to know one another I began attending Mountain View three days per week to observe children. During this time, children were dispersed into three separate first grade classrooms, each with different schedules, rules, and routines making the timing and depth of observation sporadic and less intense in comparison to the kindergarten setting. In addition, the three receiving teachers requested that my involvement with study children in their classrooms not interfere with their instruction, nor be obtrusive. This limited my data collection methods to observation with little chance for participant observation. I observed children, teachers, and participants in their classrooms during morning circle, instructional time, and seatwork; as well as on the playground. I participated in activities when appropriate and did not interfere with teacher lecture or instruction. Occasionally, when feasible, I listened to children read during their reading time and participated in small group math games. Since children were
often engaged in individual seatwork, completing worksheets, or listening to their teacher during direct instruction, little opportunity existed for active participation with children. In these first grade classrooms, children were rarely engaged in project or cooperative group work.

Once children were comfortable with my presence, I began conducting interviews. A period of observation preceding other data collection methods, such as interviews, allows interviewers to identify natural context for interviewing (Eder & Fingerson, 2002). Participant observation allowed me to identify the concerns, issues, and problems of children, parents, and teachers related to the transition to school. Consequently, this method of data collection equipped me with additional information and insights for preparation of interview questions.

3.5.3 Interviews

In-depth qualitative interviewing fits grounded theory methods particularly well. Charmaz (2003) noted that qualitative interviewing is a directed conversation that provides an open-ended, in-depth exploration of an aspect of life about which the interviewee has substantial experiences and considerable insights. An interview can elicit views of a person’s subjective world. During an interview, ideas, issues, and themes emerge that a researcher can immediately pursue to gain valuable information about the subjects’ experiences. As a method of inquiry, interviewing is most consistent with people’s ability to make meaning through language. Through interviews, dialogue, and correspondence, participants share how their experiences shaped the transition process.
Structured and semi-structured interviews were conducted with students, parents, and teachers at each school. In the spring I spent 19 hours and in the fall 43 hours conducting interviews with study participants. The length of interviews varied, with children's average interview lasting 20-30 minutes and parents and teachers lasting on average 45-60 minutes. In structured interviews, each interviewee was asked the same questions in the same way (Merriam, 1998). Semi-structured interviews had an open-ended quality about them enabling the interview to take shape as it progresses (Wolcott, 1999). Both structured questions and more open-ended questions allowed for detailed, personal responses and conversations with study participants. My interview method was consistent with Seidman’s (1998) interview protocols.

My interview questions were designed to gather data from students, parents, and teachers. Teacher questions elicited information about teacher style, philosophy, dispositions, and approaches to instruction. Parent questions were designed to gather information about the learning atmosphere, children's experiences in the school environment, and future transition challenges. Children's questions were designed to gain an understanding of perceptions of school, routines, rules, learning contexts, and concerns about transitioning into a first grade classroom at a public school. Interview questions (Appendices D and E) were core questions that were asked of each group (students, parents, and teachers). The phrasing of these core questions occasionally varied slightly to provide an appropriate context.
The children’s reactions to the prospect of being interviewed were mixed; some were quite eager and asked if I was going to interview them and demanded to know when (Nicole, Mary, William and Sally); others were curious but not as insistent. All ten children agreed to be interviewed.

The first children were extremely comfortable and looked forward to the conversation. In fact, I didn’t begin the interviews until the children’s interest and inquiry about my journal writing piqued their curiosities. At one point, several children began to carry around a clipboard with paper and pencil in tote, asking if they could interview me about various preferences. Nicole interviewed me to find out my preferences for pets, fieldtrip locations, and favorite activities.

I began interviewing children once my presence in the classroom had been established, the routine was predictable, and children were interacting socially with me. As I began interviewing the children, one at a time, curiosity began to build in the other children. Often they would stop activities, and watch and listen attentively from a distance; eventually, they would ease their way closer and closer until they interrupted the interview and I would remind them that this was “so and so’s” time for an interview. I would tell them that they could have a turn after I was finished and ask them to be respectful and not interrupt. Typically, the child would nod yes and remind me that it was their turn as soon as I was finished with the interview.

I was careful to put children at ease by embedding the interviews within the context of the familiar classroom or playground. All of the interviews took place in the context of the children’s routine activities. Many were conducted
during outside recess on the playground during play on the shark rock, in the fort, or at the picnic area; others were conducted inside the classroom, during open choice activity times, near the block area, at the journal table, and while lounging on pillows in the tree house.

Since language competency varies greatly among children, I tailored my questions and conversations around the children's expressive language abilities. I always made certain that I was on the same level as the child, whether sitting cross-legged on the classroom floor, lying among the pillows and stuffed animals in the tree house, or swinging on the swings on the playground. I believe this practice put children at ease and lessened the power differential that often exists between adult researchers and young children. Moreover, my attention to such details, including body language and position, sent powerful messages of respect and value for the children's opinions, ideas, and comments.

My first interviewee was Nicole. She was very excited and decided that she should hold the small hand recorder. That action piqued a lot of interest in the other children. With each succeeding interview, I always offered the child the choice to hold the handheld recorder; every child chose to hold it. Additionally, at the end of each interview, I offered each child the opportunity to interview me or to ask questions. Some children chose to do so and others declined, anxious to move on to another activity. On average, each child's interview lasted 20 to 30 minutes. Some children wanted more time to talk, and others didn't have a lot to say and did not elaborate on their answers.
One of the strategies I used with children in my interview mode (adult role) was to let children interview me using my tape recorder before I interview them. They loved this role and were surprisingly successful interviewers, asking detailed and pertinent questions. In one such interview, the conversation went like this:

Nicole: What's it like to be in kindergarten?
Researcher: It's awesome, I really love being in kindergarten because it's so fun and there are so many things to do.
Nicole: What's your favorite color?
Researcher: Yellow, Blue, and black.
Nicole: Do you like cows and stuff?
Researcher: No, not really.
Nicole: Do you like chickens?
Researcher: No. But I love golden retrievers, Chickadees and Sandpipers.
Nicole: What's your favorite animal?
Researcher: Golden Retrievers, puppies
Nicole: What's your favorite activity, thing to do?
Researcher: I love going to the beach, collecting shells and exploring tidal pools. I also love riding in our boat around the islands. And sailing.
Nicole: I mean what's your favorite activity, thing to do in kindergarten?
Researcher: Oh, I love playing with my friends on the playground, going on nature walks, getting ice cream at the dairy bar and writing in my journal.

Nicole: Do you like your home?

Researcher: Yes, I love my home, my family and all of my flower gardens.

Nicole: Where do your parents live?

Researcher: In New York.

Nicole: Where do you live?

Researcher: In Dover. It's about 2 and one-half miles from here.

Researcher: Any more questions?

Nicole: Yes, just one more. What would you always remember about kindergarten?

Researcher: My friends here. The wonderful projects like the wedding, the birthday celebrations, the tree house and the room filled with friends beautiful paintings and artwork.

Nicole: Okay.

Researcher: Now it's my turn to interview you.

As a researcher I found working with children to be easy; but interviewing children to be difficult at best. Three factors that I attribute to my successful communication with children were trust, respect, equality, and friendship. These elements were achieved as a result of the time that I spent with study children during observations, participant observation, and interviews.
Especially challenging was getting children to think reflectively about their experiences and to elaborate on their thoughts. Children often repeated my questions as part of their answers and provided little details. I had to work very hard to reword or restate questions in many different ways to get substantive answers from children.

3.5.4 Artifact and Document Analysis

Hodder (1994) identified artifacts as the intended and unintended residues of human activity that offer alternative insights into the ways in which people perceive and fashion their lives. An advantage of artifact and document collection is that it does not influence the social setting being investigated.

The key feature of archival strategies is the relative importance given to sifting through what has been produced or left by others in the past. For a researcher, any document that proves to be a valuable source of information can be considered an archive (Wolcott, 1999). Regardless of whether the materials have been formally cataloged or casually handed to a researcher, written records, narratives, or photographs can be a vital source of data. It is such data that supplements participant observation. Historical documents regarding school policy, rules and schedules; parent communications, including academic records, disciplinary reports, and classroom newsletters; documentation of activities, projects, and events were reviewed for the purpose of collecting data in this study. I spent ten hours in the fall and 16 hours in the spring reviewing school documents.
3.5.5 Miscellaneous Meetings

The method of collecting background data through informal meetings is beneficial for building rapport and obtaining information in an unobtrusive manner. Additionally, this method allowed respondents to volunteer information the researcher may have failed to elicit in more structured interviews (Corsaro, 1981). Schatzman and Strauss (1973) argued that field entry is a continuous process of establishing and developing relationships, not only with a chief host, but also with a variety of less powerful persons.

I attended a number of school meetings, five hours in the spring, and five and a half in the fall related to the transition of study participants. Specifically, an informal transition meeting was held by the TCC for parents to discuss concerns and challenges associated with transition to public school.

3.5.6 Field Notes, Journals and E-mails

It is critical for a researcher to document her activities, circumstances, and emotional responses as these factors shape the process of observing and recording others' lives. I took field notes and kept a record of my daily activities including my emotions and responses to those activities to inform my research. Emerson et al. (1995) assert that field note writing involves issues of perception and interpretation; active processes of interpretation and sense making; noting and writing down some things as significant, noting but ignoring others as insignificant. More significantly, field notes present or frame objects in particular ways, reflecting and incorporating sensitivities, meanings and understandings the
field researcher has gleaned from having been close to and participated in the described events.

Parents were encouraged to record their thoughts, concerns, challenges, and joys associated with the transition to public school, as well as those of their child. I asked parents to begin to document these data in the spring while children are still in kindergarten and to continue to record their thoughts and concerns during the transition to first grade in the fall. This ensured complete and accurate documentation of the transition process. Most parents documented their thoughts and concerns through e-mails, notes, and letters to me. I spent a total of seven hours during the summer months when children were not attending school and 19 hours during the fall corresponding with parents via e-mail.

3.6 Data Analysis

My data analysis goal was to identify emerging patterns in the data that I collected (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). My aim was to learn children's, parents', and teachers' implicit meanings of their transition experiences and to build a conceptual analysis of them. Using a constructivist grounded theory approach, I placed priority on the transition process, seeing both data and analysis as created from the shared experiences of children, parents, teachers, and myself and those relationships constructed within the context of the transition to first grade. Constructivists view data analysis as a construction that not only locates the data in time, place, culture, and context, but also reflects the researcher's thinking (Charmaz, 1990, 1995, 2000, 2003).
Researchers who use grounded theory methods do so through the prism of their disciplinary assumptions and theoretical perspectives (Charmaz 2003, Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Hence, they have a pre-determined set of sensitizing concepts (Blumer, 1969; van den Hoonaard, 1997) that inform empirical inquiry and spark the development of more refined and precise concepts. For example, I drew upon the sensitizing concepts of continuity and discontinuity of transition based on my readings, knowledge, and experiences to begin coding my data.

I created an interpretive analysis of study participants' transition experiences through observation, participant observation, interviewing, field notes, journals, e-mails, meetings, and document analysis. Field notes generated during observation and participant observations of children at Mountain View Elementary School were used in data analysis, in addition to interview transcripts, field notes, journals, e-mails, meeting notes, and document analysis. However, only child and parent interviews, journals, e-mails, meetings, and document analysis was used with study children from Madison Elementary School. As previously noted, only Mountain View Elementary School teachers chose to participate in this study, thus, receiving teacher interviews and observation and participant observation data were not available for study children at Madison Elementary School. Nonetheless, those study children and their parents were interviewed about their experiences, concerns, and discontinuities regarding their transition to first grade. Data collected from these children and their parents confirmed data collected from other participants and received equal weight in the analysis process.
Field notes and transcripts of interviews were generated and reviewed throughout the data collection process. Following grounded theory, I analyzed and coded data after pre-transition interviews, before transition interviews, and after transition interviews. Coding is the formal representation of analytic thinking; is complex and iterative, and entails thinking through what a researcher takes as evidence of a category or theme (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). I assigned data into categories based on initial codes. When a code repeatedly from multiple data sources and/or multiple participants it became significant; and I assigned the data to a category.

The process of grounded theory coding involves several steps: (a) initial or open coding, (b) selective or focused coding, (c) memo writing, and (d) theoretical sampling (Charmaz, 2003). From the early stages of data collection, I simultaneous analyzed data. I read and typed observations, journal entries of participant activities, and correspondences. I transcribed taped interviews, made notes, and wrote summaries about these data. Next, I read each data source in the chronological order in which they were collected, then I read each participant’s spring and fall interview transcripts, and then I read related documents to continue to build concepts and to gain new perspectives on these data. These documents included the child’s developmental profiles, learning checklists, assessments, and other reports from kindergarten and first grade teachers.

I coded data using open coding, in which I discovered participants’ perspectives, expectations, and concerns about the transition to public school,
rather than assume that I shared similar views. This enabled me to make initial analytical decisions about these data. Within focused coding during the fall, I drew upon my initial codes of pre-transition perspectives, expectations, and concerns to sort, synthesize, and conceptualize these data. While comparing spring and fall interview data, I created the categories continuity and discontinuity to describe children's, parents', and teachers' interview data (Appendix G). I engaged in the process of Axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) to more accurately code and make sense of these data (Appendix H). Axial coding allowed me to examine the conditions, context, and social interactions that gave rise to the categories continuity and discontinuity more clearly defining their properties (Appendix H). For example, I discovered that the concept of pedagogy encompassed teacher beliefs about children, beliefs about readiness skills, learning environment, curriculum, instructional approaches, and assessment practices; and reflected the category teacher which included the characteristics of disposition, personality, and style.

Building upon this process of coding, I engaged in memo writing. Memos explicitly link data gathering, data analysis, and report writing. Memo writing helped me to explore and link codes, elaborate processes defined in those codes, and to triangulate participants' data about their transition experiences. During memo writing I included interview excerpts and informal conversations to join data with my interpretation of those data. I discovered that discontinuity for parents and teachers encompassed the categories of communication, parent involvement, and information sharing. For children, discontinuity encompassed
the categories of social adjustment, stress and anxiety, teacher, and pedagogy. As I related these characteristics and connections to each other, I analyzed how well these codes captured study participants' implied and explicit meanings.

Finally, I used theoretical sampling if categories were incomplete to extend, refine and check those categories. Theoretical sampling sharpens concepts and deepens the analysis and raises concepts to an emerging theory (Charmaz, 2003). I established validity in my data by triangulating the data between interviews and correspondences with study participants, participant observations, and document analysis.

While using a constructivist grounded theory approach to data collection, I effectively captured participant's stories and meaning making processes, while building a theoretical framework. Four themes emerged from my data: (a) the importance of understanding the interactions of a child in different social systems and interactions among these systems, (b) the transferability of previously acquired competencies, skills, and learning behaviors in the first grade learning environment; and (c) conformity—the loss of voice, choice, and control for children in relation to their learning emerged during this process; and (d) the tension between beliefs about DAP and compliance with legislative mandates such as NCLB.

In summary, data collection and analysis in this study used a constructivist grounded theory approach allowing an interactive and inductive process while reflecting on children's, parents', and teachers' shared experience regarding transition. The data and findings contained in the following pages of this
dissertation are intended to provide insight into the perspectives, challenges, and lived experiences of children and parents as they "make meaning" during the transition from a private, university-affiliated kindergarten program to a public school first grade classroom.

In the next four chapters I present data and findings from this study. Chapter four uncovers children's, parents', and teachers' pre-transition perspectives and concerns. Chapter five reports sending teacher's, receiving teacher's, and parent transition practices prior to the transfer of children. Chapter six reveals the transition experiences of children, their parents, and receiving teachers. Chapter seven illuminates the continuities and discontinuities study participants struggled with during transition. Chapter eight discusses the tensions between sending and receiving teachers, the stress and anxiety children and parents experienced during transition, the underlying complexity of transition, and study limitations. Chapter nine suggests transition recommendations for parents, teachers, practice, and policy. Each of these chapters adds to my theoretical framework and adds a layer of complexity to the phenomena of transition from a private, university-affiliated Kindergarten to first grade in a public school setting.
4.0 FINDINGS: PRE-TRANSITION PERSPECTIVES AND CONCERNS

Children, parents, and teachers were interviewed prior to the transition of children from kindergarten to first grade in the spring of 2004. Semi-structured interview questions were used (Appendix D) to examine their pre-transition perspectives and concerns.

4.1 Children's Perspectives

Children’s perspectives on school varied. During interviews children were asked about their likes and dislikes, favorite activities, and their perspectives on rules, academics, and homework. Children also were asked to identify similarities and differences between kindergarten and first grade, what it would be like to attend first grade in a public school setting, and what they thought they would miss about the TCC kindergarten.

Most children stated that, “I love everything about kindergarten (May 2004).” Favorite activities included cooperative endeavors with peers at areas such as dramatic play, blocks, centers, and games; independent activities such as drawing, painting, and crafts, reading in the treehouse, computer use, writing in journals, and fieldtrips. Fieldtrips were activities conducted outside the classroom but identified as part of the kindergarten curriculum and experience. Field-trip activities included leisurely walks on the nature trails to collect leaves, observe tadpoles in the ponds, or to pick apples at the apple orchard; walks to the dairy bar for ice cream, and visits to the cow and horse barns to pet the heifers and colts. Field trip activities also included the use of community
resources such as the public library, the university pool, the theatre, and the gym. Children's favorite curriculum projects included map-making, the creation of a wedding, building simple machines, art work including drawing, painting, crafts and collage; studying nature, and growing and harvesting vegetables in the TCC's garden.

Children's perspectives on academics focused on those activities they liked and engaged in most often. The favorite academic activities in kindergarten articulated most often by children were writing in journals, followed by math activities such as counting, calendar activities, and addition and subtraction.

Children's perspectives about homework seemed to differ according to their birth order. Those study participants who were second birth order children had considerably more knowledge and understanding of what homework entailed than those children who were first in birth order or only children. For example, when asked what homework was, Beth, an only child, replied, "I don't know, I just know the word for it (May 2004)." Gretchen, another first birth order child replied, "Homework is when you get in like first grade and second grade or third grade (May 2004)." Whereas Evan, a second birth order child, expressed his knowledge about homework, elaborating on his knowledge of homework (May 2004).

Evan: Homework is bringing in stuff like pants, shirt, water bottles, sponge-hat, and sun-screen.

Researcher: Do you think you'll have any homework in first grade?
Evan: First grade you do have homework. My sister and I took Chinese study and my Chinese study teacher gives me lots of homework.

Researcher: What is homework though?

Evan: A lot of Chinese words and showing it and writing it.

Researcher: How would you explain what homework is to a friend?

Evan: Homework is like people give you homework and if you can’t do it then you have to do it. If you don’t do it then the teacher will be so mad.

Researcher: Where do you do homework?

Evan: Sometimes at home or school.

Researcher: What kind of homework will you get in first grade?

Evan: Really hard homework. Kind of, I’ve never been in first grade.

Another second birth order child, Tara, had this to say when asked about homework (May 2004):

Researcher: Do you know what homework is?

Tara: Yes. It is sometimes when you have to do like spelling, reading and math problems and sentences because I have a brother who is second grade.

Researcher: And he has homework?

Tara: Yes. And he has to read for twenty minutes.

Researcher: Where does he do this? Does he do it at school?
Tara: No. Sometimes in the car. He does it at work sometimes with my mom. And then he can play on the computer and he does twenty minutes of reading when he comes back.

Researcher: Do you have any homework in kindergarten?
Tara: No. Oh yes...to bring in some hats and a water bottle.

Researcher: Do you think you will have homework in first grade?
Tara: Yes.

Researcher: What kind of homework will they have?
Tara: Probably the same as my brother. Spelling, math, sentences and twenty minutes of reading.

When asked to state kindergarten rules, children identified school and classroom rules as physically keeping themselves from hitting, pushing or hurting another child, not running in the classroom and halls, being a friend, not walking up the playground slide, not hiding books under their nap mats and as Nicole replied, “No smoking or chewing gum in school (June, 2004).” Although children were generally familiar with some first grade classroom rules, none expressed concern about the rules or their ability to follow them in the first grade setting.

Children acknowledged similarities and differences between the kindergarten and first grade school environments. Among the most commonly cited similarities children noted were the presence of classroom teachers, friends (classmates), a classroom and a bathroom. Nicole remarked, “Potties will be the same. I think first grade will be like...sorta weird. They will have faucets you drink out of, and desks (June, 2004).” Among the most commonly cited
differences were the size and complexity of the first grade school compared to the TCC. Evan noted that first grade would be, "a lot of people and bigger (May 2004)." While Nicole explained, "you won't know what people’s names are when you say hello (June 2004)." Children noted major differences from their kindergarten school experience including that they would have a gym, cafeteria (and hot lunch), and library, along with desks in their classroom; different classroom teachers in addition to having additional specific curriculum teachers (art, music, gym); a principal, and they would arrive at the first grade school by bus instead of riding with a parent.

When asked about specific things they might learn about in first grade, some children stated, "I don’t know" or, "I have no idea (Gretchen, May 2004)." In general terms, children commented that they would continue to learn to read and spell, adding that they would learn more math concepts such as, "pluses and minuses, tens, and times."

Children who had older siblings in grade school made more positive and enthusiastic comments about what first grade would be like. Julia mentioned, "You get to do more fun stuff and you get to go on a cool field trip to Sandy Point (May, 2004)." Nicole commented, "You will learn how to spell, and how to do stuff like cartwheels (May, 2004)." Mary stated, "I think I will mostly learn about reading (June, 2004)."

When children were asked to reflect on what they would always remember about kindergarten, they consistently remarked as their first response that they would always remember their teachers, Sue and Nancy. This response was
followed by friends and then special activities such as nature walks, working on the garden project, and fieldtrips in the community. When asked what she would always remember about kindergarten, Gretchen stated, “The good times, our teachers Sue and Nancy, friends and friendships, and math and drawing and painting (June, 2004).”

4.2 Children’s Concerns

Every child voiced concerns and worries about the transition to first grade. Common concerns identified were fears about new friendships, homework, academics, bullies, the bus, school size and their new teacher (Figure 4.2-1). Differences were apparent in the concerns of first birth order children and second birth order children (Figure 4.2-2). In general, first birth order children voiced more concerns about the transition, but were not able to clearly articulate specifics within their concerns. I attributed this phenomenon to lack of exposure, direct contact and experiences with the new school setting. This factor may cause a fear of the unknown in children. Whereas second or third birth order children, having more familiarity with the school through older siblings, expressed fewer concerns and were able to more clearly articulate specific concerns.

All of the study children were excited about first grade and specifically spoke of sustaining old friendships forged by the years spent together at preschool and kindergarten. Nicole remarked, “I’m excited that I will see my brother there and my best friends (June, 2004).” All children voiced concerns about if and which friends they would be together with in first grade. This factor was a primary concern of children and took precedence over all other factors.
(dispositions, personality of teacher, rules and routines, homework, bullies and bus issues) associated with the transition. At the same time, children expressed concern, even fear in some instances about "being liked," and the ability to make new friendships. Children expressed excitement and uneasiness about initiating new friendships with "kids they didn't know" in first grade. As Tara expressed, "there might be bullies in my class and they might punch me in the nose and because Thomas has someone in his class who did it to someone (June, 2004)."

Three children expressed concern over meeting their new teacher. One child, Mary, noted that meeting her new teacher made her nervous, but she would be proud of herself for meeting her teacher without her parents present (June, 2004).

Mary: I bet when I'm excited on the first day of class I bet I would feel a little nervous meeting my teacher.

Researcher: What makes you nervous about meeting your teacher?

Mary: I think I would be nervous meeting my teacher because I never saw her before and once I go back home I feel like I'm proud of myself because I did that with no parent.

Few children expressed concern over academic expectations in first grade. Those children that did express concern focused on reading, writing and spelling, and on math and homework. Six out of ten children voiced that the hardest academic areas were reading, writing and spelling. Specifically, children cited sounding out and writing words as areas of difficulty. Among other concerns, Mary voiced her uneasiness about her reading ability by saying, "I
think I'll get nervous if I can't read really good (June, 2004).” Although only one child directly mentioned reading as a concern about first grade, children’s discussions of difficulties related to reading, spelling and writing can be interpreted as underlying concerns about first grade academics. Several children reported that the hardest subjects were reading, writing and spelling, in particular, sounding out words. Beth, summed it up as, “Hardest for me is spelling because I almost can read, but I can't really read (June, 2004).” When asked what part was hardest in spelling she replied, “The sounding out and silent letters. Yeah and the C's that sound like S's. Like Charlotte, that starts with a C (June, 2004).” Tara stated, “Writing is really hard for me because I can't get my letters the right way that I want to. Because bs are this way (writes one b) and I sometimes do them the other way (writes the letter b as a d) (June, 2004).” Mary remarked, “The hardest thing for me is reading different new words that I didn't know, that I haven't really read yet (June, 2004).”

Math was much less of a concern than reading, writing and spelling. One student, Evan expressed concern over math, although his difficulty in this area appeared related to the fact that English is a second language for him. Some children looked forward to more math in first grade. One student in particular, expressed excitement and anticipation in the challenges of first grade math. When asked what she gets excited about most when going to first grade, Gretchen said, “All the math, because I love math. I did a lot of math. I already know math, like five plus five equals ten (May, 2004).”
Children's knowledge about homework and experiences with homework differed widely. Five of the ten children expressed concerns about the type and amount of homework they would be receiving in first grade. When asked what they thought first grade would be like, many children's thoughts were focused on receiving homework. Beth replied, "You get homework on the first day of school" and Gretchen said, "You get a lot of math homework in first grade (June, 2004)."

When asked if anything worries or bothers you about going to first grade, seven children voiced concerns about the size of the new school. Beth replied, "It's a lot bigger" and Julia said, "When it's your first day of first grade you might get a little lost because it's your first day." Mary remarked that she will get nervous about where things are, "I don't know where the puzzles and games are (June, 2004)."

Children's concerns for safety were few. Two safety concerns identified by children were bullies and bus accidents. Three of the ten children expressed concern over uncomfortable social situations or bullies in first grade. When asked if there was anything that worries her about first grade, Tara replied, "Yes, there might be bullies in my class, and they might punch me in the nose (June, 2004). Thomas (her brother) had someone in his class that did it to someone." Another child, Evan, was also concerned about bullies. When asked if there was anything that made him nervous about going to first grade, he replied, "sometimes people being mad, being mean. I am afraid they might push me and bully me (June, 2004).” A third child, William, expressed concern over cliques and the possibility of not being accepted, or excluded from others. Although he
did not use the word "bully," he was clearly concerned about interpersonal
relationships and that some children might be mean or nasty, and seemed to
recognize that groups of children and the exclusion from them were potentially
more of a threat than individual bullies.

Although, seven children worried about the presence of older children, not
knowing other children and the possibility of bullies on the bus, only two children
expressed concern over safety on the bus. Gretchen was concerned about
hitting her head on the roof of the bus if she didn't stay in her seat. Tara was
more concerned about safety and traffic accidents. As part of her answer to
worries about first grade, Tara spoke about safety on the bus, "because on snow
days you might get in an accident (June, 2004)."

Most children were excited to ride the bus, especially later born children
who anticipated the bus ride to be "exciting and fun." As Julia stated, "the bus
ride will be fun. I get to go on the same bus with my brother in the same school
(June, 2004)." Although Mary would be riding the bus with her brother, she also
stated concerns about the bus, "What would make me nervous is I don’t get there
in time for class in case I miss the bus. And because I don’t really know any of
those children in the bus (June, 2004)." The concern expressed about other
children or "strangers" on the bus is consistent with the general concern and
anxiety of children about being with friends and people they know in first grade.

Common concerns identified by study children were fears related to new
friendships, homework, academics, bullies, the bus, school size and their new
teacher (Figure 4.2-1). Differences were apparent in the concerns of first birth
order children and second birth order children (Figure 4.2-2).
FIGURE 4.2-1 CHILDREN'S PRE-TRANSITION CONCERNS

- Friends
- School Size
- Bus Strangers
- Reading/Writing
- Homework
- Teacher
- Bullies
- Bus Safety
- Math

Number of Children

Concerns
FIGURE 4.2-2 CHILDREN'S PRE-TRANSITION CONCERNS BY BIRTH ORDER

Number of Children

- Friends
- School
- Bus Strangers
- Reading/Writing
- Homework
- Teacher
- Bullying
- Bus Safety

□ First born
■ Second born
4.3 Parents' Perspectives

During pre-transition spring interviews all parents stated that from their perspective, the themes of respect, voice, and choice of the community of learners that were prevalent in kindergarten would not be salient features of public school first grades. Instead, they suspected that attention to the curriculum and time constraints would be more important to first grade teachers. The teaching of reading, writing, and math would most likely become the focus of first grade, not developmental phenomena such as problem-solving, conflict resolution, empathy, and the individual expression of ideas through project work. Parents seemed cognizant of increased expectations and acknowledged that they might suffer a loss of access to their children at public school. In many cases, parents' revealed hesitations and even regret in realizing that their child was growing up and moving into a new and uncertain period of their life.

All parents sought the continuation of positive feelings and dispositions in relation to learning, school, and the educational community. Several parents remarked that they wanted their child to like school and be happy. They wanted their child to continue to look forward to school, and continue to enjoy a love of learning.

Readiness skills identified by parents included a positive disposition towards school, social skills, organizational skills, and academic skills. Social skills identified by parents for success in first grade included the ability to interact with others, be independent, and feel comfortable in a new environment. One mother, Jennifer, commented, "I think they need some amount of independence,
being able to really function independently. As simple as gathering up their things at the end of the day, their lunchboxes and their backpacks (May, 2004).”

Parents also stressed the importance of children’s respect for other people’s space, belongings and feelings.

Children’s’ readiness for first grade was primarily attributed to the educational experiences thus far obtained through pre-school and kindergarten. Parents stated teachers had done an excellent job teaching and preparing children. Their expectations for readiness skills differed, but generally there was agreement that the necessary readiness skills included social adjustment and positive dispositions towards school.

There was consensus among all parents that important academic skills included being ready and excited to learn, being able to listen and follow directions, ability to interact with materials, having the ability to respond to the teacher, answer questions and participate in lessons. Parents agreed that children should have a foundation for learning, but not be expected to be reading.

Although there was a general agreement among non-reading children’s parents that if their child had been pushed or received direct instruction in reading they “believed their children” would be reading, all parents explicitly felt that their child was ready for first grade.

Researcher: Do you feel that Gretchen is academically ready for school?

Melissa: Yes. Absolutely, I think she’s ready.

Researcher: Did you expect that she would be reading by the end of kindergarten?
Melissa: No. I'm not at all concerned about that. She’s engaging in a lot of literacy activities. She writes words, she’s very interested in reading, and she’s reading some words. I wouldn’t say that she should have to be reading by first grade. She’s a child that if I had pushed her, I could have trained her to read by now or earlier. But personally, I just didn’t see a need for it. I didn't see a huge advantage in terms of it. I think it will emerge for her and she's been so engaged in learning so many other things that are interesting to her (May, 2004).

When asked if there were specific academic areas that weren’t addressed adequately, five of the 10 sets of parents mentioned reading and writing. One parent remarked, “I'll have to wait and answer that in the fall. I have heard from others that their children from here may not have been as reading ready as others. When people say, well other kids knew how to read and my kid from TCC didn’t (Kelly, May 2004).” When asked about specific skills within reading and writing parents expressed a mutual feeling that more direct instruction could have occurred. Mary’s mother, Roslyn, said:

I think that the children are capable of doing more... I think there could be more teacher guidance... Maybe more correcting the child. I think both formal group instruction and also individual. For example, in many cases Mary is attempting to write by herself so she’s sounding out the letters and writing words and sentences but in many cases she was writing backward.
Right to left. That wasn’t corrected; teachers allowed her to do that. But, children are not expected to be reading and writing in kindergarten (June, 2004).

Another parent, Jill, remarked:
The school does the Every Day Math program and it’s a completely different way of learning math and I think sometimes kids from the outside kindergartens are at a disadvantage coming into first grade because they haven’t been exposed to it (May, 2004).

4.4 Parents’ Concerns

The complexity of expectations and concerns of parents was evident in the very different backgrounds and experiences of the families. Parents expressed a variety of potential general and individual difficulties children might encounter during the transition to public school. General transition concerns included issues surrounding size of the new school, the structure of first grade, cafeteria expectations, busing and increased curricular and teacher demands (Figure 4.4-1). In addition, individual concerns were expressed by parents for their children.

Parental concerns were fundamentally of five types. Parents were concerned about: a) their child’s social adjustment; b) their child’s teacher; c) their child’s ability to conform to basic procedures, routines, and rules; d) the safety and supervision of their child; and e) academics.

Parents worried about limited access to their child and the classroom, limited opportunities for active parent involvement in their child’s classroom, and
limited opportunities for daily contact and interactions with their child at school. Parents recognized that the daily contact they had enjoyed in child’s kindergarten would not be the standard in public school. With this recognition came a feeling of loss of community and a sadness equated with not being able to enter the classroom at will, as well as a feeling of loss of control over their child’s environment and well being. As one parent remarked, “There’s that bitter-sweet aspect as a parent - because it’s just not wanting her to - it's sort of like that loss of childhood (Melissa, May 2004).” In kindergarten, parents knew they were always welcome, whether they chose to visit or not. Every mother, and several fathers, expressed concern that access to their child and to their child’s teacher would be more restricted and much less welcoming in first grade.

All ten sets of parents emphasized the importance of their child’s social adjustment, making reference to long-standing friendships and sibling like-relationships among children. Every parent expressed concern in relation to their child’s ability to fit in and to be accepted by others. Placement of their child in the new first grade environment was of primary concern to parents. They hoped that their child would be placed with a close friend in first grade, stating that it would be “devastating” for their child if they were placed in first grade without an existing kindergarten classmate.

All parents expressed concern over their child’s new first grade teacher. These concerns ranged from the dedication, training, and expertise of the teacher; classroom environment; teaching personality and style; and academic
expectations. Beth’s mother, Chelsea, voiced concern about the possibility of Beth being assigned an “old school” teacher:

I would really feel bad if she got a really rigid, “old school” kind of teacher. Which I don’t even know if the school has any of those. But that’s my worry, she will be disappointed. Beth is creative, and thrives on that. I would want a teacher that allows her that and would focus on allowing the kids to create and be more visionary than rigid (May, 2004).

Another mother, Kelli, also worried about her daughter’s teacher:

Tabatha might be placed with a teacher that has a lot of new rules, routines and has fewer child choices. I wonder about a rigid structure and lack of choice. I also wonder about teachers really listening to children; letting children come up with their own ideas to build on. The kindergarten teachers are really good about listening to what children have to say (May, 2004).

Concerns about teacher-child relationships and aspects of the first grade learning environment were clear in this interview with one mother:

Researcher: Describe your child’s kindergarten learning environment.

Melissa: Child-centered, attention to individual needs. The teachers have been wonderful and they have a very good sense of her, and she has a good sense of them. She really got to know them as people and teachers. They have been a positive model for her, in a sense of a positive model of school.
Researcher: Describe your child's teacher's style, personality and interactions with children.

Melissa: One of the things that is articulated here is attention to a child-centered approach and paying attention to the individual strengths and weaknesses of that student. What I found is that they really did attend to Gretchen. And I think it's important for this age, is not just to her cognitive style, but also very much to her social and emotional needs, in a very gracious and loving and natural way. That has been for me as a parent, a huge comfort. Because there's nothing worse than seeing your child having difficulty, separating from you.

Researcher: Do you have any transition concerns?

Melissa: I do have a concern regarding the general aspect of the environment. It's not an environment where she'll be as attended to, as she is here. I think as a parent, the feeling that people might not be watching out for her in the same way as they are here. That nurturing piece (May, 2004).

Concerns were expressed about a perceived lack of attention to individuality, fearing that the teacher would not get to know their child, hence may not individualize or tailor curriculum to meet their needs. Sally's mother voiced that her number one transition concern was related to the teacher her child would receive in first grade:
Margaret: Who ever she gets for a teacher. These guys are awesome and I've worked with them from when she first came here so they know the issues she's had. They've worked with me; we've had really good communication back and forth. So depending on the teacher that she gets I think it can really be a make or break situation for her.

Researcher: Can you describe her kindergarten teachers?
Margaret: Caring, compassionate, skilled. They're very good at what they do. They teach, they don't limit it to any area. They're very open, they're just awesome.

Researcher: How do the teachers handle discipline?
Margaret: She's probably the most challenging child in kindergarten, as far as I'm concerned. Teachers were very creative about how they dealt with her and figuring out what worked and what didn't.

Researcher: How do you think discipline will be handled in first grade?
Margaret: That's why it's a huge concern. Depending on the match. At her last school she and the teacher really clashed (May, 2004).

Among nine of the ten sets of parents there was concern about the first grade classroom rules and routines. Parents expected that first grade classrooms would be more structured, include fewer opportunities for open-ended projects and project-based learning, and provide fewer opportunities for
individual choice. Parents feared the public school atmosphere would be one of competition, conformity, strict obedience, and quiet discipline. Parents feared this would stifle their child’s openness, creativity, and exploration of their environment.

Parents remarked that they hoped that their child’s first grade teacher would emphasize respect for others, how to talk to people, negotiate conflict, and solve problems both inside and outside of the classroom. They also expressed concern over the continuation of their child’s ability to negotiate and the receptivity and negotiation skills of other children present in the classroom.

Three parents were ambivalent about their child’s exposure to children with differing backgrounds, experiences, values, beliefs, and social status. These parents had concerns for their children regarding exposure to inappropriate language and behavior, adequate supervision, and safety. They wanted reassurance that the first grade teachers would monitor and scaffold conflict resolution in the classroom using and expanding on the language and norms of the kindergarten pre-transition setting. These norms emphasized time for reflection for individual children, opportunity for self-expression, negotiated discussion, teacher guidance, and peaceful resolutions. One parent expressed concern regarding the amount of time children would be given to acknowledge and regulate their emotions in the first grade classroom. Mary’s mother, Roslyn, stated:

Roslyn: Of my two children, Mary is the most temperamental and emotional.
Researcher: Do you feel those may be concerns in first grade?

Roslyn: Maybe initially. Because the teachers will not know her or know how to handle her. If she is upset about something and she gets sad and upset then she can ask for time for herself. She can have a quiet time and she recomposes herself then she can ask for help or try to resolve the situation. If she’s upset that we’re trying to talk to her at that point she needs to cool down and then she’ll be ready. She needs time to recompose herself and be able to talk or be able to apologize or whatever it is (June, 2004).

In kindergarten the fundamental principles of respect and acceptance of others; imagination, creativity, and individuality; individual choice and voice; and discussion, negotiation, and compromise were fostered by teachers and encouraged among children. The appreciation and approval of the socio-moral atmosphere of the kindergarten classroom was recognized by parents and a desire was expressed for a similar school atmosphere in first grade.

Although parents expressed general concerns about the rigor of academic expectations of their child’s first grade teacher and their child’s academic success in the new first grade environment, only one parent viewed this as a potential source of transition difficulty for their child. These concerns were both immediate and long-term. Immediate concerns were about how a child might perform in the classroom or how a child might react to his or her own performance in the classroom. Long-term fears focused more on the potential
negative effects or implications about their child's potential performance academically or socially in the new environment, and whether or not poor performance might somehow handicap the child's future social or academic growth, performance, or ability. In one instance, William's father voiced concern about the academic curriculum of public school being challenging enough to maintain his son's excitement for learning and school:

Boredom would be a huge concern for William and us. We really hope that he's in a classroom where he is being challenged and that his teacher is going to be able to accommodate his particular interests. Someone with a sense of humor, that's very important. Someone who will sort of keep an eye on the social situation (Rob, May 2004).

All parents anticipated less communication in first grade. Five of the ten sets of parents voiced concern over the perceived lack of daily, on-going communication with first grade teachers. Every parent in this study agreed that this constant flow of communication from teacher to parent through written notes, newsletters, telephone calls, and face-to-face meetings would likely not continue in first grade. Parents recognized that they had an exceptional relationship with their child's teacher in the pre-transition setting, and expressed deep concerns about their ability to really know what would be happening in their child's school life in first grade. Although many parents recognized they might receive a monthly newsletter, all parents feared that their only communication with their child's teacher or school could well be a dreaded phone call regarding their child's misbehavior or poor academic performance. Sally's mother explained,
"I'm afraid that I won't hear anything positive or negative until I get that phone call telling me there's a problem (May, 2004)."

Eight of ten sets of parents expressed concern over the size of the school and the general "bigness" of the new environment. Although expressed as a concern over the size of the building, playground and school grounds, this concern was intertwined with concerns over the daily routine and concerns over safety and supervision.

Nine sets of parents expressed many concerns over aspects of the daily routine for their child in the new setting. Concerns in these areas were procedural and centered on whether or not their child would understand and conform to the expected rules and procedures. Parents expressed alarm that their child would not be able to follow new rules or procedures and direct assistance would be lacking or unavailable. Primary instances of concern were expressed among organizational activities such as remembering to bring homework, lunch boxes and back packs home, and procedural activities such as riding the school bus or eating lunch in the school cafeteria.

Parents expressed supervision and safety concerns about the cafeteria, the playground, and the bus ride to and from the new school in the morning and afternoon. Parents were concerned that there would not be enough adult supervision to protect the safety and welfare of their child in all places at all times. The knowledge that the size and layout of the playground combined with a variety of different aged children from diverse backgrounds and the notion of limited supervision made all parents uneasy. In particular, concerns were
repeatedly voiced about the lack of adult supervision leading to unwanted exposure to inappropriate adolescent language and behavior. Parents equated this type of exposure to a loss of innocence and loss of childhood. One parent, Chelsea explained:

> She will be exposed to other types of children, families and a bus driver. She hasn’t had that really. So, yeah that scares me and my husband. Maybe not the young kids but I think once you get older kids on the buses. I hear a lot of things that on the buses a lot of bullying and a lot of negative name calling. Supervision and safety issues really worry me (May, 2004).

Three parents had similar concerns about the bus. In particular, lack of adult supervision and potential exposure to inappropriate language and behavior were cited by parents, especially first birth order parents. Second birth order parents recognized the potential for this to occur, but stated they were generally more comfortable since their younger child would be riding the bus together with an older sibling. When asked if their child would be riding the bus, one parent of a young girl stated:

> No way. No buses yet. Especially since there will be sixth graders who are twelve or thirteen years old. I don’t want her exposed to that. Maybe if she was in the mid to older range of the kids, but not being the youngest (Margret, May 2004).

A primary concern among the majority of parents was the fact that children would be eating lunch in the cafeteria, not in their classroom with their teacher. Nine of the ten sets of parents anticipated that the cafeteria would be problematic for
their child and for themselves. Concerns included the size and layout of the cafeteria, an increase in the number of children eating at one time, and dealing with lunch money. Many parents expressed concern about their child being responsible to request, hold on to and pay for lunch with money from home. Many thought that their child might forget or lose their lunch money, or worse, their lunch money might be stolen by an older child or by the school bully.

Parents' pre-transition concerns included: a) their child's social adjustment; b) their child's teacher; c) their child's ability to conform to basic procedures, routines, and rules; d) the safety and supervision of their child; and e) academics. These concerns are summarized in figure 4.4-1.
FIGURE 4.4-1 PARENTS' PRE-TRANSITION CONCERNS

Number of Parents

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<tr>
<th>Concern</th>
<th>Number of Parents</th>
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<tr>
<td>Teacher</td>
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<td>Social Adjustment</td>
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<td>Rules/Routine</td>
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<td>Communication</td>
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<td>Supervision</td>
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<td>Academics</td>
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4.5 Sending and Receiving Teacher's Perspectives

Sending teachers pre-transition perspectives focused on their beliefs about children's individuality and strengths, and readiness factors. Readiness factors included both social skills and academic skills. Receiving teachers from the one participating elementary school, pre-transition perspectives focused on children's readiness factors and current academic abilities. Receiving teachers discussed the potential weaknesses of the incoming children in a manner that suggested that the children they receive are deficient in skills, development, and behavior. The overarching theme of receiving teachers was that children need to be taught to conform to new rules and procedures and become an integrated part of a larger community.

Sending teachers viewed children as capable, competent, and eager to learn. Nancy commented, "I believe that children are capable and competent. They continually amaze me the way they are able to interact with one another and adults to make sense of the world around them." Sue described her beliefs about children as:

I think that they are very capable if you give them opportunities in learning, whether it's providing a provocative environment, a variety of materials, good thinking questions or resources. I think children have a lot of potential if you give them opportunities. I think they are vivacious, and energetic. For me they're an absolute joy to be around! I really enjoy their thinking, their 'ah-ha's' and their motivation to learn (May 2004).
Receiving teachers viewed children as individuals as well, but focused on academics and development of community through adherence to a consistent structure, rules, and behavioral expectations. Barb described her beliefs about children:

I think kids are individuals. I think that at the same time, they also need to understand that they are part of something larger, a community. I think kids are very inquisitive and at an early age that needs to be encouraged and fostered. I think they know a lot of things but can benefit from understanding them more deeply. And they’re very eager to do the right thing and to be kind to other people for the most part (September 2004).

Jackie expressed her beliefs about children in relation to her teaching philosophy:

My central philosophical ideas are for children to feel safe and be able to take risks in the classroom. So I encourage the building of community. Children feel secure here. We allow a lot of responses. They don’t get any negative feedback from the kind of responses they make, as long as they are within the behavioral bounds of the classroom. We have consistent behavioral expectations, clear rules and a consistent structure throughout the day. I do a mixture of direct teaching and practice (September 2004).

When asked what the essential readiness skills that each child needed prior to entry into first grade were, sending and receiving teachers responded with a number of social and academic capabilities children should have when
The idea that we listen to each other. I like the idea that the teacher, as much as the community, I am the head of the classroom and I expect to be treated that way. As far as some of the other things that kids have to know, and they're little things, like don't interrupt, they have to learn how each area works during the day. But that varies a great deal and whoever comes through the door, whatever they bring with them that's what we start with. It's nice if they're all socially very ready to get along with each other, to work collaboratively (September 2004).

The two sending teachers identified essential readiness skills as being responsible for self and toward others, and for belongings with the classroom. The ability to be resourceful, find books, enjoy and find their niche in the classroom, to express learning style preferences and being receptive to learning were further noted as indicators of first grade readiness skills. Receiving teacher Jackie stated:

I wouldn't say there are any requirements. But it makes it easier if they've learned to compromise and that they are at a developmental stage where they can listen to other children. Children need to feel comfortable and part of a community where they don't feel they are going to be teased or made fun of. That even if someone doesn't want to play with them they won't feel badly about that. Children will know how to respond to each other even if they don't want to work with each other. Oh, and physical things like they can put their coat on and off, and their boots, and manage
their lunch and stuff like that. Those things are really helpful coming into first grade. But we don’t always get that (September 2004).

Jill, Julia’s first grade teacher, noted that:

The essential skills are the ability to function in a classroom setting both independently and cooperatively. That’s probably the baseline. I don’t think it’s an academic skill so much as it’s a readiness to be part of a group and accessible to being able to learn in a classroom situation (September 2004).

Jackie, William and Gretchen’s first grade teacher, commented on what the important readiness skills children entering first grade should display. She stated:

Academically being able to follow directions, simple two or three step directions with some sort of visual support. Letter identification, consonant knowledge, consonant sounds. That they would know their alphabet names and most of their consonant sounds. Maybe that they are beginning to be able to encode, maybe a beginning and an ending sound that would be a good entry level first grade skill. That they can work maybe 10 – 15 minutes independently. Math, maybe count to 20 and be able to write their numbers but beyond that I don’t think they need to have any other skills. Some kind of rudimentary ability to stay on tasks and have practiced that in areas where they are not 100% comfortable, that isn’t totally child driven. I think children need practice doing activities in
seat work that they haven't chosen that are academically based ready for first grade (September 2004).

The sending teachers’ academic goals focused on helping children to find information, to think critically, to be resourceful, and to promote problem-solving skills in academic settings. Nancy, one of the sending teachers interviewed, stressed the importance of empowering children to become independent while still being able to work collaboratively, and having the ability to communicate wants, needs, thoughts and ideas with other children and adults. Nancy and Sue stressed the importance of children seeing themselves as readers and writers, and the importance that children use these skills throughout their day in meaningful and authentic ways.

The academic emphasis in the pre-transition setting was not decontextualized on shapes, colors, numbers or basic, fact-based instruction in isolation such as the ABCs. Instead, teachers sought to enhance children’s thought processes using observation and documentation techniques to scaffold their learning. As kindergarten teacher Sue expressed:

Academics are children being able to express themselves, ideas and theories in a variety of ways and being able to act on that. As teachers, we need to pull academics from that. Knowing that literacy isn't just reading and writing, we immerse children in many different types of literacy experiences. Through project work, observations, conversations and listening, investigations, and research we are able to access learning
through project work because skills are embedded in project work (May 2004).

These Kindergarten teachers did not believe that children should arrive at first grade reading and writing. Sending teachers felt that every child should be exposed to the essential literacy building blocks in the pre-transition setting. Sue explained:

I feel that children should have a strong foundation in literacy. But I don’t feel they should be reading. They should know the function of print, have a strong understanding of letters, of sound-letter connections and that letters can make a word, and of enjoying books—being able to read a book through looking at the words and pictures. Just understanding that those words and illustrations tell a story—that they can listen to a story and make predictions; can think critically about a story, sharing stories orally, being able to understand that there’s a beginning, middle and end. Seeing themselves as readers and writers. Having an internal understanding of when they are writing that it is an actual task that communicates something. That’s an important skill to have (May 2004).

In contrast, receiving teachers’ academic goals were directly related to the state’s curriculum standards, focusing on reading, writing, and math. Each of the first grade teachers implemented the district curriculum goals in their own way. Knowledge of letters and consonant sounds, concepts of print, and an understanding that print tells a story were common expectations among the first
grade teachers. Each first grade teacher commented that children were responsible for their learning. Barb, Evan and Sally's first grade teacher, said:

Basically kids need to do a lot of things. I think kids need to learn how to do things that will help them in whatever content they need to do it in. So I think reading and writing and thinking and questioning and mucking about with stuff is really important. Also, kids need to understand some content within the context of understanding the process that goes along with learning and say science, and social science (September 2004).

School had only been in session for a few weeks and, in general, most receiving teachers felt children coming from the TCC environment were well prepared. Barb and Jill did not voice specific concerns about behavior or academics concerning individual children. Jackie, William and Gretchen's teacher, expressed some doubts and concern about incoming children. Jackie stated:

My guess is that they (children) tend to come from faculty families so they are prepared. If they didn't, I don't know that they would be prepared. Because I don't think that those things are in place (at TCC) (September 2004).

4.6 Sending and Receiving Teachers' Concerns

Sending and receiving teachers expressed transition concerns for both children and their parents during the transition to first grade. Sending teacher concerns for children included their ability to adjust to the new learning environment, new relationships with receiving teachers, the much larger size of
the new school, a more structured daily routine, and an entirely new social environment.

The lack of communication and sharing of ideas among students was assumed to be one of children's greatest challenges in first grade. In general, children's activities in kindergarten were structured to promote and support discussion, interaction, and cooperative endeavors. Children often worked together on projects at tables, read together in the treehouse, acted out dramatic play scenes in the block area and engaged in such games as *Uno, Dominos* or *Monachola*. Teachers predicted that little time would exist for such interactive cognitive endeavors or social activities in the new learning environment.

Sending teachers expressed concerns about the interpersonal relationships and social adjustment of some children with teachers were identified. As Sue stated:

A child's success will depend on their first grade teacher. Some children are independent and can relate well to others; some need constant reminders about structure and procedures, some will be perceived as behavior problems because teachers may not make connections with them such as how the child functions, their background, needs and their interests. There would not be time to figure out the idiosyncrasies of children. There would not be time to work through children's behaviors or concerns to discuss and practice acceptable behavior. Behavior can often be misinterpreted if not discussed (June 2004).
Sending teachers stated that some children would struggle with the size of the school and the increased number of other children, and might feel lost, abandoned, or alone in the larger atmosphere and surroundings. There was a recognition that children would struggle with the overall daily procedure, routine and rules during the transition process. For example, first grade teachers in each special class would have different procedures and rules in their classroom and this would be confusing for the children.

Sue noted that the regimented structure would be difficult for some children, while others would like it. She stated that the starting of a project without time to follow through would be disappointing for many children. In kindergarten, children often worked on projects until they were largely completed. From her perspective, children in first grade often work in isolated blocks of time on unrelated content areas. These isolated blocks of time will require that children adapt their attitude and work schedule to include frequent interruptions or starts and stops. Study children were unaccustomed to this practice. This starting and stopping of subjects and projects requires that children remain focused and organized in a more demanding way than was required of them in kindergarten.

In addition, the lunch line and cafeteria were cited as areas of concern. Children would be uneasy about going through the lunch line, finding everything they needed to eat lunch and the right spot to sit. At TCC, children brought their lunch to kindergarten and ate together in the classroom with their teachers.
Another concern related to lack of teacher flexibility and time was facilitation of conflict resolution; the ability to help children recognize and negotiate their behavior, to understand the consequences of one's actions and to seek amiable solutions. The practice of discussing children's behaviors, working through their conflicts and concerns, and practicing socially acceptable ways of dealing with conflict was a regular practice in the kindergarten classroom. Teachers felt that every social and emotional conflict was an opportunity to teach and learn. Sue explained that, "Some teachers will automatically assume that children can't negotiate conflict. But given the right supports and freedom, children have a lot of capability to come up with wonderful solutions."

The kindergarten teachers, Sue and Nancy, felt strongly about the emotional climate of their classroom. Sue stated:

Respect is the common denominator; respect for individuals, their emotions, children, teachers, materials and each other. The emotional health of children drives my teaching. It is vital that I make sure that their feelings are validated and they are able to express how they feel. Children need to feel safe, secure and nurtured in the classroom so they are comfortable with challenge. Feelings are a common vocabulary in the classroom. The expression of feelings empowers children; it is conducive to problem solving. This climate of respect, responsibility and believing in children's capabilities creates our community (May, 2004).

Sending teachers had some concerns about the potential behavior of individual children related to boredom, stubbornness, or temperament. For
instance, teachers worried that William, while characterized as brilliant, would get bored and not respect the time that other children need to express their thinking. Sue noted, "He gets very impatient and disrespectful; I worry about him during group time. He's very bright, fabulous language and lots of knowledge about all sorts of things (June, 2004)." Sally and Julia also were identified as children who could be seen as strong-willed, stubborn, and difficult at times.

Receiving teacher concerns for children included learning a new school culture and managing the physical and emotional reactions of children. Barb noted that each school has its own culture and it would be challenging for children to learn that culture and how things work. Jackie stated:

Making the transition from our kindergarten is managing the emotional reaction of the children, while making the transition from a private school is managing the physical reaction of children from a whole day program that's a little more intense than a kindergarten program. Children get very tired and I think that's a challenge for the children and the parents dealing with that (September 2004).

Sending teacher concerns for parents included adjustments to changes in parental involvement, parent-teacher communication, the size of the school, the more structured daily routine, supervision and safety, and childcare. Teachers predicted that parents would have difficulty with the transition because of limited access to their child and the classroom, declining opportunities for active and ongoing parent involvement in the classroom, and few opportunities for daily interactions with their child's first grade teacher. As Sue noted:
It is through daily interactions with parents that we are able to make connections to children, to make them feel that the teachers are part of their lives. We want to establish a partnership so we strive to get to know the family and be more personal. Parents feel that we are their neighborhood community (May 2004).

Sending teachers predicted that parents would be frustrated by the lack of daily and on-going communication with first grade teachers. In kindergarten, parent-teacher communications consisted of daily interactions in the morning when children are dropped off at school and in the afternoon when they are picked up, telephone calls to inform parents of exciting events and as needed for bumps and bruises, daily news (written on the grease board) and weekly newsletters. Daily contact with teachers, positive nurturing relationships, the feeling of community, and being able to come in classroom at will would not be components of the public school first grade, parent-teacher relationship. Nancy noted:

Not having that intimacy that they have here, seeing us twice a day at drop off and pick up... just feeling that they really know what’s happening in their child’s life, the good and bad, the challenging. They are going to miss that. We make an effort to share the not so positive with the positive. I worry that they will only hear the bad and only have those phone calls and not know that there may be good things going on (May 2004).

The size and layout of the public school was predicted to be of concern for parents. Sending teachers noted that some parents may even be more
concerned about this than their child. In addition to an increase in building size, the new school would have many more specialized classrooms and children would move from one classroom to another during the day. The kindergarten environment did not have separate places for the cafeteria, gym, library, and music room, and the new layout would be a concern for parents. In addition to school size and layout, the increase in the number of children attending the public school would contribute to the “bigness” of the transition experience.

Sending teachers commented that parents would be concerned about the procedure, routine and rules of the new environment. In particular, sending teachers noted that the process of obtaining and paying for lunch would be challenging for parents as well as for children. For parents, challenges would not only include not knowing if the child ate lunch, but also if the lunch money made it to the appropriate hands, or if it was lost or possibly stolen.

Sending teachers recognized that parents would be very concerned about the supervision and safety of their children in the larger, potentially less supervised environment. Areas of concern for parents were identified as the playground, bus, and cafeteria. Bus and playground were identified as potential sources of worry for parents because their young child would be amongst older children from diverse backgrounds, and the fear of limited supervision would make parents uneasy.

A final area of sending teachers concern for parents was childcare. Kindergarten teachers remarked that childcare would be stressful for both children and parents. In Kindergarten, children were dropped off and picked up
by their parents anytime between the hours of 7:30 a.m. and 5:30 p.m. each day. While in first grade, children would need before and after school care since school hours were from 9:00 a.m. to 2:30 p.m., and parents worked before and after school hours. Arrangements for transportation to before-school care, school, and after-school care and back home would need to be coordinated. Pick up and drop off schedules would be difficult at best. Remembering these schedules and everything needed for before-school, school, and after-school care would be stressful for both parents and children. Additionally, siblings who had been together at the preschool all their lives would now be separated not only by the first grade classrooms, but also by many miles, even by towns since some younger siblings would be at CCT, while older siblings would be in public schools miles away. Siblings would no longer be able to visit one another during the day at school.

Like sending teachers, the three receiving first grade teachers from the participating elementary school interviewed, identified similar concerns for parents as challenges related to the school bus, cafeteria, and playground. Both sending and receiving teachers stated that parents would worry about the size, layout and adult supervision when children gathered in these areas. Children would worry about the location and process of navigating these areas. Receiving teacher, Jill added that children coming from another place have more adjustments to make because they are coming to an unfamiliar building and they wouldn't know the librarian, gym, music, or art teachers or their expectations.
She added that many parents are very nervous about putting their child in public school because, "It's a big leap."

Receiving teachers' concerns for study children were related to social adjustment, managing the emotional reactions and behavior of children, and conformity to classroom rules and routines. Jill and Barb noted that children's social adjustment to the new surroundings, rules and routines that accompanied the new environment, teachers, and peers would be difficult for some children during the transition. Jackie noted that some children may struggle with the shift from child initiated activities to a more traditional teacher directed curriculum.

Additionally, though requests for discussions concerning assessment practices had not been made, receiving teachers expressed concerns about the assessment practices of sending teachers. While acknowledging that sending teachers had forwarded student records (Appendix I), Jackie expressed concerns about her perceived lack of formal assessments administered to the children in kindergarten. However, TCC faculty remarked that a letter was sent to all area principals requesting information about the expectations and assessments for entering first graders. First grade teacher Jackie, had this to say about the students' records:

Academically and socially, it tends to be a very positive, individual based document that documents the kind of individual strengths of the child but does not give us a lot of information about difficulties. We often get children in from the UNH preschool as well as kindergarten with no documentation at all about significant difficulties. That might be academic
they might be learning habits, they might be learning disabilities, behavioral issues. They are not documented in a way that would be useful to us. And we plan our classrooms in this heterogeneous way, and what we would consider special needs and academic difficulties balanced. And if we don't get that information from them we can't plug them in that heterogeneous mix. What can end up if we get three or four, and there are issues that weren't really recorded we don't get an indication of less severe but significant issues. And parents don't. When I talk with parents about issues of children coming from that setting, it is the first time they heard about it. And I can't believe that they didn't show up, because often they are significant. And I have a feeling we are dealing with one right now. I think there's a lot of knowledge out there about a lot of different conditions and issues that are not addressed.

The other thing is academically in kindergarten here we have a very formal assessment procedure in kindergarten, and if children are not on grade level for kindergarten and those skills we have a huge amount of one-on-one support which is put in place to make sure they are on grade level, or coming into first grade with those skills. And that's not available in that setting. When they come in we don't have a good academic assessment.

I don't think they assess the specific skills. I don't know for sure those children are gaining those skills. I don't get that impression because I don't get any academic assessments; it's kind of embedded in an
anecdotal way. It's just a lack of information also. You know, kindergarten is a critical time to be compensating for those things that children are not making the usual progress through. It is kind of late in first grade if they have an opportunity to pick that up early (September 2004).

4.7 Comparison of Teachers and Parents Concerns

Overall, the concerns expressed for children by sending teachers, receiving teachers, and parents were different (Table 4.7-1). Sending teachers were interviewed in the spring, prior to the children in this study leaving their classroom. Receiving teachers were interviewed in the early fall, after receiving the children in their classrooms, but early in the transition process. Parents were interviewed in both spring and fall.

Sending teachers' concerns focused on children's social and emotional health. Difficulty in separating from friends and siblings, adjusting to new relationships with other children and with their teacher were concerns of sending teachers. Particularly difficult would be the adjustment to a new teacher, learning environment and new rules, routines and expectations.

Sending teachers' social-emotional concerns for children were similar to the concerns expressed by parents for their own children (Table 4.7-1). Sending teachers were also concerned that parents would experience anxiety adjusting to a larger, potentially less supervised environment. Especially difficult would be the changes in communication, reduced opportunities for involvement in their child's classroom and a change in child care provider (Table 4.7-1).
Receiving teachers concerns for study children were related to social adjustment, managing the emotional reactions and behavior of children, and conformity to classroom rules and routines (Table 4.7-1). Receiving teachers had more academic concerns for study children than did sending teachers. Their concerns included readiness skills, proficiency in reading, writing, spelling, and mathematics, and the lack of formal assessments.

Both sending and receiving teachers predicted that parents would have concerns related to the size and structure of the school. Especially difficult for parents would be supervision concerns related to the playground. Parents expressed these same concerns (Table 4.7-1).
**TABLE 4.7-1 TRANSITION CONCERNS OF TEACHERS AND PARENTS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element</th>
<th>Concerns</th>
<th>Sending Teachers</th>
<th>Receiving Teachers</th>
<th>Parents</th>
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5.0 FINDINGS: TEACHER AND PARENT TRANSITION PRACTICES

Two sending teachers, three receiving teachers, and all ten sets of parents were interviewed about the transition practices they employed for the children in this study. Sending teacher practices are identified in section 5.1, receiving teacher practices in section 5.2, and parent practices in section 5.3. Teacher practices are summarized in Table 5.2-1. Parent practices are summarized in Table 5.3-1.

5.1 Sending Teachers

Two sending teachers were interviewed to determine what practices they use in their kindergarten classroom during the spring of the year when children are finishing kindergarten and preparing for entry into first grade in the fall. The parents of children enrolled at TCC are provided with a Welcome Packet (The Child Center [TCC], 2004) prior to entry into the program. The Welcome Packet includes the kindergarten philosophy, framework, and intentions of the TCC and its staff. It outlines the many modes of communication the TCC employs to establish an ongoing and open dialogue with parents. These methods include parents night, home visits, daily notes, weekly bulletins, parent conferences, and written development profiles. Much of the text below stems from the documents that the TCC provides to parents of children attending their programs. Substantial portions of the actual TCC documents are included below (TCC, 2004).
Prior to the beginning of kindergarten the TCC staff contact parents and invite them to schedule a time when one of the kindergarten teachers can visit with them and their child in their home. The purpose of the visit is to connect the kindergarten teacher with the family of the child, within the family’s home to acquaint the child, parent, and teacher with one another. Typically the visit is approximately 30 to 45 minutes in length. TCC has found these visits to have a tremendous positive effect in smoothing children’s transition into kindergarten and hopes that all families will take advantage of them. If the family is planning a vacation during the month prior to school, the TCC will make alternative plans with the family to schedule this visit.

One of the first methods of communication is Parents’ Night. Parent nights happen frequently, and the first one is held during the week prior to the beginning of kindergarten. Additional parent nights are held throughout the year beginning with an Open House held in early September. Each parent night may have a designated topic of discussion with a guest speaker, or may simply be a time for parents, teachers, and staff to come together to discuss ideas, questions or concerns. The TCC welcomes parent suggestions (TCC, 2004). Nearing the end of the kindergarten year, in mid May, teachers hold a special parent night which focuses on the transition to public school. It is a time when parents can come together to discuss concerns related to their child’s upcoming transition to first grade in a public school setting. It is designed to alleviate parent’s concerns and to support the transition to public school.

Nancy outlined some of the aspects of parents’ night:
We host a parent night for families that have a child transitioning into first grade. We invite past families, too. We share stories, advice, and ask questions. We encourage parents to share developmental concerns with the new teachers (June, 2004).

To ease the transition for children, kindergarten teachers invite both first grade principals to come to their classroom to talk to children very informally about the differences between TCC and public school, and kindergarten and first grade. This practice is designed to introduce children to the concept of a principal and to alleviate fears about scary principal practices. TCC teachers also invite several alumni children from the previous years to visit the kindergarten children in their classroom. Alumni children openly discuss first grade practices, structures, and procedures they have experienced. Additionally, they answer kindergarten children's questions and concerns.

TCC teachers write Developmental Profiles for each child. Profiles are shared with parents twice during each year; in January and in June. These documents include a written narrative, an Individual Learning Profile, work samples from children's portfolios, and child interviews. They are intended to provide parents with an overview of their child's progress, growth and development across all areas as observed and documented during their child's year in kindergarten. The sending teachers at TCC work closely with the Pine Plains Central School District special education teachers to identify, assess, and develop Individual Education Programs (IEPs) for children requiring services. In addition to the Developmental Profiles, two parent conferences are held during
the year, one in November, the second in April. Additional parent conferences
may be held at any time and parents are encouraged to request a conference
whenever they feel it necessary. Teachers exercise the same option. These
conferences are committed to sharing information regarding a child's growth,
development, and overall experience in kindergarten, and to establish additional
goals for children during the remainder of the school year.

During the April parent-teacher conference, teachers inform parents about
transition practices and encourage parents to take an active role in preparing
their child for the transition to public school. When interviewed about the content
of these transition discussions, Nancy summarized the discussion:

At parent conferences we talk about how ready children are socially and
academically for first grade. We encourage parents to write a letter to
school and advocate for their children, and to take that first step and
contact the new school and teacher (June, 2004).

When asked what practices the school has in place to address parents
and children's concerns facilitating the transition to first grade, Sue replied,

Part of it is helping children be more independent, relate as a group.
Parent night. Children from first grade meet with kindergarten kids in a
question and answer format session from the children's perspective. One
principal comes to visit children. We support and encourage families to
visit first grades. We encourage families to take their child's
developmental and narrative records to share with the teacher. Write
letters for parents when requested discussing the child's strengths. If
requested, a kindergarten teacher will meet with first grade teacher to
discuss a specific child (June, 2004).

The TCC uses a number of communication methods to meet each family's
needs and to establish an ongoing, open dialogue with parents. Teachers send
home weekly bulletins regarding children's experiences in kindergarten to keep
parents abreast of curricular developments in the classroom. These newsletters
review what has been happening and what is expected to come next, as well as
any important announcements or special events. In addition to weekly bulletins,
the TCC sends parents Special Bulletins whenever necessary. To assist with
communication, the TCC posts daily messages on a grease board. There is a
notebook for parents to write any information that they want to communicate to
TCC staff. This is important because staff members may be busy at drop-off and
not always be available to talk. The notebook ensures that staff receive all
important messages from parents. In addition, folders of information for parents
are placed in the same location to avoid lost notes or letters. This practice
prevents notes getting lost among a child's belongings or lost in his or her cubby.

5.2 Receiving Teachers

Three receiving teachers were interviewed to determine what practices
they use in their first grade classrooms during the spring and summer of the year
when children are finishing kindergarten and preparing for entry into first grade in
the fall. Teachers stated that they hold an open house, meet with parents, send
information home, communicate with children, and hold parent conferences.
When asked what teachers do to ease the transition for children and their parents, the first grade teachers replied that they have an open house before school begins so families and children can come together in the classroom before the school year begins. Receiving teachers noted that some parents are familiar with the first grade setting since their child attended kindergarten in the same school. However, other parents and children, including all those in this study, attended a different kindergarten and were not familiar with the first grade setting.

A transition practice used with new families moving to the district is to conduct a meeting between the teachers, the school principal and the parents. When asked what the school does as a community to ease the transition for children and parents coming from other places, first grade teachers said:

Jill: Whenever a new family comes into the school they meet with the principal. He will give them a tour of the school and sit down and talk with them about the school. They'll get a copy of the school handbook. Usually once the child has been placed in a classroom, the principal will bring the family and teacher and the child together so they get to see the classroom and meet with the teacher individually (September 2004).

Jackie: We invite the children in for a half-hour one-on-one interview and just getting to know you period several days before school starts. We do that for all the children. I think that's
particularly useful for the children who are coming from other settings because they actually do a tour of the school. We acquaint them with all the kind of housekeeping things that may be different from the things they're used to. Then we review those all on the parent night. Curriculum night is parents only. Then we have an open house when children can bring parents back to the classroom (September 2004).

Mountain View provides a packet of information for families with children entering their first grade program. These materials outline general rules of behavior and conduct for children, discuss the core values expected of students, and outline the parent teacher conference schedule, and when written assessments and updates are sent home during the school year. Mountain View materials for parents also note that the Elementary School publishes a newsletter, which is produced by the Parent Teacher Organization. The newsletter carries information of interest to parents and to the community at large, and includes a calendar of school related events, topics of interest for parents, and a monthly article by the principal about the school community or of general interest about education.

First grade teachers hold a special session for parents to discuss curriculum content and their expectations. Jackie explained curriculum night as:

Parents' night is a couple of weeks into the year so parents kind of have a sense of what questions they might want to ask and what things are confusing them or bothering them. And that night there's a presentation
about the curriculum, particularly about how reading is taught so that parents are on the same page, basically doing the same things with the children (September 2004).

Receiving teachers stated that parent teacher conferences are used to communicate with parents. The initial parent conferences are held in November, with written progress reports in January and June, with a less formal update sent home in April. Parent teacher conferences may also be arranged as requested by either parents or teachers.

Although receiving teachers remarked that a formal school transition policy didn't exist, they stated that it was the classroom teachers' responsibility to ease the transition for new children and their families entering first grade. Teachers stated they meet with incoming families, answer questions and send packets of information to families. Barb explained their practices:

Unless my family life keeps me from doing it, as the kids come in for about a half hour the week before school starts I talk to the parents a little bit about our schedule, what that means for kid's fatigue level, and supplies. I work with the children a few minutes and answer any questions parents have immediately. There's a lot of information that goes home. I would encourage them to listen to their kids.

There are certain procedures set up at the very first few days of school so that kids feel physically comfortable coming in. There are a lot of adults to help them. I think, that there are staff that try to monitor to make sure things are going well for the kids. I think we try to give kids
some time to adjust, to learn the differences in what school is like, listening to kids, letting them know what behaviors they’re doing are good, what behaviors need to be changed at this point (September 2004).

Jackie explained her role in easing the transition for children:

We give a tour of the school and tour of the classroom. And that first day we made children introduce themselves as they went to do specials. We made sure they understood that. Showed them where the bathrooms were. Made sure they had someone at recess (September 2004).
### TABLE 5.2-1 TRANSITION PRACTICES OF TEACHERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sending Teachers</th>
<th>Receiving Teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transition Practices Primarily for Parents</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hold individual parent conferences</td>
<td>Hold open house where parents meet teacher and principal, tour school and classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invite first grade principal to school</td>
<td>Meet with parents to explain routine, discuss supplies, and expectations for reading, writing and math</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hold ‘Parents’ Night’</td>
<td>Hold ‘Curriculum Night’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invite alumni from first or second grade to talk with children</td>
<td>Provide parents with a copy of the school handbook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Invite parents who have experienced transition to talk to parents who have not experienced transition</td>
<td>Teachers prepare their own packets to send home in lieu of formal transition policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequent communication</td>
<td>Send information packets home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourage parents to write letters to new school principal</td>
<td>Encourage parents to listen to their children</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Transition Practices Primarily for Children</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Help children be independent</td>
<td>Encourage first graders to help new students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write reference letters for children at parents’ request</td>
<td>Explain appropriate behavior</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet with first grade teachers at parents’ request</td>
<td>Listen to children</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
5.3 Parents

During the pre-transition interviews, parents spoke of the importance of preparing their child for the transition to public school first grade classrooms. Every parent stated that they intended to tour the school, look at the classrooms, visit the playground, and try to meet with their child's teacher prior to the beginning of the school year. Each parent stressed the importance of talking to their child about the transition. They stated that a key element in preparing their child for first grade would be in discussing the expectations and differences between the two educational settings.

The parents of two children wrote letters to the receiving school principal describing their child's strengths, weaknesses, and learning style to ensure a good teacher-child match. The parents of two other children noted that their child would be attending a summer camp program at one of the new public schools, although not necessarily the school where they would be attending first grade. They expressed the idea that this practice would help ensure a smoother transition to public school in the fall, regardless of which school they would be attending as a first grader.

All parents stated that they had intended to attend their child's classroom open house in the fall of the year. It is interesting to note, that for second order children who have older siblings in the same public school, parents still stressed the importance of visiting the school and their child's new classroom. They stated that even though the transitioning child was familiar with the new school and had been exposed to it numerous times previously through attendance at
school events and community functions of older siblings, it was still important for them to attend the open house with their transitioning child.
TABLE 5.3-1 TRANSITION PRACTICES OF PARENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent Transition Practices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tour school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet with teacher(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Visit playground with child</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicate with their child and discuss concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write letter to principal describing child’s strengths,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>weaknesses and learning style</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enroll child in summer program in public school</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attend open house with child</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.0 FINDINGS: TRANSITION EXPERIENCES

Upon entry to first grade, children, their parents, and teachers were interviewed at the end of September through December regarding children’s transition from kindergarten to first grade. Semi-structured interview questions were used (Appendix E) to examine their transition experiences.

6.1 Children’s Experiences in First Grade

All children developed affective impressions and were able to express their opinions and transition experiences in some detail. When interviewed about first grade all children stated that they liked music, art, library, and physical education classes. All children stated that they were excited about first grade. Children most often commented that in addition to the “special classes,” they enjoyed “choice or free time.” During this time children often chose to draw or engage in some form of artwork, although some children commented on the limited selection of art materials. Materials at children’s disposal consisted of crayons, pencils, and construction paper. Paint, collage materials, chalk, and other art media were not available to children when they had been in kindergarten. Children were limited by the amount of time given to complete art projects. As Julia noted, “we don’t get very much time for art (September, 2004).”

Children identified the increase in the number of people, both adults and children, and the number of rules as the most uncomfortable aspect of the first
week of school. This included the noise level in the cafeteria and on the playground. When asked what the first week of school was like, Beth said, “Lots of people I didn’t know (October, 2004).” Nicole’s reply to this same question was, “I was like, who are all these guys (October, 2004)? On the first day when everyone came to school.” Mary identified, “The hardest thing about going to first grade was the first day. I was really nervous because I didn’t know anybody, except for Tabatha. And I was new to the school (October, 2004).”

In first grade children identified favorite activities as special curriculum classes (art, gym, library, music, and recess) when asked what they liked best. Recess was cited as the number one activity, followed by art. William noted that he “loved the freedom to walk the halls, and go to the Nurse’s office (September 2004).” His response reflects those of the other children:

William: Recess is everybody’s substantial favorite.
Researcher: What about your favorite?
William: Recess and Art.
Researcher: Why Art?
William: Because I love the projects.

Children identified math (Beth, Evan, Mary, and Tara), reading (Nicole, Tabatha, and William), writing (Sally, Julia), and nature (Gretchen) as their favorite academic subjects. Math was children’s most liked subject. Although Julia and Sally stated that they liked writing stories, they mentioned that they get to “illustrate” and draw, indicating that was the reason for stating writing as the best liked subject. Gretchen was the only child that mentioned science and
nature as a favorite. When asked about what children liked in relation to first grade academics, children expressed ambivalence about reading and writing. Tabatha stated that she liked reading workshop, but that you had to write, and it was hard to sound out the words. Julia remarked that she liked reading, but added that both “reading and writing was kind of easy, and kind of hard.” Below is the transcript of our discussion about first grade academics.

Researcher: Do you like reading?

Julia: Kind of.

Researcher: Is it hard or easy?

Julia: It’s kind of hard, kind of easy.

Researcher: What’s the easy part about reading?

Julia: If you can’t read a word you can raise your hand and the teacher will come and tell you the word.

Researcher: What’s the hard part about reading?

Julia: If you don’t want them to come and you want to figure it out yourself it takes a really long time. Like sounding the word out if you don’t want the teacher to come.

Researcher: Is the writing hard?

Julia: Not really. You have to sound the word out. If you’re right you don’t have to start over, or if it’s really close (September, 2004).

Sally expressed that she liked reading and writing workshop, “We get to make and write books. But I can’t do all of my drawings that I like to do in my
stories (September 2004).” When I interviewed Gretchen about reading, she replied:

  Researcher: Do you like to read?
  Gretchen: Yes.
  Researcher: Is it easy or hard for you?
  Gretchen: It’s easy. Well it’s not easy. When you starting reading it’s hard because I think I’m going to have some trouble (September 2004).

William noted that he loved writing because it is “interesting and quite fun.” I asked him if writing was hard for him. William replied it wasn’t hard for him, but it was for the other children. This is a transcript of our conversation:

  Researcher: What are you learning about in first grade?
  William: Learning how to write, which is interesting and quite fun.
  Researcher: Is it hard?
  William: Not really for me. But it’s hard for the other kids (September 2004).

Although learning how to write was not hard for William, he often complained to his parents, teacher, and to me about stomach aches and tiredness during the day. Below is a transcript of our conversation.

  Researcher: Tell me what you like about first grade.
  William: I sort of like to go to the nurse’s office.
  Researcher: Why?
William: It's like the place I go most besides the classroom, cuz [sic] basically I have a lot of these odd feelings and I've gone there a couple of times.

Researcher: What kind of odd feelings?

William: My stomach hurts unexpectedly.

Researcher: When does it happen?

William: They only happen every once in a while, they are so unexpected they can even come after lunch, no I mean after snack (September 2004).

When asked what they didn't like about first grade, children identified procedures such as navigating the lunch line and remembering rules; academics, including reading, writing, and worksheets; and issues concerning bullies. William reported being bullied on the bus and playground as those things that he disliked about first grade.

When asked about the rules in first grade all children remarked that there were too many and when asked to recall them, many children remarked, “I forget them, there's so many (October, 2004).” Julia was able to remember a few rules, “you can't run in the hall, you have to raise your hand and you can't shout out (October, 2004).” Sally remarked, “In first grade you have a lot of rules, more than you do in kindergarten and preschool (September, 2004).”

Researcher: Tell me about the rules in first grade.

Sally: There's too many!

Researcher: What are some of those rules?
Sally: One rule is no karate in school, and the other rule is no choking. And the other rule is you have to ask before you go to the bathroom, (pause) and that’s kind of weird.

Researcher: Why is that weird?

Sally: Because it’s weird when you have to go to the bathroom because we don’t have a bathroom in our room. So we have to use the bathroom outside.

Researcher: Did you have to ask to use the bathroom in kindergarten?

Sally: No (September, 2004).

Beth remarked that there were a lot of rules in first grade. When asked to state some of them she replied, “You have to ask before you go to the bathroom. You can’t interrupt someone if they are talking, and you have to raise your hand to say something (October, 2004).” When I asked her which rules were hardest for her, she replied, “to raise my hand.” I asked her what happens when someone breaks a rule and she replied:

Beth: You get your name on the board.

Researcher: What happens after that?

Beth: If you keep doing it you get a check, and if you get two checks you lose part of your morning recess.

Researcher: Have you ever broken a rule?

Beth: Once.

Researcher: What rule did you break?

Beth: You can’t sit in that chair at a certain time.
Researcher: Why couldn't you sit in the chair?
Beth: Because it was rest time and you have to lie on the floor (October, 2004).

When I asked Nicole about rules in first grade she said:

Nicole: No smoking and no chewing gum. A golden rule is treat others like you want to be treated. No climbing up the slides.

Researcher: What about in the classroom?
Nicole: In the classroom, no running, no screaming, no talking out.

Researcher: Do you have to raise your hand before you talk?
Nicole: Yes.

Researcher: Do you have to ask to go to the bathroom?
Nicole: No, you can just go, and if your teacher says, 'Wait, Nicole, where are you going?' I say, 'To the bathroom.' She says, 'Wait a second.'

Researcher: She says, 'Wait a second?'
Nicole: Yeah, and I'm like, 'I have to go really bad' (distressed voice) (October, 2004).

Gretchen identified the following as rules in her first grade classroom, “No hitting, and, don’t touch anything. And always raise your hand before talking (September, 2004).” William focused on the rules on the playground when asked about rules in first grade:

Researcher: Tell me about the rules in first grade.
William: No picking up rocks on the playground, no picking up sticks on the playground, no kicking up dust on the playground, and inside the classroom no loud voices. Actually, extremely quiet voices.

Researcher: Do you have to raise your hand?

William: Yeah.

Researcher: Is it different than kindergarten?

William: Well, you did have to raise your hand in kindergarten, but you could pick up rocks, and kick up dust, and take sticks.

Researcher: What about in the classroom? Which rules are the hardest for you in the classroom?

William: Being quiet, of course, because I come from a very loud family. And the bus driver also wants you to be quiet. And I'm very fidgety so my teacher gives me a fidget ball (October, 2004).

Many children did not purchase hot lunch, because it meant navigating the lunch line. Children said that they didn't like the food, although they stated that they had never tasted it.

Researcher: Where do you eat lunch?

Beth: In the cafeteria.

Researcher: Do you buy hot lunch?

Beth: No, but you can.

Researcher: How come you don't?
Beth: I don’t like the things at school.

Researcher: Is it good food or yucky?

Beth: I don’t know, I never tasted it. But I know I don’t like it (October, 2004).

Another student elaborated on the process of how challenging navigating the lunch line could be for her.

Nicole: Something that’s really different about it is that we go to the cafeteria.

Researcher: Do you like cafeteria?

Nicole: Yes.

Researcher: Do you get hot lunch?

Nicole: Sometimes.

Researcher: Is it easy to go through the line?

Nicole: No, it’s not really easy. You have to say your name; the first person has to say what class you are in. Once I ordered pizza toast, instead I got a bagel. It was hard, I couldn’t tell. I was like, ‘What is this (October, 2004)?

Additionally, lunch was characterized as a loud and confusing time of day. Tabatha said, “It’s a lot of people yelling (September, 2004).”

Children identified spelling as a difficult subject. Many remarked that they had spelling for homework and had to study for spelling tests (Nicole). When asked what was the hardest subject in first grade, children replied spelling (Beth, Tabatha, Tara, Evan, Sally, Gretchen, William, and Julia), followed by math
(Julia, Gretchen, and Nicole), and reading (Mary). Gretchen noted first grade was different from kindergarten, "You have to do math and you have to start to read (September, 2004)." Spelling encompassed sounding out words when writing in journals, in addition to studying for spelling tests.

Children were unaccustomed to being confined to sitting at tables for long periods of time, to having seat work, and completing worksheets. Many children voiced strong emotions revealing their dislike; stating that they were boring. William remarked:

Researcher: Do you like the worksheets?
William: Some of them like the really easy ones are boring.
Researcher: Are they really easy for you?
William: Yeah, the harder ones are more interesting (November, 2004).

Other things that children disliked about first grade was the bus ride to and from school. Some children remarked that the bus ride was uncomfortable. When asked about the bus most children stated they liked it. However, Mary reported that it was, "very loud," and Gretchen said, "its just takes a long time and I get bored." William reported being bullied on the bus. This is his story:

Researcher: What do you dislike about first grade?
William: There's this guy on the bus called Tim, who is always in the seat behind me hitting me on the head.
Researcher: Has any thing been done about that?
William: Yep. My mom went on the bus and told him not to hit me.
Researcher: Is there any thing else you don’t like about first grade?

William: I don’t like the bus, because I don’t have all my books on it which I can read.

Researcher: What about your classroom, your teacher and friends at school? Are there other things that you don’t like about first grade?

William: In the cafeteria these whole gangs of people who go around making fun of people.

Researcher: Do they make fun of you?

William: No. But I don’t like to watch them do it (October, 2004).

When asked about additional things that he didn’t like about first grade, William had this to say, “One day these kids pushed me around the playground and pulled on my neck and stepped on my hand and I got a mouth full of dirt.” When I asked if he told anyone he replied, “yeah, but they couldn’t do anything, cuz [sic] they scrambled into the school and disappeared and no one could find them (October, 2004).”

Similarities between kindergarten and first grade identified by children included tables, computers, a bathroom, a classroom library, and a teacher. Children noted that although they had computers, a library, and bathrooms, these items were in separate rooms or locations within first grade. In kindergarten, these items were part of the classroom.

When asked if kindergarten was the same as first grade, children acknowledged few similarities but many physical and curricular differences.
Children classified differences between the two school environments as either physical or curricular. Children noted that the first grade classroom was smaller, didn't contain a bathroom and that a water fountain replaced the sink. The layout of the school was different for children because it contained a separate space and location for gym, music, art, and library. All of the children recognized that the first grade school was bigger. Most often mentioned was the fact that the playground was much bigger. Children also stated that they went to the cafeteria for lunch; they no longer ate lunch together with their teachers in the classroom.

As first graders, all the children referred to the playground as “recess.” Although much larger in first grade, children cited playground as being the same in kindergarten and first grade. Children did mention that they were able to visit the playground several times per day in kindergarten and only once in first grade. They also noted that they spent longer times on it in kindergarten.

Researcher: Do you have a playground?

Nicole: Yes, yes, yes.

Researcher: Is it bigger or smaller?

Nicole: Bigger, way bigger.

Researcher: Do you get to go out every day?

Nicole: Of course, we get to go out two times every day. But in kindergarten we got to go out three times, one in the morning, one in the middle of the day, and one in the afternoon before we went home (Nicole, October, 2004).
In general, children commented on the fact that first grade was more academically focused, especially the areas of reading, writing, spelling, and math. Children stated that first grade was harder than kindergarten because, "you have to do homework," acknowledging the time commitment involved.

Children most often voiced one difference in first grade was that they did not have centers. Most children commented on the fact that there were no blocks or opportunities for dramatic play in first grade. Additionally, children recognized that seatwork and worksheets replaced active hands-on center work and took precedence over all other activities. As Evan said, "You have to finish your work first, then show it to your teacher, then you can play (September, 2004)."

Most children recalled that there was no nap or rest time in first grade. In general children noted that there was a decrease in choice and free time and that the choice options were limited. Children commented that opportunities for the use of blocks, puzzles, dramatic play, creations, or games lacked.

Researcher: Are there things that you do in first grade that you didn't get to do in kindergarten?

Julia: You didn't get to do homework because you were too young. I think that's it. This is what you can't do in first grade but you could do it in kindergarten, nap.

Researcher: Are there other things that you got to do in kindergarten that you can't in first grade, besides naps.
Julia: Dress-up, you can't do. They have more games. We have a kind of short choice time (October, 2004).

In first grade all 10 children knew what the concept of homework meant.

Researcher: In first grade do you get homework?
Tabatha: Yes. I have to read and write.
Researcher: Where do you do your homework?
Tabatha: At home. That's why it's called homework.
Researcher: Do you like it.
Tabatha: Not really (October, 2004).

All children stated that first grade was harder than kindergarten because you get homework and had to read. Homework most commonly stated by children included math, spelling, reading, and writing. Mary elaborated on the types and amount of homework she received in first grade.

Mary: We have homework.
Researcher: How much homework do you have?
Mary: Lots.
Researcher: Every day?
Mary: Yeah, except on the weekends.
Researcher: What do you have for homework?
Mary: Math. You do this number problem sometimes.
Researcher: What else do have for homework?
Mary: We have to do reading and we have a reading log that we write in.
Researcher: How many minutes a day?

Mary: 15.

Researcher: Then you have to write in your log?

Mary: Yup.

Researcher: What about spelling, do you have spelling words every week?

Mary: Yes.

Researcher: Did you have that in kindergarten?

Mary: No (November, 2004).

All ten children stated that they missed their kindergarten teachers, Sue and Nancy, and friends. Eight out of ten children stated that they missed naps. Centers were also a commonly missed activity. Children identified the specific center activities of drawing, creations, and other forms of artwork followed by dramatic play and games as the most missed center activities. Additionally, two children (Tabatha and Evan) stated that they missed home days, the practice of staying home to spend with family. Some children stated that they missed their old school (TCC) (Gretchen and William). Three children stated that they missed “helping hands,” the ability to visit younger siblings in their classrooms during the day. William and Gretchen, especially missed the daily contact with their young siblings and Tara, although not having a younger sibling to visit, missed being able to help out with younger children in the toddler room. When asked what she missed about kindergarten, Mary said:
I miss naps; I miss relaxing. Other things I miss about kindergarten. I
miss my friends because I don't get to see them very often. It's true. I
miss games. In kindergarten we mostly get to draw whenever. But in first
grade we never get to draw. Unless it's in activity or art (November,
2004).

When I asked what it's like to be a first grader, William had this to say:

Researcher: What's it like to be a first grader?
William: Oh, it's good. Do you know, I really miss TCC.
Researcher: What do you miss about it?
William: I miss the old playground. But this one's a little bit bigger, so
you know, a little more freedom.
Researcher: What else do you miss about TCC?
William: The tree house. Especially being leader and being able to
sleep in it.
Researcher: Do you miss naps?
William: Yeah. I'm always sleepy at all the times of the day. I even
fall asleep sometimes, very occasionally, I'll fall asleep on
recess. I wake up at the bell. Since recess is like one hour I
sleep for an hour.
Researcher: Tell me exactly what you miss about the tree house, besides
sleeping in it.
William: Being able to read books in it. And I also miss telling stories. Because then once I got to act them out they would go into my story-telling book.

Researcher: Do you get to do that here?

William: Nope. A lot of books I miss. I don’t get a very pleasant nap; I don’t get to have a nap. (pauses) I miss the small building and being the tallest in the class.

Researcher: Do you miss anything else about the building?

William: I miss having a built in bathroom. I miss being able to visit my sister.

Researcher: That’s hard isn’t it?

William: Yes. She’s in whole different building now. (pauses) And I miss Nancy and Sue (October, 2004).

The concerns expressed by children during their first grade interviews (Figure 6.1-1) were compared with the concerns they expressed about first grade while still in kindergarten (Figure 6.1-2). In first grade, all children expressed concern over friends and friendships, and spoke of difficulty keeping old friends, making new friends, or being bullied by older children. Prior to entering first grade, children had similar fears about their transition and friends in first grade.

Three factors children worried about prior to their transition turned out to be less of a concern once they were actually in first grade. These factors were school size, the number of strangers or people they did not know, and whether or not they would like their first grade teacher. In fact, not a single child complained
about their first grade teacher, although four children expressed concern over their first grade teacher while they were still in kindergarten.

Three factors in first grade were more of a concern than the children had anticipated in pre-transition interviews. Concerns about the difficulty of reading, writing, and homework were expressed by more children in first grade than in kindergarten. In first grade, all the children in this study expressed concern over the amount or difficulty of the homework they were getting from their teacher. Finally, every child expressed concern over the number of rules in first grade. In kindergarten, children were generally aware of first grade rules but not one mentioned it as a pre-transition concern (Figure 6.1-2).
FIGURE 6.1-1 CHILDREN’S TRANSITION CONCERNS

The bar chart illustrates the number of children's concerns in various categories. The concerns are as follows:

- Friends
- Rules/Routine
- Homework
- Academic
- School Size
- Strangers
- Teacher

The chart shows the following number of concerns:

- Friends: 10
- Rules/Routine: 10
- Homework: 10
- Academic: 10
- School Size: 4
- Strangers: 3
- Teacher: 1
FIGURE 6.1-2 CHILDREN'S PRE-TRANSITION AND TRANSITION CONCERNS

![Bar chart showing the number of children concerned about various issues before and during transition.]

- Pre-Transition
- Transition

Number of Children

- Friends
- School Size
- Strangers
- Academic
- Homework
- Teacher
- Rules

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6.2 Parents' Experiences

Examination of the transition concerns expressed by the parents of the ten study children revealed several areas of common concern (Figure 6.2-1). In first grade, all ten sets of parents expressed concern over some aspect of the social-emotional facet of the transition. The concerns expressed by all ten sets of parents included the ability of their child to sustain old friendships while negotiating new relationships with peers (nine of ten children's parents), the fatigue their children were exhibiting or expressing at the end of the school day (seven of ten children's parents), and concerns over their child's self-image (three of ten children's parents) or self-esteem (three of ten children's parents). Summed across all children, one or more of these social-emotional concerns was expressed by all parents.

Friendships and Relationships

Especially emotionally challenging for the majority of children was maintaining old friendships while making and incorporating new peers and relationships in first grade. As stated by one mother:

Sally initially had a difficult time sharing friends. She was upset over the fact that her best friend was placed in a different classroom. During recess this lead to difficulties. She had to see a guidance counselor the first week of school because at recess, her feelings were hurt during a tiff with her best friend (Margaret, 2004).

Another mother remarked the difficulty for her child sustaining old friendships during the first weeks of first grade. Tara's mom explained:
I think making the transition where she has some old friends in her class and some new friends and trying to meld the two groups together, I've noticed she's had a little contention with some friends on the playground. In art class yesterday she had a little bit of a tiff with one of her ex-TCC people about a third party joining them (Jennifer, September 2004).

Despite these difficulties, Tara made an easy transition. Her mother stated that academically, she was doing well and that her "reading had skyrocketed."

Beth was placed in the same classroom as Tara. Her parents stated that she loved school, had good friendships with classmates, and felt very connected to her new school. They remarked:

I think that the transition was pretty easy for her because she had so many friends. I think the thing that really helped her transition was going to camp at her new school in the summer, again with a bunch of people she knew. So going to Camp Kowabunga was really exciting for her, but it gave her experience riding on the bus. So going to first grade didn't really have the same feeling as this is the first time I've ever really walked into the place (Chelsey, 2004).

Stress, Fatigue, and Anxiety

Gretchen's transition was characterized as difficult by her parents. Most notable was the traditional structured work environment, lack of choice, and the evaluative nature of her first grade environment. Gretchen's mother described her as an "intensely stressed child", having behavioral regressions, and self-
esteem issues. When asked how Gretchen was making the transition, her mother replied:

She’s very exhausted when she comes home. Also she’s clinging to me where she wouldn’t have done that before. And hearing what she’s doing in the classroom indicates to me that she stressed. Because she fidgets when she’s stressed.

Basically, I feel that she is a child who is intensely stressed right now. And I have seen real regressions even at home in terms of things that would indicate to me that she is stressed. For example, she has always been quite independent and very sociable and outgoing, but we have gone to several events where she won’t let me leave. She’ll cry, she will stay by my side, clinging to me. Even when she was three she wasn’t a child who would do that. It was only since she started school (Melissa, November 2004).

Self-esteem and Body Image

In addition to exhibiting regressive behaviors, Gretchen’s mother was very concerned about her diminishing self-esteem. She explained:

The other thing is she started saying very negative things about herself regularly. She’ll say things like, ‘I’m stupid. You think I’m stupid.’ She said, ‘I hate how I look. I hate my dark, dark hair.’ This morning I was talking with her about it and there’s this situation where it seems like she’s been teased and I don’t think her teacher’s really are aware of that. But I think that it’s part of the social environment, which is obviously a much
less protected social environment. I asked who said that and she doesn’t know the children. She said they are older children and they are always picking on her. She’s never been like that. She’s always been confident (Melissa, November 2004).

Another parent, mentioned that her child was very concerned with her body image. She explained that this was new, although she had always been conscious of how she dressed and what she wore. According to her mother, since going to first grade Tara had verbalized concerns about whether “she was fat or if her hair was messy.” Her mother remarked, “I don’t know where she gets the fat thing and I was thinking it was tied into the lunch. But it doesn’t seem to be. It’s very weird how concerned she is about her appearance (Jennifer, September 2004).”

Learning Environment

Parents also expressed concern over the new first grade learning environment (seven of ten sets of parents), and for basic school procedures, routines, and rules (six of ten sets of parents), most commonly concerning the lunch line in the cafeteria and the playground. Half of parents (five of ten sets of parents) expressed concern about the teachers’ disposition and instructional approach. Most of these concerns addressed the content of curriculum. Finally, five of ten sets of parents expressed concerns associated with parent-teacher communication and opportunities to participate in their child’s classroom. Only four of ten parents were concerned over curriculum and academics (Figure 6.2-1).
During the first month of school, Julia’s parents watched her struggle with the manner in which conflict resolution was negotiated and teacher directed activities that had no chance for children’s voice or choice. Julia’s mother explained:

I think the transition from TCC to this classroom was, I won’t say difficult, she did fine, but I think there are differences that made it a little bit harder for her. In first grade the activities are more teacher directed, At TCC they were much more likely to let the kids shape how things went. She likes that, she likes to be in control. So that worked for her. Then when things were more teacher directed, she’s okay with it, but I think there was this period where she questioned, “Why can’t I do it this way (Helen, October 2004)?

Structure, Routine, and Rules

Kelli, Tabatha’s mother, described her transition to first grade as smooth. She remarked that initially the routine and schedule of school and lunch was difficult for Tabatha, although she felt she had made the transition. She explained:

She went right off to school the first day of school very happy, very excited, and came home very excited. She wanted to tell us all about it. And then the next day when she woke up she didn’t really want to go to school. And that has happened two or three times since, but not very much, and usually it’s just as she’s waking up. Once she wakes up and has breakfast then she’s fine. This is the first time where I have actually
had to wake her up. Before, we could go to TCC kind of whenever we wanted, we slept late. So I think she’s just getting used to the fact that I actually have to wake her up for school, so like this morning she said, ‘I just want one more hour, Mommy.’ I said, ‘Well, yes, don’t we all (Kelly, September 2004).’

Another child experienced difficulties involving the structure, procedure, or rules related to the cafeteria, playground, and bathroom. Tara’s mother stated that the cafeteria had been a source of confusion for Tara. She explained:

They don’t really make it clear what they are supposed to do. There’s a line for the main course but they don’t tell them about the table for the other things. So she, for a week or two when she did have hot lunch a few times, she didn’t realize there were other places to go and she was a little confused. They have about 20 minutes to eat and between socializing and eating she doesn’t feel she has enough time and she gets stressed out about it and she doesn’t eat her lunch. Other than that I think it’s asking like to go to the bathroom, I think they just don’t know when they are allowed to ask (Jennifer, September 2004).

Beth’s mother commented that in addition to negotiating friendships and peers, was the size and noise associated with the cafeteria during lunch. She summarized Beth’s first day of school by saying:

The first day came and she was so excited. That night she talked a lot about it and was very positive. The next morning when I woke her up she covered her head with her blanket and said she wasn’t going back. She
hated lunch and hated recess right after lunch. When I asked her more about it she said it was too crazy, all the kids in the school are in there. And when all the kids are on the playground it was too crowded and there wasn't anything she could do (Chelsey, October 2004).

Nicole had some knowledge about school procedures and routines through her older brother, but her mother still noted that the daily routine was sometimes confusing and tiring for her. She had already been exposed to the new school through her participation in several school events with her family. When asked how Nicole made the transition, her mother replied:

I think pretty well. I mean, she's been exhausted – she just goes all day long. I think she's been excited for the last three years that she's been watching Nicholas [her older brother] get ready and go to school and go on the bus. And when it finally came you could see some tentativeness, like, 'Uh-oh now it's really here and I have to take on some responsibility.' I think the details and the organization of the day are very tiring for her. Remembering that she has this in her backpack and that has to go to her teacher, this has to go to the after-school program. I think that's very challenging for her (Danielle, October 2004).

The organizational piece for Nicole was identified as the single most challenging aspect of her transition. Nicole had difficulty with remembering schedules, lunch money, and remembering to pass homework and notes to her teacher. Apparently, in her first grade classroom, there was a basket for children
to place homework. It was particularly challenging for Nicole to remember to do this. Her mother explained:

She did come in last Tuesday and say, ‘I forgot to pass in my homework’ and I was like, ‘Oh, you can pass it in tomorrow.’ Not really thinking anything of it. Then the next two days we were asking her, ‘Did you pass it in?’ ‘No I didn’t pass it in.’ ‘Why not?’ ‘I can’t remember.’ ‘I don’t see it there.’ ‘I don’t look.’

So the structure and organization piece is a challenge for Nicole. And I think that it adds to her tiredness at the end of the day. It’s one more thing and she needs lots of reminders about it. So I think the more reminders she gets, the more frustrated she gets about it and realizing that she has forgotten, herself, again (Danielle, October 2004).

Although the organization and structure of first grade was challenging for Nicole, overall, her transition was smooth. Her mother remarked, “She loves to go to school, is very excited about school and has made a good adjustment and transition.”

Academics

Although Julia’s transition was characterized as easy due to prior knowledge and exposure to the new school through an older sibling, Julia had more anxieties about academics, especially reading. Julia’s mother noted:

The only thing that she seemed to be worried about was at open house. During this time they had like a typical day outlined on the chalkboard and it had reading and math and she was like “There’s reading, I don’t know
how to read!” I think it’s because her older brother can read. She sees him reading and she’s like “Uh oh I don’t know how and I’m going to first grade.” I think it was really that kind of a situation (Helen, October 2004). Her mother further remarked that she loves art and music, and adjusted well after the initial “honeymoon period.”

Evan’s parents thought he had made the transition, although they had academic concerns related to his speech and the quality of his English, particularly articulation. This concern was related to reading, writing and spelling. As a second language, English was particularly difficult for Evan. This difficulty often surfaced in his reading, writing and on timed worksheets. Consequently, Evan received speech and language support outside of the classroom by a specialist, in addition to ESL services.

Gretchen’s transition was characterized as difficult both emotionally and academically by her parents. While reflecting on Gretchen’s transition her mother replied:

My feeling is she’s gone off to this whole new huge school by herself, she’s never done that before. She’s getting on the bus by herself. She’s gone through a huge transition which I think she’s adjusting to, separating from her big brother. That’s a big thing because they’ve always been together their whole life. They adore each other; they’re like bonded at the hip. So that was very hard for both of them. So she’s gone through that whole thing and then she doesn’t want to walk down this huge hallway by herself. To me I wouldn’t be making the judgment, ‘Well
she's not independent enough, she's not mature socially (Melissa, November 2004)

Gretchen's parents were especially upset with her teacher's interpretation of her academic performance. The first time she had heard anything about her academics and behavior was at the first teacher-parent conference. She explained:

The attention issues floored me. It wasn't that they said she is at the lower end of math. And I wasn't surprised that they were saying that she's at the lower end of the reading spectrum. I knew that she wasn't very advanced in those areas. I was surprised that they saw this as such a marked problem. And almost talking like she has Attention Deficit Disorder. I don't know what they're speculating on. The reason why that doesn't ring true to me is because in her other school she never had difficulty with fidgeting. I mean she's a highly active child but she's not hyperactive. They saw yawning as an attention problem.

The reason why it surprises me is because it just emerges in the context of a new school where she's very stressed and nervous it seems like to me it's more that likely that she's nervous. That she's fidgeting because she's not comfortable in the environment. It seems rare to me that suddenly in first grade this is the first time there is any talk at all about her attention. Well maybe she's yawning because she's really tired. I feel like it's a fatigue thing and I think it's a deficit thing. I think she really
needs more support with phonics and definitely numbers. Now they just gave her Title I support (Melissa, November 2004).

Gretchen’s mom remarked that the kindergarten teachers did not see inadequate performance. She explained:

They (kindergarten teachers) very much reassured me that she was at level. I knew she wasn’t advanced which didn’t bother me, but I didn’t think it was going to be a real liability.

I’ve actually gone to them and shown them reports—they were shocked and said, ‘We saw no red flags for her.’ Then she got into first grade and suddenly her teacher’s whole report is ‘difficulty with this, that, and the other.’ Her teachers at TCC felt she had all the pre-literacy skills that she needed. But apparently at school it’s not coming together as quickly for her as they want. And you know Sue laughed, her read on this, when I was talking to her, she said her perspective is, ‘I would see her as child who needs to adjust to the environment because she’s so stressed and for them it’s about her making progress in reading and math.’ It seems strange that two months into the year this is all a big thing (Melissa, November 2004).

Gretchen’s mother noted that her “nervous behaviors were the result of underlying transition anxieties and things that she’s not necessarily completely clear on.” Concerning Gretchen’s transition, she remarked:

To a certain extent she’s functioning normally. She’s going to school. It could be worse. I still feel she’s not herself. I’m not sure if it’s the best
program for her. I'm just not clear whether it's a good situation for her or not.” On the one hand when they [first grade teachers] say she has deficits I think well maybe we shouldn't have put her in public school. But on the other hand, I felt like from our perspective she was in an environment at TCC where she was completely immersed in learning. So there's the one side that I say maybe that was a false kind of assurance, but she seemed so happy and so creative and so engaged and we never saw any problems with her. On the other hand I wish she could have stayed at TCC or stayed in the same kind of environment. It's very confusing, to think about what would be the best thing. She has to adjust at some level if she's going to stay in public school, but at the same time I don't want to kill her spirit (Melissa, November 2004).

Regarding ambivalence about the academics and learning environment of first grade, another parent voiced dismay about the excessive use of worksheets and lack of teacher flexibility. William's mother explained:

He really dislikes the worksheets, the math worksheets particularly. He says, 'I'm so bored, Mommy. The worksheets are so easy.' The math worksheets he finds incredibly dull. He doesn't mind the language arts worksheets because they have a drawing component. He quickly works with these, which are very, very easy for him, that he can illustrate the words that he's put down. So he has no real complaint about that, but he finds the math worksheets extremely dull. Really I think the problem is
with sitting there doing worksheets, below his intellectual level (Nancy, November 2004).

William was perceived by his first grade teacher as having a fidgeting problem and lacked the ability to concentrate in certain academic areas, particularly mathematics. His mother, a developmental psychologist, explained:

She [the teacher] thought that this was a sensory integration dysfunction that was causing him to be problematic in her class, rather than a discipline problem. She sees it as an issue of him wriggling and fidgeting and having a lack of concentration. She doesn't seem to see it as an issue of his being bored. So the onus is placed on the child though it's medicalized so he isn't morally judged. He is perceived as having a sort of medical, neurological issue that makes it difficult. But none of the responsibility is taken by the teacher or the curriculum; you know it's not their fault.

And this is one of the reasons why we [parents] don’t really see him as having a ‘dysfunction.’ But we don’t want her to read him as a discipline problem so in some case this disease, whatever, neurological problem becomes a kind of middle ground where the child’s behavior can be explained. The parents see it as if he’s bored because he’s smart and the work is way below him. The teacher sees it as he’s a pain and a problem. But then the medicalization becomes sort of a neutral value freeway of discussing the problem without actually addressing one or the other. Whether a child ought to be trying harder to behave or whether he
ought to be getting harder work. So it's both a cop-out but also a way of deflecting from him responsibility (Nancy, November 2004).

His parents saw this as a problem with not being challenged in first grade since William often complained about being bored at school. His mother stated, "Academics are a real problem." She further clarified the issue:

I think if he was in second grade he would be doing fine with the second grade work. And in language arts I think he could easily be doing third or fourth grade work. None of this has been sort of identified as any kind of a gifted issue. I wish William could go for third grade reading, for instance. I wish there was some sort of flexibility on that kind of thing. For William, who can already read well, he’s not getting social studies or science or all these other fields that would be open to a child with his reading ability. He gets that at home. But we have very much felt frustrated because I feel like any learning that goes on is going to have to take place at home (Nancy, November 2004).

William’s parents sought to get their own pediatricians recommendations about his teacher’s concerns about sensory dysfunction disorder. She reflected on the situation:

Now we’ve got to really think about exactly what to do. In some ways I think we’re going to have to wait to talk to the doctor. I’m pretty sure we’ve made some decisions. We’re not going to send him to a private OT. That seems sort of ridiculous. I mean he can ride a bike, he can bounce, he can climb. Physically he doesn’t have the classic issues.
When she gave us the book ‘The Out of Sync Child’ our kid is not out of sync. Maybe slightly out of sync with his grade. I think if he was put in a higher grade this wouldn’t be an issue.

So this is all about some sort of gross motor thing that she’s perceiving. At home he never spills his milk or anything like that. We’re not seeing any signs of unusual clumsiness or any thing like that. Nobody else has ever suggested these things. So we’re not going to hire an OT. But what we will probably allow them to treat this like an OT issue if they like because they let William have his own desk, they let him chew gum, they let him do pushups during math.

What we’re really disturbed about was she actually showed us a weighted vest he could wear so it would help him not fiddle around. And the idea that she would go to a weighted vest before a more challenging worksheet - this just flabbergasted us. So we feel like she’s using kind of OT kind of methods of physical outlets for him to address what is essentially being intellectually under-challenged.

But I do think that at this point academically he’s not going anywhere. This has manifested itself, I think, in his various behavior issues. I think William has fallen through the cracks. Obviously the first grade level work is too easy for him. There have been no enrichment possibilities offered for William or anything. So he’s just stuck there kind of labeled as a sensory integration dysfunction issue, whereas I think a lot of it is really lack of intellectual stimulation (Nancy, November 2004).
Despite these difficulties, William's mother stated that he loved the special classes, especially art, music, and library; the free choice time, and getting classroom jobs such as running errands for the teacher. He also loved getting to choose hot lunch and books to read during novel time.

**Birth Order**

The transition experiences and concerns of parents of only children or first born children were different from parents with second born children (Figure 6.2-2). Parents of first born children, experiencing their first kindergarten to first grade transition, were much more concerned about teacher disposition and instructional approach, and about parent-teacher communication and opportunities for parent involvement in the classroom, than were parents of second-born children (Figure 6.2-2).

There were fewer concerns for second order children about riding the bus because older siblings provided a supervisory role of younger siblings. When asked if there were any bus concerns, Julia's mother noted that "she's fine with the bus, her brother rides it with her and walks her to her classroom."

Mary was also a second born child with a brother one year older. As Mary's mother explained, "Her brother rides the bus with her everyday and looks for out for her. If there was a problem one of them would let me know."

Nicole's mother commented on the fact that Nicole's older brother, Nicholas, had a lot of conversations about first grade with Nicole. In particular the bus and rules were most often the focus of discussion. Nicole's mother explained:
We had a lot of conversations and actually I have to say her brother was more helpful. In July, Nicole started talking about things and Nicholas was like "You can ask me anything. Just ask me anything, I'll tell you, I'll tell you what it's like." And she did, she was worried about the bus. She said I hope I don't get in trouble on the bus. And Nicholas just told her the way that the bus driver was, she's strict but she's really nice.

And again, the nice thing about having the same teacher was that Nicholas had a lot of information. She would say things sometimes, something like "I think Mrs. Swan will XYZ" and Nicholas would say yes or no, "She's not going to do that, or when I was there this is how it was." So I think throughout the summer she had a lot of opportunity to bounce things off of us as well as Nicholas. And again, having it come from Nicholas it was almost like it coming from a peer. Much more meaningful than if we had said it (Danielle, October 2004).

Because Nicole had an older sibling, her parents were more comfortable with the transition process. They were already on a first name basis with the first grade teacher and had requested the same teacher because of the positive experience of their older child.

When asked to describe her child's teacher, Nicole's mother said:

My son had her for two years. So we're very familiar with her and actually requested that Nicole be in her classroom. I feel like she's very organized, very thoughtful teacher. The environment in her room is very
well thought out, each area of the room has its clear purpose and it’s multi-disciplinary at the same time (Danielle, October 2004).

Having previous contact and knowledge of a teacher through an older sibling made communication much easier and more effective for parents. When asked about the communication with school, Julia’s mother said:

Communication’s good. I may be a little bit atypical because I have a kid with special needs. So I’m actually pretty plugged in to all the resource people too. So I’m actually there for him for IP [individual program] meetings and all that. And I already knew Julia’s teacher, Jill, from before. So, I feel the potential for communication is very good there. I like the school. There’s weekly, and I think all the classrooms do this, a weekly newsletter. And I feel if I have an issue and I want to talk to someone about it I just have to make a phone call and I would get a phone call back (Helen, October 2004).

Julia’s mother described Julia’s transition experience as easier than other children because her brother had been in the same first grade classroom the previous year. Since the family had already met the teacher, attended several classroom and school wide functions, and been exposed to the structure and procedures of public school, the transition was characterized as easy.

We were already part of the first grade experience. I think that if she hadn’t had the experience with her brother in the school that it would have been a harder transition (Helen, October 2004).
Parent’s expressed pre-transition concerns over the procedures, routines, and size of their child’s first grade school, as well as concerns about the potential disposition and communication of their child’s new first grade teacher. Once their child was actually in first grade, parents still expressed these concerns over the procedure and routine of the new school, and about teacher disposition and communication (Figure 6.2-3). However, no parents expressed concern over the size of the school once involved in the transition.

In addition, parents expressed new and heightened concerns for the social-emotional and learning environment aspects of the first grade environment once their child was in first grade. All ten sets of parents expressed concern over some aspect of the social-emotional atmosphere of first grade. Half of parents also expressed concerns over the instructional approach in the new classroom and about opportunities for parent involvement in the first grade classroom (Figure 6.2-3). These concerns were not anticipated by parents of the study children during pre-transition interviews.
FIGURE 6.2-2 PARENTS' TRANSITION CONCERNS BY CHILD'S BIRTH ORDER

- Social Adjustment
- Learning Environment
- Rules/Routine
- Teacher
- Instructional Approach
- Communication
- Parent Involvement
- Academic

Number of Parents

First born • Second born
FIGURE 6.2-3 PARENTS' PRE-TRANSITION AND TRANSITION CONCERNS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Concern</th>
<th>Pre-transition</th>
<th>Transition</th>
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<tr>
<td>Rules/Routine</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9</td>
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<tr>
<td>School Size</td>
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<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>Instructional Approach</td>
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<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent Involvement</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Adjustment</td>
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Number of Parents
6.3 Receiving Teachers’ Experiences

Three first-grade teachers were interviewed about children’s transition experiences and concerns they had for study participants (Appendix E). These three first grade teachers received five of the 10 study children. Three other first grade teachers at a second school declined to participate in this study.

Teachers’ transition experiences and concerns focused on social, academic, and behavioral issues. Social and behavioral concerns were expressed more often than academic concerns. Social concerns involved peers, friendships, and conflict resolution. Behavioral concerns included issues of challenging directions, requiring high levels of support, controlling tempers, learning to take turns, and learning not to disturb other children in the classroom. Behavioral concerns also included issues of individual attention, or failure to pay attention, fidgeting, and ability to sit quietly during class. These latter concerns tied into academic concerns regarding grade level and competency.

Teachers expressed their concerns for study children by describing the performance of individual children in their classroom. Rather than respond to interview questions with general transition concerns for children, receiving teachers often responded in a diagnostic manner, relating each child’s transition to their social, behavioral, and academic performance in first grade. Inadequate performance was perceived by these receiving teachers to be an indicator of transition difficulty.

Social
Social areas of concern expressed about study children included adjusting to new peers in an unfamiliar school culture. Study children's peers came from a variety of backgrounds, different values, beliefs, and experiences. Some of the study children had not been exposed to such diverse children; nor had they been prepared to deal with these differences.

Social concerns involved Evan's limited interaction with his peers and his lack of independence. Barb characterized Evan's social behavior as "solitary and non-risk taking." She also noted that Evan had a temper and exhibited it at inappropriate times, such as if spoken to when not listening. In addition to social concerns, Barb noted that Evan often complained about being tired throughout the school day.

Negotiating friendships was identified as especially difficult for Sally. While Sally enjoyed new friendships, she struggled with positive peer negotiation in a way that was comfortable for others. Sally liked to be the leader with her peers and became quite agitated if she wasn't in control. Barb explained:

A few times she has become physical with friends when things haven't gone her way. For instance, while on the playground during recess, Sally became very upset with another child who choose to play with other friends. During this disagreement, Sally held the other child's hand and wouldn't let it go, squeezing it harder as she became more agitated by the fact that this child still didn't want to play with her. This incident left Sally upset for the rest of the day (September, 2004).

Overall social concerns were well summarized by one teacher:
I think it's been hard for some of the children to come to terms with and know how to relate to the rough and tumble of public school. They are meeting children who come from families that are very different from their families. With language on the playground and different ways of resolving conflict. I think some children are struggling with all of that because they hadn't previously come in contact with that very much. I think the differences are significant enough for it to be difficult for some children (Jackie, November 2004).

Resolving conflict was identified as one of study children's most difficult social challenges in first grade. This was attributed to significant differences in family values, lifestyle, experiences, and previous ways of resolving conflict. First grade teacher, Jackie explained:

Outside of the classroom, you know kids from different groups, have different families who have different values will resolve conflicts in different ways. And I don't think some children ever been exposed to those kinds of spectrum of how people interact socially. I think it's been shocking for them. A lot of conflicts will take place on the playground or in a situation where teachers aren't involved in them. So they are child resolved and they are resolved by kids saying, 'Oh, well, that's stupid' or, 'We’re not going to do it that way.' And it never gets to the teacher (November, 2004).

Academic
Academic concerns were expressed by receiving teachers for three children. In one case, academic concerns were linked to the fact that English was a second language for the child, and in a second case, the receiving teacher tied academic difficulties to behavioral and attention issues.

For one child, English was a second language. He was difficult to understand and struggled with phonetic skills, vocabulary, and writing. He also had difficulty comprehending instructional directions. The child was referred for articulation evaluation and recommended for speech and language services. In addition, he received ESL support services in writing, spelling, and reading in the resource room.

Another teacher stated that she “suspected attention issues” in a child she described as deficient in the academic areas of reading, writing, and math. In reading and writing, this child was categorized as working on the very low end of grade level, but not proficient on the letters and their sounds, and considerably below grade level in mathematical abilities. First grade teacher, Jackie commented:

Quite considerably below grade level in math. A lot of that is because she doesn't have some of the basic skills. Doesn't know a lot of her numbers. First of all in math, she doesn't complete work in a timely matter relative to the other children in the classroom. Even when she understands the concept. She's having great difficulty; doesn't know her numbers one through ten. She gets very anxious and frustrated when she sees that she doesn't have the necessary skills (Jackie, November 2004).
In addition to academic difficulties already stated, Jackie expressed concern about this child's learning, memory, and retrieval processes. In particular, she was puzzled by the fact that this child, "obviously a very bright child is having particular difficulty with certain things." Jackie explained:

Particularly her cognitive ability is quite high. So in some areas she doesn't seem to be matching her potential for some number of reasons. We've seen quite a lot of difficulty with her retrieval of words, psychologically she's not sustaining.

I don't have all the answers yet. What we're doing is supporting her in those areas that she's find difficulty. Gathering more information that will eventually get her some support. We're going to do some data collection about retention. So we're going to keep looking. We're going to have some test on word retrieval, rapid naming (November, 2004).

In early December, when asked if she thought this child had made the transition, Jackie replied, "No. I think it will still take a while for her to do that."

**Behavioral**

Behavioral concerns were most commonly expressed by receiving teachers. Behavioral concerns included issues of challenging directions, requiring high levels of support and attention, controlling tempers, learning to take turns, and learning not to disturb other children in the classroom. All three receiving teachers expressed concern over children's challenging directions, needing attention and support, and controlling tempers.
Julia would challenge adult directions and teacher directed activities in socially unacceptable ways. Julia often asked why she needed to do the task or remarked, “No, I can’t do this.” She often required additional support and attention for her teacher. Her teacher explained:

Julia was very dependent on both adult attention and support and immediately appealed for help whenever she got into any situation. She didn’t understand that she wasn’t the only child and had a lot of difficulty waiting or trying to figure something out on her own (Jill, September 2004).

Jill noted that with some prompting, Julia was able to complete tasks. However, she said that Julia exhibited a need for more adult attention and less teacher-directed activities. Jill also expressed concern with Julia’s social relationships. Jill noted that, “she can be quite strong willed and sometimes has verbal conflicts with her peers. And she can’t let go of the situation until it is resolved to her satisfaction (October, 2004).” Jill noted that despite her impatience, temperament, and strong willed personality, Julia made an easy transition in the first month of school.

Barb also found that one of her children tested and challenged adult directions. Sally often asked to check on her best friend in kindergarten. When she wasn’t allowed to leave the classroom to go to her best friend’s classroom down the hall, Sally became very upset. Her behavior toward her teacher Barb became confrontational, rude, and inappropriate. Barb explained, “Sally can be disrespectful using body language if she doesn’t get her way.” Barb noted that
Sally's disrespect stemmed from anxieties related to unknown structures, routines, procedures, and unanticipated changes in her daily schedule.

The third first grade teacher, Jackie, expressed a number of concerns about two of the children in her classroom. Jackie explained her concerns for one child by saying, "I think there are things that might not have shown up in her kindergarten situation. But they are beginning to show up now. Academic concerns and attention concerns, a lot of concerns actually." Although Jackie stated that this child didn't have difficulty in maintaining classroom expectations of behavior, she did have some behavioral issues related to the structure of first grade. Jackie explained:

Well, there are some things and I think it is part of the transition. Learning to take a turn to talk and not disturbing other people during work time. And I think again that's a different structure here than it is at the kindergarten. Generally I see children who come from TCC kindergarten having difficulty with those issues. Because it is much more child centered there in terms of a smaller group and they can manage a group in the way that we can't here because we have the numbers and the curriculum to plow through (Jackie, November 2004).

In addition to identifying turn taking and not disturbing other children during work time, Jackie stated that she had attention and hyperactivity issues about this child. She explained:

Attention issues are quite considerable. She's okay in areas where she really wants to be doing something, like drawing. But as soon as she's
engaged in an area where she isn’t firm and she has any difficulty whatsoever she has a lot of trouble sustaining.

She has difficulty with time on task, and organization of task to be able to complete it. And we see it both one-on-one when we’re doing conferences with her that her attention wanders when it’s difficult. We have to keep bringing her back or do very short sessions with her, which is atypical of what we usually see. Also movement. She has a lot of hyperactivity issues in group. They are very obvious here, particularly in the afternoon. She can’t sit still and ends up doing gymnastics at the back of the room (laughs) and all kinds of things. Is not typical of a first grader at this stage. I do have a lot of concerns. Independence, difficulty doing independent tasks like taking the lunch tray down to the cafeteria, even when she’s practiced it (Jackie, November 2004).

Jackie discussed the emotional anxiety of transition for children who by personality react anxiously. Jackie remarked:

I think she’s an anxious child generally about new situations. Again, because most of children knew the building, knew the routines, and knew every thing that was going on we don’t spend quite as much time in getting to know the situation as children coming from other situations could perhaps benefit from. We do some of that. We do some of that individually. I think some children need a lot of that.
I think some children are sensitive to changes and sensitive to differences in styles. Some children are comfortable when they come from other situations in a day and some children take longer; it's just how they are. Emotionally, she's fragile. I think this has all been quite difficult. And again I don't think that's typical of transitions for most children, but for her it's played into it being a difficult transition (Jackie, November 2004).

Jackie described William as very bright, interesting, and categorized as "off the charts" in his language, vocabulary, comprehension, listening, and interpretive skills. His reading ability was categorized as "considerably above grade level, while his mathematical abilities were labeled as on grade level. Although no academic concerns were expressed for William, Jackie stated that she had social and behavioral concerns for him not associated with the transition to first grade. She explained:

I have significant concerns. He demonstrates many behaviors throughout the day that suggest that he is needing to seek extra input from the environment. Touching many things, difficulty sitting still, touching hallway walls, making mouth noises. This may be impacting his ability to remain focused during academic tasks that are more challenging for him, such as math (Jackie, November 2004).

When asked about further detail concerning the basis for William's behavioral concerns, Jackie remarked that William's parents requested that she not discuss the issue outside of their family. She further explained:
I have some ideas about what I think might be the basis for those concerns. We are doing some in-house assessments for him, and some evaluations and they (his parents) are going to do some privately as well (Jackie, November 2004).

When asked if William had made the transition, Jackie replied:

Yes. However, I do think with some of the behavioral concerns, the transition would have been better if they were identified at the kindergarten in the correct way. Because there are so many accommodations that can be made for children with these issues and we make a lot of those. Again, if he had been in kindergarten here, that would have been picked up. The accommodations would have been made and he would have come in with those in place. I have to say it upsets me that it was not picked up, and the parents were hearing about it for the first time. As soon as they heard about it they said, 'Oh my God (Jackie, November 2004)!

William's parents expressed a very different viewpoint on William's behavior and his teacher's interpretation of that behavior as expressed in the previous section.

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7.0 FINDINGS: CONTINUITY AND DISCONTINUITY IN TRANSITION

While transitions were both exciting and challenging for children, parents, and teachers involved in this study, continuities and discontinuities became apparent during this process. Although much continuity between the TCC and first grade environments existed and can be taken for granted, a research focus was to identify the discontinuities for children who experience transition. Continuities are factors or experiences that did not create stress, anxiety, or difficulty during the transition from kindergarten to first grade. Discontinuities are factors or experiences that created stress, anxiety, or difficulty during the transition.

7.1 Continuities

Continuities during the transition to first grade included continued and new friendships, and time spent on the playground. Most children moved to first grade with at least one other child from their kindergarten environment. This was a positive, reassuring element of the transition for the children that provided some continuity between the kindergarten and first grade environments. Ladd (1990) reported that children making the transition who were familiar with peers in the class were less anxious at the beginning of the school year. Nonetheless, friendships changed subtly during the transition. In the new first grade environment, there was competition for friends and groups of friends that resulted in behavioral concerns for some children. These concerns are discussed in the section entitled relationships.

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Children perceived the playground as a source of continuity during their transition. In first grade, the children referred to the playground as recess. Although larger than their kindergarten one, the public school playground created a sense of familiarity for children. It became a place where children could mix with old kindergarten friends and new peers while engaging in familiar activities such as swinging, sliding, or playing tag. However, children commented on the difference between the kindergarten and first grade rules governing the playground use. William stated, “No picking up rocks on the playground, no picking up sticks on the playground, no kicking up dust on the playground, and inside the classroom no loud voices. Actually, extremely quiet voices.”

7.2 Discontinuities

While the transition to first grade offered new possibilities and study children were excited about friendships, eager to learn new things, and looked forward to their new school, many discontinuities emerged in these data. Discontinuities emerged in aspects of (a) school culture, (b) learning environment, (c) conflict resolution, (d) pedagogy, (e) relationships, (f) school procedures, (g) information sharing, (h) communication, and (i) parent involvement (Table 7.2-1).
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7.2.1 School Culture and Core Values

Children’s learning and development are not context free. Learning and development are influenced by family and the home, past school environments, and new educational settings and experiences. In each new context, there is a culture present that influences the child’s behavior, learning, and development. This culture represents the shared core values, traditions, and beliefs characteristic of the setting. Successful transitions require that children anticipate and comprehend the similarities and differences between the kindergarten and primary school cultures (procedures, rules, and routines), curriculum, and teaching methods.

An important component of school culture is instilling core values and a sense of responsibility in children. The culture of TCC was represented by its philosophy statement, which fosters the belief that children are competent, provocative, resourceful, and intelligent young people eager to share themselves and eager to experience their world. Children’s uniqueness and individual capabilities are recognized, valued, and supported during their development. Teachers believe that children are curious and filled with wonder about the unknown and possess a strong desire to deepen their knowledge and understanding of it (TCC, 2004).

The culture of Mountain View was represented in the school handbook through the statement of its core values. Core values at Mountain View included respect, courtesy, integrity, philosophy of learning, and sense of community. Students are requested to exhibit respect for themselves and for others, including
teachers and staff, at all times. In addition, students are expected to demonstrate respect for the school building, for materials and property of the school district, and for other people's belongings. Academically, students are expected to demonstrate their personal best and sense of community as outlined by the school handbook (Mountain View, 2004):

We will strive to act with integrity, to match our actions to our values. We will think for ourselves and take responsibility for our own actions. We will have the courage to do the right thing, even when others disagree. We will take responsibility for our own learning. We will be willing to take risks and explore our strengths and weaknesses. We will create an environment in which everyone is challenged to achieve his or her personal best.

We believe our lives are richer when we are part of a community. That community can be as small as our family or school, as large as our country or world. Our community is strengthened when we cooperate, respect community standards, include everyone, resolve conflicts, and give of ourselves in a spirit of service (pg. 3).

While the fundamental core values of each educational setting are not different, the manner in which they are presented and perceived is different. At Mountain View, the children and their parents were furnished with a handbook, and discussion and comprehension of the values was to be performed at home between the children and parents. In the kindergarten setting, the discussion of values was performed at school, and core values were discussed between the
teacher and the children in the classroom. Additionally, kindergarten teachers modeled appropriate behaviors that were valued in the classroom and children were given opportunities during school to practice and refine these skills.

7.2.2 Learning Environment

The learning environment includes the components of classroom structure, organization, management, rules, and routines. Differences between the time allotted for discussion of ideas, the rules associated with discussion, and approaches to the management of children occurred between the kindergarten and first grade learning environments. During observations, I recorded the length of time that morning circle lasted, the depth of discussion, and the level of student participation. I documented an average of 30 minutes less discussion during morning meetings in the first grade classroom compared to discussion in the kindergarten classroom. In general, discussions and conversations lacked sufficient time for (a) open discussion (things that children wanted to talk about), (b) focused discussion (things the teacher wanted to talk about), (c) students to think, reflect, and articulate their thoughts, and (d) all children to contribute to the discussion.

In both settings, children were expected to sit within the morning circle, wait their turn to talk, listen to one another's comments and ideas, and be respectful of everyone's thoughts, ideas, and opinions. However, in the kindergarten classroom I consistently observed greater teacher flexibility in regard to rules and children's needs. Children were allowed more time to express their ideas and greater freedom of individual movement. They were
allowed to whisper to one another, speak freely without raising their hands and waiting to be called upon (as long as children were respectful and didn't interrupt one another while speaking), during group discussions. Children also were allowed to fidget, squirm, sit cross legged, kneel, or even lie on the floor at times; use the bathroom, get a drink of water, and attend to other basic personal needs. They were allowed to do so and remained in control of their needs, deciding when they needed to get a drink of water, use the bathroom, or leave their seat to get a tissue. This depth of flexibility was not observed in the first grade classrooms.

An example of a typical day in kindergarten began with a morning meeting in which children and teachers greeted one another, planned the day, and began or continued educational discussions with children. During morning meeting, children were given as much time as they needed to express ideas, articulate opinions, ask questions, and relate their interests and experiences to the curriculum being discussed. The cooperative spirit of the kindergarten learning environment is conveyed in the following morning meeting transcript:

  Nancy: What is a wedding? Why do people have weddings?
  Tara: Because they want to get married and have a happy family and see and meet their cousins.
  Nicole: A wedding is with a car and she rided [sic] inside the car—it was old fashion. They didn’t see but they ran over Raymond’s toe. Mary is now married to Uncle Tim and now they live in Vermont.
Sean:  I think I know why they put flowers in their hair—they are called flower rings.

Julia:  A wedding is when people want to live with another person and they were boyfriend and girlfriends and they marry because they want to have a baby that will grow up and marry another person, it goes on and on and on.

Mary:  People get married because they want to have children and a nice family and so they can get more grandchildren and children. And they want children so they can have a family just like other families. People marry each other because they like having a husband and they think it will be nice to have a nice wedding with family and friends. They like to see the husbands they pick to marry each other because it would be nice to have kids with each other. They might like to have two or one or whatever they like, they are lucky to have them. People get married because they see the true love to the man they want to marry and be together.

Brittany:  People want to have children so they can grow up and be parents. It’s a life cycle of a person, baby, person, baby, person, until all the people have died then it stops and all the people are angels.

Isabella:  Not all families have kids, my aunt, my mommy’s sister, doesn’t have any kids even though she’s married.
Sean: Except when people are dead angels they are God’s servants. I read it in the Bible at my church. Only some people are angels. God may only let some people be angels if they are good not bad.

Gretchen: Christina, she didn’t get married but she has children.

Nancy: Do you have to get married to have children?

Gretchen: No.

Nicole: Mary, now she’s my aunt and I love her.

Nancy: Why is she your aunt?

Nicole: Because she married Uncle Tim.

Kindergarten teacher’s listened carefully to children, their comments were respected and valued, and their ideas were validated by teachers. Teachers recorded children’s conversations as they unfolded during morning circle and other discussion times. Later teachers would document children’s work by preparing transcripts of the children’s conversations and distributing them to parents as a way to convey curriculum content and promote communication.

In first grade, teacher expectations about rules and student behaviors were different. Children were expected to do more listening than speaking within group discussions, particularly during morning circle and other meeting times. Study children were not accustomed to the teacher dominating the conversation. One mother commented on this during the first week of school; her daughter said, “My teacher really talks a lot.”
One late September day during morning meeting, I observed a
conversation between Sally and her first grade teacher in which Sally was told,
"We don't talk at circle unless called on." There was a discussion about scary
hay rides and Sally had openly agreed that hay rides could be scary. The
conversation continued with the teacher dominating the conversation. Children
raised their hands, including Sally, to offer comments. Three children were
selected to speak. Then the teacher said, "Hold your ideas, we've heard stories
from three people already. We need to move on to writing." Sally had held her
arm and hand straight up the entire time, waiting to contribute her comments.
She was not called upon for comment nor was she acknowledged for raising her
hand and waiting to be called on.

The first grade classroom atmosphere was characterized by teachers as
one in which children were encouraged to develop confident and independent
attitudes to study. Teachers expected children to learn mathematics, science,
reading, and writing by being engaged in those academics. Children were
expected to develop attitudes and learning habits that would carry them
throughout their academic careers. Parents characterized the first grade learning
environment as having a rigid structure, schedule, and curricular formats that
focused on academics, student attitudes, and learning habits. When asked to
compare the kindergarten and first grade learning environments, Gretchen's
mother explained:

My sense is that, the first grade environment is more kind of a traditional
learning environment where there are much more explicit instructions.
There are, for example, timed activities. For example, you’re given two
math worksheets and you’re supposed to finish them in twenty minutes
and turn them in. I think it is a much more explicitly evaluative
environment. And I am not sure if the teachers are encouraging that. I
am not saying the teachers are evaluating, part of what happens in first
grade is that there is more self-evaluation going on and self comparison
going on among the kids, but I also think that the environment is sort of
lending itself more to that than at TCC.

So, at TCC I felt like, just for Gretchen, I could see an environment
where she is working at her own pace, where she was able to engage for
extended periods in the kinds of things that she was attracted to. Very
much in the child centered approach, which is not the approach at all at
Mountain View (Melissa, November 2004).

William’s parents described the first grade learning environment as
structured and regimented. They explained:

First grade is a far more structured environment. The teacher has
seemed far less sympathetic than the kindergarten teachers. It is much
more regimented. There were never worksheets at TCC. I think the
switch from the emergent curriculum to a set curriculum is a big thing.
Because in the emergent curriculum the children were dictating what they
were interested and then following their interests. Whereas in this
particular set curriculum even a kid like William has to sit there doing
sequencing. He has to go through the whole shebang whether he’s been
able to do that since he was three or not. One of the advantages of the worksheet is obviously that you see exactly what the kid can and can't do. And boy we've discovered definitively that he can add. So that's very different, the structure of the curriculum. Child oriented towards just regimented (Nancy, November 2004).

7.2.3 Conflict Resolution

The approach to and scaffolding of conflict resolution used in first grade by teachers differed significantly from the approach used in kindergarten. Conflict resolution was commonly child initiated and if necessary, teacher mediated in kindergarten. Children were granted the time and space to work things out without teacher interference or domination. Children were encouraged to "walk away" from an incident and take time essential to think about how or why the conflict took place as well as possible solutions to resolve issues. Additionally, children were given the leeway to leave the group if they needed to cool down, reflect on their behavior, or engage in emotional and social self-regulatory behaviors such as reflecting on perspective taking, behavior towards others, or reactions toward others during conflict episodes. They were given time to internally process and reflect upon conflict incidents. If requested or necessary, children were coached through the situation until an amenable resolution for all parties was achieved and children felt that their feelings were validated.

In their efforts to resolve conflicts children utilized compromise, negotiation and social skills. Children supported and encouraged one another, expressed themselves, and took risks. In doing so, they developed respect and
appreciation of others ideas, thoughts, and opinions. They learned the concepts of diversity and culture among themselves.

Below is a transcript which is an example of how one kindergarten teacher guided and supported a child's efforts in conflict resolution. The transcript involves a dispute between two children, Mary and Nicole, in Nancy's classroom. After Mary stopped crying and was ready to talk, Nancy intervened, helping Nicole with perspective taking and following through to work things out. She asked Nicole:

Nancy: Did you have a conversation with Mary about what happened?
Nicole: No.
Nancy: Well you should talk about what happened. I know it was an accident. But you still have to talk about it.

(Mary joins the conversation)

Nancy: What could you have done?
Nicole: I said sorry.
Nancy: Does sorry make her feel better?
Nicole: No.
Nancy: Well, (pauses) what could you have done to make her feel better?
Nicole: Do you need help fixing it?
Mary: No, that's okay.

(both walk away)
In first grade, conflict resolution was teacher initiated and directed. Children were not scaffolded in their attempts to resolve conflict among peers. Children weren’t given the amount of time they needed to think, reflect on what had happened, or seek their own solutions to conflict. Children were told what to do and when to do it. In addition, children were not given strategies, or guidance to work through conflicts and to seek agreeable solutions. Recognition and validation of children’s social and emotional health did not seem an important component of conflict resolution in the first grade.

Below is a transcript of how one first grade teacher approached conflict resolution as I witnessed. An incident between a study child, Sally, and another child occurred at school on the playground during recess. After returning to the classroom from the playground the following conversation took place between Sally, her first grade teacher and the other child:

Barb: I want to talk to both of you about the incident on the playground.

Sally: It was his fault…… (is interrupted by the teacher)

Barb: I talk first.

Sally: But…. (Looks down)

Barb: This is how it works. (looks at Sally) I talk first and you listen. (Looks at the other student) Sally will tell her side, and then you will tell yours.

Sally: He was choking me so I kicked him.

Other student: She was spying on me and I didn’t want her to.
Barb: Next time, use your words not your hands. Sally, no karate and no spying. Go back to your seats.

In addition to teachers having a different perspective about their role and children's roles in conflict resolution, children at Mountain View were not accustomed to the language of conflict resolution that children attending TCC used. I repeatedly witnessed times when study children used the phrase, "no thank you" to voice disapproval of something or to stop an unwanted comment or action by another child. For instance, TCC children said this phrase to convey dislike, hurt feelings, or unwanted behaviors such as put downs, aggression, or negative language. The phrase, "no thank you," meant nothing to children at Mountain View. While interviewing Gretchen's mother about conflict resolution practices in first grade, she expressed dismay at children's lack of skill in conflict resolution and teachers' guidance in their development. She stated:

She [Gretchen] was telling me about these kids that were being mean to her; they were saying mean things to her. So I said to her, 'What did you say to them? What did you do?' And she said to me, 'I said, No thank you.' But that didn't stop them.

So I thought well of course she always knew at TCC the thing to do was you always said no thank you, you didn't attack back. It's kind of a new world for her (Melissa, November 2004).

Nicole's mother also noted the lack of teacher guidance and support for in conflict resolution in first grade children. She remarked:
At TCC if there was a disagreement or even one person being more upset when there were two or three children together, my sense was that there was a teacher always there to come in and say, 'What do you think happened, and what do you think happened, and what do you think happened,' 'Now did you hear what so-and-so said, what did so-and-so say.' And really process that whole thing right then and there. My perception was that happened a lot in that particular kindergarten class. The way that public schools work that time is just not there. You've got to go to recess or you've got library coming up or the bus is coming. Whatever the issues are, the time constraints and the structure of the public school day I don't think necessarily lend it to so much teacher intervention (Danielle, October 2004).

Other children also struggled with the manner in which the first grade teachers engaged in conflict resolution matters. Mary's mother remarked:

I think with TCC there was more time taken to have a resolution when there was a conflict or difference of opinion. They really sat down and talked. So there was a sense of validation so all parties were satisfied with the conclusion of whatever the conflict was. They just can't do that in first grade (Roslyn, September 2004).

7.2.4 Pedagogy

Pedagogical differences between teachers are known to make transitions difficult (Curtis, 1986; Mellor, 1991). Differences between teachers' disposition, personality, and style; beliefs about children, their capabilities, and readiness
skills; expectations; instructional approach to curriculum, and assessment practices occurred in the kindergarten and first grades.

Teacher disposition, personality, and style

Parents remarked that differences occurred among first grade teachers’ disposition, personality, and teaching style. In general terms, parents stated that the first grade teachers were not as “warm and nurturing” toward children in their relationships as their kindergarten teachers had been. Especially notable were the differences between kindergarten teachers and one of the first grade teachers. William’s mother described his teacher’s teaching style:

We found her to be quite rigid. She’s more crisp, structured, organized and even regimented, I think. She doesn’t have the kind of warmth of other teachers. And this is a big contrast to the kind of very warm loving interaction with the teachers he had at TCC (Nancy, November 2004).

When asked to elaborate on her teaching style, William’s mother provided an example of a time that William complained about his teacher’s “crisp” interactive style. She commented:

Once, when they had a clock assignment, the long hand was on the 12 and they had to fill in one o’clock, two o’ clock, three o’clock, and William found this incredibly easy and boring. He finished in a few minutes and he began to draw on the clock. He made a cuckoo clock, a grandfather clock and an alarm clock. She stopped him from doing that and said it wasn’t appropriate. And that was a moment that I think he felt like, ‘Why is she stopping me from doing this? The only interesting part of the project is
drawing this clock.’ We don’t hear a lot about her. I don’t think she’s a positive or negative force in his life. She seems to be off the radar screen and he has more of a relationship with the lunch lady (Nancy, November 2004).

Children respond more quickly and effectively to an enthusiastic, friendly, interpersonal teaching style, and this is an important factor in student performance and achievement during transition (Good & Brophy, 1989). Parents of study children seemed to agree with this finding, believing that an enthusiastic, warm, and friendly teacher was important to their child’s transition success.

**Beliefs about Children**

Comparison of sending and receiving teacher’s beliefs about children revealed significant differences. Sending teachers viewed children as capable, competent, and eager to learn about themselves and the world around them. Sending teachers believed that children are “vivacious, energetic, and have great potential given a variety of materials and resources, adequate adult support, and developmentally appropriate learning environments (Sue, May 2004).” Receiving teachers believed that children are “inquisitive; and need encouragement, acceptance, and instruction (Barb, Jill, and Jackie, September 2004).” Beliefs about children focused on their need for academic instruction and skills and competency in reading, writing, and mathematics. One receiving teacher stated that, “it was their responsibility to find out how children learn and to teach them the basic skills in the core literacy areas (Barb, September 2004).”

**Beliefs about readiness skills and behaviors**

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Readiness represents the extent to which a child is capable of benefiting from the activities, expectations, and goals of a school program (Graue, 1992). It is the combined result of a child’s eagerness to fully participate in school life (Yeboah, 2002), as well as the child’s preparation prior to school entry (Elliot & Lambert, 1985). Children’s adjustment to school may be influenced by parents, sending teachers, and receiving teachers’ perceptions of what skills and behaviors children need for early school success. In general, the kindergarten teachers and parents believed that study children were ready for first grade and ready to meet the demands of public school. However, some parents had commented on rumors concerning past children’s readiness for first grade in public school. Issues surrounding instructional formats and academic preparation in reading, phonics, and writing instruction surfaced among several parents (Harper, 2004 unpublished data).

Despite these uncertainties, all of the study parents believed that kindergarten was a place and time when children acquired a literacy foundation on which to build future knowledge, skills, and concepts. First grade was where formal reading, spelling, and writing instruction should begin and parents expected that by the end of first grade, their child would be reading fluently. Despite some worries, parents, by and large felt that their children were on track and ready for first grade.

Even so, many parents voiced ambivalence regarding the issue. On the one hand, several parents commented that if pushed (either by themselves or their teacher) their child would have been reading by the end of first grade. On
the other hand, some parents were nervous and a bit anxious to know where
their child ranked academically with children who attended kindergarten in public
school. Some even wished that their child was reading and writing more fluently
based on rumors they had heard about the transition difficulties of the previous
TCC kindergarten cohort of children.

During the transition to first grade, it became apparent that teachers at
Mountain View had a different perspective on children's readiness skills.
Academic concerns focused on attention, activity level, essential reading and
math skills, and competency in reading, spelling, writing, and math. One first
grade teacher insisted that one child did not possess the basic knowledge and
skills associated with numbers, letters of the alphabet, and sound symbol
correspondence, critical to first grade entry. These deficits were attributed to
possible memory and retrieval issues associated with learning. The child's
parent found this to be disturbing and stressful for her and her daughter. She
explained:

I feel like her teachers at Mountain View have been very different. First of
all, they have a very different read on her than the teachers at TCC.
There are probably various reasons for that. But, I think that one of the
things is that they don't know her the way TCC teachers do. So, their
interpretation of her behavior is very different than mine. I have been very
surprised because some of the things they have said to me are just not
characteristic of her at all.
Basically what I feel is that she is a child who is intensely stressed right now. And I have seen real regressions even at home in terms of things that would indicate to me that she is stressed. So, for example, she has always been quite independent and very sociable and social and kind of outgoing. And she is outgoing still at home. She is still happy. She likes going to school and she says she likes learning things. But now, for example, we have gone to several events like parties where she would have been very happy to play with other kids earlier. She won't let me leave. She'll cry, she will stay by my side, clinging to me and she is in first grade. Even when she was three she wasn't a child who would do that. It was only since she started school (Melissa, November 2004).

First grade teachers had concerns about study participants' lack of preparation and readiness skills for first grade. In particular, one teacher expressed strong opinions about lack of preparation. When asked if study children were prepared to enter first grade she replied:

No, no. I think the two structures are very different. The kindergarten one there and here. And I love what they do in that program, but it's really not compatible with what is done in public schools. In terms of most public schools have kindergartens that assess for those kinds of things. Like the numbers and the letters and they would have identified quite a lot of these problems before.

Had she been here, she would have had support in gaining those skills to come into first grade. Things are becoming tougher and tougher
academically in public schools because of legislation and we have a very firm curriculum we have to follow. There's an expectation that children are coming into first grade with these skills. So it's very hard if they are coming from a kindergarten that doesn't support those things.

And it's hard for the child, particularly a very sensitive child. I really think Gretchen is having self-esteem problems because she sees herself as not as capable as the other children. There is no doubt she is more capable in many respects in that she hasn't had that support in kindergarten to firm up those skills she needs to come into first grade. And to get those things done in first grade that is mandated now by our district, 'No Child Left Behind.' It's really tough for those children who don't have the necessary skills. Obviously we do every thing we can to bring those skills up. She would have probably come in with some kind of support had she come from our kindergarten (Jackie, October 2004).

When asked to identify the essential skills necessary for a child entering first grade teacher, Jackie replied:

Letter identification, consonant knowledge, consonant sounds, numbers one to twenty, some kind of rudimentary ability to stay on tasks and have practiced that in areas where they are not 100% comfortable, that isn't totally child driven. Because a lot of curriculum in public schools is not very child driven. I think we're probably one of the remaining schools that have any kind of child-centered decision making around curriculum. So I think children need practice doing activities in seat work that they haven't
chosen that are academically based ready for first grade. Given this is what is necessary for first grade these days. It's not what I personally believe in, but it is what we're having to teach. I think personally that first grade shouldn't be that academically based but it is. That's how it is, and it's tough. So I think kindergartens really have to reflect that in preparing children to come into that situation so they're not floundering when they come in (Jackie, October 2004).

During the transition to first grade, it became apparent that teachers at Mountain View had a different perspective on children's readiness skills. Academic concerns focused on attention, activity level, essential reading and math skills, and competency in reading, spelling, writing, and math. Despite children's eagerness to fully participate in school life, coupled with sending teacher's belief that children possessed the necessary social, behavioral and academic readiness skills to be successful in first grade, receiving teachers found study children to be academically, socially, and behaviorally unprepared for the demands of first grade.

Teacher Expectations

Teacher expectations were different in first grade. Children were expected to be responsible for bringing items such as notes and homework back and forth between home and school. Many children failed to maintain such responsibility for notes, homework, lunch money and personal items between home and school. Several parents complained about the lack of reminding and prompting children in relation to this. One child's mother explained:
One of the things that I think disturbs me a little bit about the environment is how little prompting the children get. For instance, we give William a note to give to his teacher and he forgets that he has the note and this creates conflict between us and William. Because we are like yelling at him for forgetting the important note, but he just couldn't remember. He says that there is no prompting in the morning and we would like to see ‘Do you have any notes now children?’ or, ‘Do you have your homework books.’ Just something to help them, because I think in first grade there’s now a sort of real expectation of a real independence and almost grown up, and I think just a little more prompting on things like that might be appropriate, might help reduce friction (Nancy, November 2004).

Curriculum and Instructional Approach

Sending and receiving teachers’ instructional approaches were characterized by instruction which included a balance of large and small groups, teacher directed activities, and opportunities for individualized instruction. Teachers in both settings encouraged the development of autonomy among children, while at the same time providing teacher support, and guidance as children faced new academic challenges. A teacher’s selection of curriculum, instructional approaches, and assessment techniques influences a child’s transition as much as the learning environment, her style, and personality, and her interactions with children. The instructional formats, and approaches, and children’s learning experiences were areas of major differences between kindergarten and first grade.
According to TCC's mission statement, Kindergarten teachers viewed teaching and learning from a social-constructivist theory. They stated that, as constructivist teachers, they believed that children and adults construct knowledge with others. Kindergarten teachers stated it was their responsibility to "purposefully create and provoke rich experiences for child discovery and to extend previous, more serendipitous experiences that occur at home, school, and the greater community." The teachers functioned as active partners with children and their parents so that the learning context was meaningful to children and enriching to parents. During the spring interview with one Kindergarten teacher the TCC's educational philosophy was explained:

Our primary goal is to create a pedagogy of collaborative inquiry. One in which teachers, children and parents construct knowledge in relation as processes of learning are developed that support inquiry, such as resourcefulness, critical thinking, problem solving, autonomy, and deliberate attention. Consequently, we strive to create group experiences in which children will develop relationships with people, materials and space from which discoveries can be made (Sue, May 2004).

The curriculum formats and instructional approaches to reading, writing, spelling, and math were different in kindergarten and first grade. In kindergarten, teachers encouraged children to explore, discover, inquire, and problem-solve independently and as a community of learners. The learning environment was designed to enhance the development of oral and language, intellectual, emotional, moral, and social skills. As kindergarteners the children were
encouraged to initiate their own learning activities through a process of choice, self-selection, and negotiation generally embedded in play activities and project work. Teachers created integrated curricular experiences to support the exploration, discovery, and extension of children's knowledge and theories as it related to such topics, as well as to those spontaneous teachable moments that arose throughout the course of a day. The curriculum, activities, and experiences developed were based on the understanding that children have diverse learning styles and many ways in which they express themselves.

Using an emergent-negotiated curriculum approach, based on the interests and needs of the children, literacy skills were embedded in authentic project work in kindergarten. The following series of transcripts of learning episodes provide examples of the elements of voice, choice, authentic tasks, parent involvement, and the general excitement of learning that was prevalent in the curriculum and instructional approach of the kindergarten learning environment.

One project, lasting approximately four months, involved the purpose and traditions associated with weddings in Asian countries and the United States. Interest in weddings first emerged when Allison, the student teacher announced she was getting married. Children immediately began asking questions and the kindergarten teachers guided their interests by involving them in a series of discussions and activities that explored weddings in addition to diversity and culture. The children made the cake, flower bouquets, veils, and reception decorations. They participated in all aspects of planning a mock wedding. The
soon to be married couple came to the school and performed a mock ceremony, together with the kindergarten children while the entire center watched.

During the wedding project children choose those activities in which they wanted to engage. Children chose to make flower arrangements or a pillow for the ring bearer, design and prepare chocolate party favors, select appropriate recipes, measure and mix ingredients to bake a wedding cake, design and create reception invitations, craft and assemble a pearl necklace, a bride’s veil, flower girl accessories, crowns, flower arrangements, or boutonnieres. All of which required children to read, write, and apply skills in authentic ways. Children also worked cooperatively, negotiating the division and completion of tasks associated with the project.

These transcripts follow the children’s interests during the wedding project and serve to illustrate the curriculum content and instructional approaches used in the kindergarten environment. In the transcripts, many types of weddings are discussed, including Korean weddings, Chinese weddings, and same-sex weddings. Children brought books, newspaper clippings, and family photos in to school that provided sources of information about weddings. The transcripts detail the emerging curriculum and discussions of weddings continued over approximately four months.

Sue: I noticed that Nicole was looking at this book during DEAR [Drop Everything and Read] time. So I picked it up and was looking through it at rest time and thought it was interesting.

All: Wow, look.
Sue: There are some interesting pictures that I want to show you. Let's look at the pictures together. (She shows the children the pictures of Korean weddings as she holds the book out facing children and walking from child to child in the circle)

Sue reads various captions from pictures about Korean weddings and associated ceremonial traditions. Children begin to ask questions in an open format.

All: Why don't they face each other?

Sue: Kindergarteners, if you have a question, comment or something you want to share, raise your hand and I'll write it down so we can answer it (writes children's questions on the grease board).

Nicole: I have a share. They bow because of this tradition (pauses) to thank for the food.

Tara: They bow like this (Interrupts Nicole and shows how they bow)

Nicole: You ruined it (starts to cry)!

Sue: Nicole, do you want to share or move on?

Nicole: Groans. (Sobs loudly and continues to cry)

Sue: Why don't you take a deep breath and then you can share.

Nicole illustrates the Korean tradition of how married couples kneel on the floor to eat at a large table using the block platform as a prop to demonstrate.
Sue: Does anyone have a question, comment or share about anything in the pictures or about anything I just read?

Before anyone can answer, Nicole’s father arrives to take her home. She asks for snack before she goes home. Nicole asks her father a question about Korean weddings. He announces that they have a book about them at home. He offers to bring it in the next day.

Sue: Tell me about these pictures (pointing to the wedding pictures in the book), what do you notice about these in relation to American wedding traditions?

Mary: The color red.

Tara: A veil.

Mary: Mostly the brides have skirts or dresses.

Cindy: The bride and groom are both wearing red.

Tara: I think that red means love (pauses), a family tradition. I like the crown and veil.

Mary: I think red means the color is for weddings. That’s the color of their wedding to let the world know.

Following this discussion of Korean weddings, one of the children brings in family wedding photos to share with the class. The child, Evan, is Chinese, and the photographs stimulated additional discussion about weddings.

Allison: Evan’s family brought in wedding photos to share with us.

(Passes the photos around the circle to children)
Allison: How are these pictures similar or different from the ones we've seen?

Cindy: What's the red sign mean?

Allison: Happiness and love (She looks closer at the paper). Double happiness.

Nicole: In this country we have veils, in some countries, they don't.

Cindy: Men in this country wear Tuxedos—black ones. In this picture (points to another picture) the man is wearing fancy clothes—red—but not a tuxedo.

Interest in weddings continued, and one of the teachers wrote a letter to the class asking for help with the upcoming wedding. The teacher specifically asked the children, (a) "Would you like me to wear anything special to the wedding? (b) What would you like me to say?, and (c) Explain what I need to do during the wedding."

Sue: Kindergarten friends, we have received a letter from Erin.
   (She reads the letter aloud).

Sue: What should she wear? (Calls on children as they raise their hands)

Cindy: A black dress.

Tara: A black dress with whatever shoes she has.

Tim: A blue dress with a hat and white shoes and a necklace.

Sally: A dress and shoes to match.

Nicole: She could wear any dress or pants and shoes.
Sue: What should she say?
William: I love you, Stuart.
Sue: Hun, she's not marrying Stuart. She's marrying Bill.
William: From the newspaper.
Sue: You mean the newspaper clipping? (gets the newspaper clipping and reads it aloud)

Sue: Same Sex Couples Wed Across Massachusetts.
Sue: The two men clasped hands, looked into each other's eyes.
'I love you, Stuart, and I want to give you the best of who I am and who I am becoming' said Mr. Bourn, reading the couple's marriage vows. 'I know that this journey will not be easy, but I will live better with you.'

The newspaper clipping concerned same-sex weddings being held in Massachusetts. The article was brought to school by William and his mother to share with the class. I interviewed Sue regarding the context of the article:

William's mom brought it in. She actually brought it in not so much for two men getting married, but for what it was actually about. What they were saying to each other. And we had another parent, Beth's mom, ask if we were talking about other kinds of marriages and if we were making an effort in introducing it to children, because she was concerned that we should explain how there are different kinds of marriages. She really wanted us to talk about same sex marriages (May, 2004).
The class decided to work on writing the lines for the mock wedding. Sue, one of the kindergarten teachers asked, “Who wants to work on the officiate lines for the wedding”? Several students remarked, “I do.” The following transcript reveals the conversation that took place:

Sue: Okay, I’m ready.

Beth: Here we are all gathered to see these two become husband and wife?

Tara: Would you like to take this man as your husband?

Beth: And you will probably know the other one? The same thing except the woman.

Sue: What would you say?

Beth: Would you like to take this woman as your husband?

Cindy: Would you like this woman to be your wife?

Sue: Okay, what do you think they need to do as a couple?

Beth: Kiss and hug.

Sue: Well before you get to that part. What things do they need to do to be together?

Cindy: You should not die.

Sue: How do you think they should treat each other?

Beth: Nice.

Tara: Be very, very kind.

Cindy: And be really, really nice to their baby.
Sue: (Repeating what children have said while writing it). You should be nice to each other and...

Beth: You can’t say and be nice to your baby, because they might not even have a baby.

Sue: Well, that’s true, not everybody who gets married has babies.

Beth: They shouldn’t say it.

Sue: Should we leave the baby part out?

Beth: Yes, because Allison said she probably doesn’t want to have a baby. Because if they say it, (pauses) then it won’t make sense because they are not going to have one.

Sue: Is that okay with you?

Beth: Tara said the baby part.

Tara: (Tara nods her head, indicating yes) Be happy and kind to each other.

Sue: So they should be nice to each other and have a good time?

Cindy: And have a good wedding.

Tara: Have a good honeymoon.

Sue: Think about Allison and Bill as a married couple and what they will be like together. How do you think Allison and Bill should treat each other? (Pause) (Sue looks at Evan and asks) How do you think they should be to each other?

Evan: (pauses) Happy?
Sue: (Still looking at his face repeats) Happy. You want to write that?

Evan: (Nods yes and repeats) Be happy and nice.

Sue: (Repeats) And nice.

Evan: To each other.

Sue: (Repeats) To each other (as she writes).

Sue: Good. And do you want to add anything else?

Evan: Yup. You kiss.

Tara: Yes. I have one more.

Sue: Is that the ending?

Tara: It's the middle, I'm still thinking.

Sue: Beth and Cindy do you have anything you want to add before we end?

Beth: You may kiss the bride.

Cindy: You may kiss the groom.

Tara: I have the middle.

Sue: (Children look puzzled) Tara is thinking of something for the middle.

Tara: Try not to argue. Now we can do the ending.

Beth: Groom, you may kiss the bride.

Cindy: Bride, you may kiss the groom.

Sue: How should we end?
All: Congratulations, Allison and Bill. Love, your kindergarten friends.

Sue: Okay, I'm going to read it back and you tell me if it's want you want. Ready?

(Reads the lines)

Tara: Here we are all gathered to see these two people become husband and wife.

Beth: Would you like to take this man as your husband? Would you like to take this woman as your wife?

Cindy: You should be nice to each other, have a good time and a good honeymoon.

Evan: Be happy and kind to each other.

Tara: Try not to argue.

Beth: Groom, you may kiss the bride.

Cindy: Bride, you may kiss the groom.

All: Congratulations, Allison and Bill. Love, your kindergarten friends.

This conversation was typical of the teaching style, context of learning, and the instructional approach used by the kindergarten teachers, as well as the amount of voice and choice children were granted in their learning. In addition to this difference, an integral component of the curriculum for children and teachers was the time and practice of revisiting their discussions, work, and experiences. Teachers granted children significant time to revisit, repeat, or extend their
involvement in activities. Teachers saw this as critical to the success of meaning making in children. They also encouraged children and parents to bring in items and experiences from home and to extend classroom activities at home. Teachers were genuinely interested and appreciative of parent’s interests, culture, and involvement. Parents were encouraged to participate and share throughout the year and did so regularly.

The first grade learning environment, the curricular formats, and instructional approach to teaching and learning was different from the kindergarten experience. The teachers stated that their goals were to provide knowledge, skills, and dispositions required for children to become proficient in the basic skills of reading, writing, and mathematics. This reflected current federal mandates and state curriculum standards. All the parents commented on the increased academic expectations and responsibility for children in the form of homework, timed worksheets, and spelling tests. They also noted that the first grade curriculum was more structured, in-depth, focused on the academic skills of reading, writing, spelling, and mathematics, and exposed children to social studies and science.

While reflecting on the differences between the kindergarten and first grade curriculum content, formats, instructional approaches, and learning environments, parents described the environment of first grade as teacher driven, structured, and dominated by worksheets. Tara’s mother explained:

I think it’s very less student driven in first grade. Before it was very interactive, like what they were going to learn or what direction they were
going to go more at TCC, even though her class was bigger there. Which is kind of funny going to a smaller class. But they also have spelling test every week, reading that they have to do. Just workbooks, it's more on paper type things (Jennifer, September 2004).

Another parent explained:

I just think there's a mismatch between the two educational goals. In some ways the things she was encouraged to do or the things that were valued at TCC are now, which to me were in the direction of her strengths and natural tendencies, is now a liability (Melissa, November 2004).

A third parent explained:

I think the whole focus of the first grade is to get all the students to a certain level. Getting them all to a certain place. Which is probably quite appropriate, not a negative. Yeah, it's very much about getting them all to do the worksheet in under 15 minutes and to do it correctly. Not to deviate from the way it's supposed to be done. Conforming to the way that they think it's going to be good for the child to do it. At TCC that was never true and they would support children individually. Which I think they are also trying to do in first grade. But it's a very different kind of setting (Nancy, November 2004).

Proficiency was achieved primarily through seatwork and worksheets. Children recognized that seatwork and worksheets took precedence over all other activities. As Evan said, "You have to finish your work first, then show it to your teacher, then you can play (September, 2004)." Children voiced that one
difference between the learning environments was that they did not have centers in first grade. All children commented on the fact that there were no blocks for constructing things or opportunities for dramatic play in first grade. This limited their choice and voice in relation to their leisure time and curriculum preferences. Children identified one or more components of centers, whether it was dramatic play, blocks, puzzles, or games as learning opportunities in kindergarten that were not available in first grade. Instead, the curriculum consisted of reading, spelling, writing and mathematics.

Reading and Writing

First grade teachers' instructional approaches to teaching reading were different from the instructional approach of kindergarten teachers. At TCC teachers read individually, in small groups, and in whole group formats on a daily basis. At Mountain View, teachers read to children in whole group formats, but their instructional approach differed. Reading instruction was segmented into specific blocks of time in which children completed worksheets focused on phonics, word families, sentence structure, and related skills at three different "stations", followed by individual reading and journal writing. Individual children were not read to by teachers. Instead, individual children were asked to read to the teacher for 15 minutes per week. As they read to their teacher, they were assessed on a variety of reading skills, including vocabulary development, sight word recognition, decoding of short and long vowels, application of onset and rhyme to include word families, concepts of print, and general text.
comprehension. This approach ensured that each child received individual instruction at least fifteen minutes at least once per week.

Sally expressed that she liked reading and writing workshop, "We get to make and write books. But I can't do all of my drawings that I like to do in my stories (September, 2004)." One day during a reading conference with her teacher, Sally expressed frustration and disappointment in reading and writing in first grade. When asked about her flip book that she had made, she stated, "It is a book about my best friend changing into different colors. Her teacher asked, "How would people know what this story is about?" Sally replied, "It's a flip-o-rama book. You just flip it like this (shows the teacher how to flip through the book to see the characters actions)." Her teacher's comments were, "You need to think about writing sentences to tell the reader what's going on. Let's move on to your next story." Sally wanted to re-read the flip book, but was told it's time to move on to her next book. After reviewing several of Sally's other stories, one about a trip to Mexico and one about the ocean, her teacher remarked, "I like your ocean story, you start some careful work then move into your scribble mode. I'd like to see you work more carefully, like you did in the beginning of this ocean book." Sally's teacher took eight of her finished story books, despite her repeated requests to keep them and repeated pleas to read other books to her. The teacher stated, "No, I have to work with others (Barb, September 2004)."

Spelling

Spelling continued to be a challenge for children in first grade. In kindergarten children were encouraged to think about sounds in relation to letters
and letter combinations, however, children were not expected to show proficiency in spelling. What was discontinuous for children was the teachers' expectation related to the ability to spell correctly. Teachers required children to sound out words and to write letters for corresponding sounds. While more developmentally appropriate in the first grade classroom, this was a difficult and anxiety producing task for some children.

Worksheets

Although children looked forward to the increased academic responsibility of first grade, they soon voiced dislike for the constant flow of worksheets in reading, spelling and math. One child expressed extreme boredom about the frequent use of math worksheets.

Researcher: Still doing worksheets?
William: Yeah.

Researcher: Do you like them any better?
William: Nope.

Researcher: How come?
William: I don't know.

Researcher: Last time we talked you told me you felt like you were in a car that couldn’t pass inspection. Is that what you said? Tell me about that.
William: You know how you can't use a car anymore, or it's failed its inspection?

Researcher: Mmm, hmm.
William: If you don’t have a lot of money you can’t hardly buy a new car.

Researcher: Right.

William: That’s what I kind of feel like. Trapped in an old broken car with no way out.

Researcher: What’s the broken car?

William: Math.

Researcher: Math is the broken car?

William: Yeah, and I’m stuck in math and can’t get out.

Researcher: Why are you stuck in it? Tell me what you mean?

William: Well I just can’t get it, it just seems like it takes a long time to get done with it.

Researcher: Is it hard for you?

William: Yeah. The hard part of the broken car thing is it’s hard to get a new good one.

Researcher: So what do you need? A new, better math?

William: No. What I need is for math to be a pinch easier. A pinch easier and a pinch harder.

Researcher: I don’t understand.

William: Neither do I.

Researcher: Do you like math?

William: No.

Researcher: Is it just the worksheets that you don’t like?
William: Yes.
Researcher: So you like math, but just not the worksheets?
William: Yeah.
Researcher: It looks like the worksheets are easy for you though. You do them so quickly.
William: Some are, some aren't.
Researcher: Which ones are easy? The adds, the plusses or the minuses?
William: That part gives me a headache.
Researcher: Why?
William: There's so many easy and so many hard ones that I can't say.
Researcher: What ones are hard?
William: Minus, times.
Researcher: You're doing times?
William: No. If we were doing times it would be hard.
Researcher: Do you want to be doing times?
William: No. I want to wait till I'm older and know more pluses.

Homework

Children did not receive homework in kindergarten. In first grade, all of the children in this study received homework, although the type, amount, and expectations differed from teacher to teacher. Some children received a weekly packet of homework which consisted of a two page reading log, a list of spelling
words varying from 10 to 12 word families and sight words, and a page of math facts. Although initially children were excited about receiving homework, that sentiment was short lived. By the second month of school, children no longer thought it was special. Study children voiced that they “didn’t like to give up play time to do homework.”

Homework was often a source of difficulty for parents. Parents often had to request to see the homework papers, monitor children while they completed homework, remind them to place it in their school bags, and re-check to ensure it reached the child’s teacher. This was often a lengthy process. As Nicole’s parents noted:

Last week she had finished her homework and I gave her a folder because the teacher doesn’t give her a folder. For my purposes for organization and knowing what her backpack is probably going to look like I gave her one. I said, ‘Put all your stuff in here and then when you open it up you will see your lunch money in there and your homework.’ Well it went to Thursday and she still had not passed in her homework. So we talked about the lunch money is right there when you take that out you should see your spelling paper and give it to her. And finally on Thursday my husband actually took it off her hands and said, ‘I’m putting this in her mailbox with a note (Danielle, October 2004).’

Assessment

Assessment practices were discontinuous for children. In kindergarten, children were continuously assessed as part of the documentation process of
learning. Individual portfolios were kept, projects revisited, and children's thinking was documented through a variety of media. In addition, children were interviewed about their development and learning, and teacher's evaluated children's skills using a checklist of criteria. The following transcript conveys how children were assessed. During a large group format, at the summation of their investigation and project work of weddings, children were asked to document their learning. The following transcript conveys the ways in which children's work was assessed.

Nancy: We've been talking about weddings for a long time. What have you learned about weddings?

Sally: Marriage is about people getting married and not just doing whatever you want. It's doing what the bride and groom tell you to do. And that flower girls sometimes throw flower petals. This time they just held the petals.

Gretchen: It can be embarrassing when you are in a wedding.

Sally: You don't have a baby before you get married.

Gretchen: You don't have to be married to have a baby.

Julia: You don't have to get married to get a baby. But it takes a man and a woman to make a baby. They have to love each other.

Nancy: Be part of our meeting, please. We are talking about what you learned about weddings.
Nicole: I learned about weddings that people, well, the bridesmaids, they hold their trains. And the flower girl usually ... that’s it.

Cindy: I learned that you have to walk down the aisle slow.

Mary: What I learned about weddings that the, they, the bridesmaids and the flower girls don’t just have to wear one color. They can wear different colors. ... Like if there was a bridesmaid and there was this flower girl and she had this pattern...... The flower girl can have patterns, the bridesmaids can have different colored flowers. They don’t just have to have one color dress.

Nancy: Does anyone else have any other observations? Anything else you have learned, how your thinking (about weddings) might have changed?

Tara: People don’t have to have trains and bridesmaids don’t have to carry flowers.

Nancy: So, do all weddings look the same?

All: No.

Nancy: Why are weddings different?

Tara: Because.

Nancy: Why, Tess?

Tara: Because brides don’t have to wear trains and there can be a lot of flower girls and bridesmaids. Sometimes there can only be one.
Nancy: Who decides about that?
Tara: The bride and the groom?
Nancy: Why Beth?
Beth: And because everybody’s different.
Gretchen: I think because you don’t have to have it in a church.
Nancy: Julia?
Julia: To be a flower girl or bridesmaid it doesn’t have to be all ... it can be brown because people...like... Weddings have...well... it’s not nice to say ...um...it’s not nice to say only white people with white skin can go in. Because people of all colors can be in. Doesn’t have to be flower girls or bridesmaids...just peach, peach, peach, they can be brown, peach, brown.
Nancy: Good observation.

As a last activity of the wedding project, children were asked to document what they learned and thought about weddings. Children were often asked to document what they learned by expressing what they learned in many different forms, such as through the use of different media. Nancy stated:

For one of the last things to finish up our wedding exploration at center time today we are going to have you document and illustrate using our black pencils and pens. We’d like you to represent some of your thoughts and ideas about yesterday or any thoughts and ideas you have about
weddings. Anything you think about or anything that you noticed or learned about weddings. It’s up to you (June, 2004).

Two of the drawings produced by children to document what they learned during the wedding project are included as Figure 7.2.4-1.
FIGURE 7.2.4-1 KINDERGARTEN DOCUMENTATION AND ASSESSMENT

I LOVE THA WEDDE DRAS
AND I LOVE THA AMADA'S DRAS
First grade assessment practices focused on tests, timed activities, and on-going evaluation. Children took an exam during the first weeks of school. This exam was used to place children in reading, math, and writing. It was also used to evaluate children's ability and informal label children as above, on or below grade level in relation to reading, writing, and math skills.

Weekly spelling tests were a regular occurrence for children, as were homework and timed math facts. Parents complained that their child was unaccustomed to timed tasks and voiced dislike and discomfort with the tasks. Additionally, parents voiced concern over the overly evaluative nature of the classroom. Gretchen's mother explained:

There are, for example, timed activities. Children are given two math worksheets and are supposed to finish them in twenty minutes and turn them in. I think it is a much more explicitly evaluative environment. And I am not sure if the teachers are encouraging that. I am not saying the teachers are evaluating, part of what happens in first grade is that there is more self-evaluation going on and self comparison going on among the kids, but I also think that the environment is sort of lending itself more to that than at TCC. So, at TCC I felt like, just for Gretchen, I could see an environment where she is working at her own pace, where she was able to engage for extended periods in the kinds of things that she was attracted to. Very much in the child centered approach, which is not the approach at all at Mountain View (Melissa, November 2004).
In addition, the new role of student required academic responsibility outside of the classroom by requiring homework. Homework was a source of difficulty for children and parents.

7.2.5 Relationships

Discontinuity in relationships occurred for the children in this study. These discontinuities involved a failure to maintain previously stable and somewhat exclusive friendships forged during the kindergarten experience and years spent together in preschool. Study children were placed in classrooms with existing classmates and friends; however these friendships changed once first grade began. Competition for friends and sharing friends was common among study children. Four children experienced difficulty with sustaining old friendships while formulating new ones in first grade, but almost all children had some difficulty with this aspect of the social transition.

Especially challenging for one child were behavioral and social-emotional issues related to friends. Sally showed signs of distress because she was separated from her best friend when first grade classroom placements were made. Sometimes during recess, Sally would seek out her friend on the playground and want to control the space and time spent with her. Sally became very upset if her friend expressed interest or desire to play with other friends. According to her mother, “Sally had to see a guidance counselor the first week of school because at recess, her feelings were hurt during a tiff with her best friend (Margaret, September 2004).”
Two other children experienced difficulty with friendships as well. Feelings were hurt on more than one occasion when old friends expressed interest in playing and hanging out with new friends. Tara's mother offered this information:

I think making the transition where trying to meld the two groups of old friends in her class and some new friends is difficult. I've noticed she's had a little contention with some friends on the playground. In art class yesterday she had a little bit of a tiff with one of her ex-TCC people about a third party joining them (Jennifer, September 2004).

7.2.6 Image and Self-esteem

Several children were identified by their parents as struggling with self-image. In particular, two girls voiced concerns related to body image and appearance. One mother explained:

She's very concerned about her body image lately. Which is kind of odd. Not that she wasn't always conscious of what she wore. But now whether she's fat or if her hair is messy. I don't where she gets the fat thing and I was thinking it was tied into the lunch. But it doesn't seem to be. It's very weird how concerned she is about her appearance (Jennifer, September 2004).

A third child also struggled with issues of self-confidence and self-esteem. One mother commented that her daughter "didn't like deviating from the norm, standing out or apart from other children, or taking risks in school (Chelsey, October 2004). A fourth mother voiced self-image and self-esteem concerns for her daughter. She stated:
The other thing is she started saying very negative things about herself regularly. She'll say things like, 'I'm stupid. You think I'm stupid.' She said, 'I hate how I look. I hate my dark, dark hair.' This morning I was talking with her about it and there's this situation where it seems like she's been teased and I don't think her teacher's really are aware of that. But I think that part of the social environment, which is obviously a much less protected social environment. I asked who said that and she doesn't know the children. She said they are older children and they are always picking on her. She's never been like that. She's always been confident.

I think she's in an environment where people aren't always kind to her. Not to say it's a mean environment. But it does concern me that she's going to have to toughen up and cope with it. I think of a lot of children going through that. I'm concerned about her feeling bad about herself. I think she's struggling with this new environment (Melissa, November 2004).

7.2.7 Information sharing

Although the study children's developmental profiles and learning checklists were forwarded to the first grade teachers by sending teachers, they were perceived as lacking specific assessment knowledge. All three receiving teachers stated that the kindergarten report cards did not indicate a lot of useful information. Jenni summarized,

It tends to be a very positive, individual based document that documents the kind of individual strengths of the child but does not give us a lot of information about difficulties. We often get children from kindergarten with
no documentation at all about significant difficulties. That might be academic, they might be learning habits, they might be learning disabilities, behavioral issues. They are not documented in a way that is useful for us. And we plan our classrooms in this heterogeneous way, and what we would consider special needs and academic difficulties balanced. And if we don't get that information from them we can't plug them in that heterogeneous mix.

Yeah, so I think there's a lot of knowledge out there about a lot of different conditions and issues that are not addressed. The other thing is academically in kindergarten here we have a very formal assessment procedure in kindergarten, and if children are not on grade level for kindergarten and those skills we have a huge amount of one-on-one support which is put in place to make sure they are on grade level, or coming into first grade with those skills. And that's not available in that setting. When they come in we don't have a good academic assessment. Our reading specialists do the assessments of all first graders. And then if we have children that are kind of red-flagged through that initial assessment if they don't do well we do a much more in depth assessment. And from that assessment we place them for support (September, 2004). Since the report cards were developmental and not based on academic test scores in the skill areas of reading, writing, and math receiving teachers did not use the knowledge about individual children provided to build on their strengths, interests, abilities, and experiences. It's interesting to note that there
is a five month gap between kindergarten assessments and the grade one assessments. Therefore, the limited usefulness of these assessments may be argued. Additionally, according to educational law, children in this state are not mandated to attend kindergarten. Hence, it may not be reasonable for teachers to expect test scores on children's entry to school.

Information sharing is crucial to successful transition since children come to school with a variety of prior learning experiences. In order to build on children's experiences, primary teachers need to know about children's interests, abilities, and experiences (Kagan, 1994, 1999; Peters, 1998, 2000). Furthermore, Meisels (1992) asserts that it is essential for a teacher to focus on a child's current knowledge and skills, accomplishments, and life experiences for the purpose of building on them with additional knowledge, concepts, and understandings. It is clear that information sharing will enhance and ease a child's transition to school. This has been found to be an area essential to easing a child's transition to school (Broström, 2003; Fabian, 2003; Kagan, 1994; Margetts, 2000; Meisels, 1992; Peters, 1998). My finding is similar to the research conducted by Hains et al. (1988), confirming that the lack of information sharing between sending and receiving teachers may jeopardize the academic, social, and emotional gains made by children in the early years.

7.2.8 Communication

While communication about first grade was continuous the content, frequency, and timeliness of communication was discontinuous for parents, especially for those of first born children. Parents remarked that communication
was sporadic, untimely, and lacked specificity. It did not focus on individual children and was limited to weekly or monthly newsletters about curriculum and one parent conference held in November, followed by a post card progress report in April. Parents expected to be regularly informed about their child's school life, activities, events, and their child's academic progress.

In kindergarten parents received daily information about their child and the day's events. Communication during their child's kindergarten also consisted of daily contact. This daily contact included written news, notes, and reminders, and daily interactions in the morning when their child was dropped off at school and in the afternoon when their child was picked up from school. In addition to face-to-face contact and written communication, telephone calls between parents and teachers were common and served to inform parents of accidents, exciting events, or challenging behaviors in their child's day or in the day of others in the school. Kindergarten teachers also sent home weekly newsletters that communicated information to parents about their child's classroom and learning environment.

In the first grade setting, most parents remarked that they received a weekly or monthly letter regarding classroom curriculum, news, and up-coming events. However, they commented on the fact that the letter was very generic, lacked specificity, and did not offer individual information regarding children. One mother remarked:

She brings home a Friday folder with homework and a letter. It's not individualized. It's just to the parents, 'This week we did blah, blah, blah.'
And she does a summation of the week and what to expect for next week (Jennifer, September 2004).

Another mother noted that although she received a Friday letter that, “it’s hard, we used to be able to see the classroom, the teacher, and the children (Kelly, September 2004).” Other parents also commented on the lack of contact with the first grade environment. Parents stated:

We miss that personal touch of how our kid is doing, because you’re assuming they are doing fine, otherwise I think that you would hear from the teacher. But that’s a weird transition. And I think once you’ve done it already it’s not as bad the second time. You’re used to it. But the first time your child is at a school they haven’t been to and you don’t really know the teachers, you don’t know the school, it’s a big transition for a parent (Jennifer, November 2004).

For us as parents who had the daily contact with TCC, we feel completely cut out. And we can tell our child is excelling academically but we didn’t hear until our conference that the teacher didn’t think he was doing well. So this has been two months into the semester he wasn’t doing well and clearly we wanted to know earlier on. I think the lack of communication is very difficult (Nancy, November 2004).

Other parents felt that communication was lacking in first grade. One mother explained:

There is a definite lack of communication. There’s a general, generic newsletter that comes once a week, but it lacks any specificity. There’s no
day to day contact or information. And you just don't know what's going on. You can't monitor anything. There's such a lack of visibility too. It's so different from the TCC. I feel out of the loop (Margaret, September 2004).

Another parent commented:

There's not a lot. We've had one parent conference. When I brought in the book orders we exchanged a few words. But as far as daily contact there isn't any. That is the strangest transition for a parent, going from TCC to elementary I think. There is no contact (Jennifer, November 2004).

Communication is a practice that involves many individuals. Formal lines of communication need to be established between programs and schools, as well as within programs and schools, and include parents. Sending and receiving teachers should establish communication to facilitate an organized an efficient transition (Hains et al., 1988). Since parents are partners in the education of their child, the establishment of on-going communication between teachers and parents is essential. Frequent communication is conducive to parental involvement and support in schools. Additionally, parents play a vital role in facilitating and ensuring successful adjustment of their child during the transition to school. Lack of communication between and within programs and schools, sending and receiving teachers, and parents may jeopardize the academic, social, and emotional gains children made during the early years (Hains et al., 1988).
7.2.9 Parent Involvement

The support and involvement of parents and families are vital to successful transition to primary school. Through parent's assistance, children are able to build confidence and adapt to a new environment, maintain self-esteem, and confidence. They also develop positive attitudes about school. Pinkerton (1991) asserts that children achieve successful transition from early childhood education to primary school when parents are seen as teachers, educational partners, decision-makers, and advocates of their children. Bronfenbrenner (1979) postulates that best results are achieved when parents, teachers, and children work as equal partners in the transition to school. Researchers Renwick (1984) and Peters (1998) have concluded that teachers' understanding of the child's home background can facilitate communication and learning easing the transition to school.

Parents participation opportunities in first grade varied due to their work schedules, opportunities available, and teacher comfort with parent involvement. Some parents commented that involvement in the first grade classroom was minimal and there wasn't a lot of opportunity for participation, explaining that the things that parents could be involved in were "maintenance" jobs. These tasks included grading spelling tests and checking math papers. Some parents remarked that they could accompany their child on a field trip once during the year. One parent mentioned that the only way to participate in her daughter's class was to organize and compile the monthly book orders. Another parent stated, "It seems as though participation is discouraged (Margaret, September

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Additionally, William's parents commented, "their son's teacher hadn't even met their minimal requests, so parent involvement has actually been discouraged rather than encouraged (Nancy, November 2004)."

During kindergarten parents were always welcome to drop by unexpectedly and invited to share their knowledge, expertise, and interests with children and teachers. Study participant's parents were engaged and proactive in their child's education. At Mountain View Elementary few opportunities existed for parent involvement and the quality of the available opportunities was low. In general, opportunities for parents were limited to running errands, grading worksheets, or compiling book orders. In some instances, parents were allowed to accompany children on class field trips. Parents sought ways to be involved in their child's education and voiced dismay about the lack of opportunities to actively participate in their child's first grade classroom.

Although Stubbs (1998) found parent involvement to be apathetic and a negative factor in a child's transition to school, this was not the case in my study. The parents in this study clearly indicate that greater parental involvement would have eased the transition for children, parents, and possibly also, for teachers. Parents should be seen as equal partners and advocates to support and ease a child's transition to school (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Pinkerton, 1991). Evidence from previous research emphasizes the importance of parental involvement in achieving smooth transitions (Marriot, 1995; Peters, 1998; Renwick, 1984). When parents are not involved separation anxiety is increased and may transfer
anxiety to children. Separation anxiety is a common concern of parents (Deitz & Warkala, 1993; Hains et al., 1991).

7.2.10 School Procedures

Difficulties related to the transition concerned the size, procedures, and expected norms of the playground, cafeteria, and school bus. The playground was especially problematic for one child. She wet her pants several days in a row during the first weeks of school. Her mother attributed this behavior to not remembering the rules about bathroom use prior to going out on the playground. She explained:

She's been potty trained since she was two and a half and really never had accidents, ever. The first couple of weeks of school they do a bathroom run before they go out on the playground and she was just too busy to do it. And for 3 or 4 days in a row, she peed her pants. She was too embarrassed to ask to go inside because someone has to bring you in and they already had a bathroom break and she didn't go. I think because she missed it she was afraid they wouldn't let her go back in (Jennifer, October 2004).

Another mother reported that on the first day of school, her child pronounced that she, "hated lunch and recess." She explained:

The next morning when I woke her up she covered her head with her blanket and said she wasn't going back. She hated lunch! And hated recess right after lunch. When I asked her more about it she said it was too crazy - all the kids in the school are in there - and when all the kids are
on the playground it was too crowded and there wasn't anything she could do (Chelsey, September 2004).

Children and parents commented about the size and noise of the cafeteria and the lack of clarity regarding the procedure for obtaining and paying for lunch. Two children had difficulty adjusting to the size and noise levels of the cafeteria during lunch. One mother mentioned that on the first day of school, her child pronounced that, “she hated lunch and recess” and wouldn’t get hot lunch at school until she was a second grader. The other child’s mom remarked:

I think at first she had trouble getting used to lunch, because it was loud. She is not used to eating in a cafeteria with a lot of kids. So she thought that it was loud. She still sometimes comes home and hasn’t really eaten a whole lot (Tabatha’s mother, October 2004).

Two other mothers also commented that children had little time to eat and socialize during the time allotted for lunch. Other parents stated that the cafeteria had been a source of confusion for children because the procedure of getting food was not clear, and children were afraid to go through the line because they don’t know how to do it. They’ve never had to go through the line and get food and go to multiple stations. One mother explained:

I think they don’t really make it clear of what they are supposed to do. There’s a line for the main course but they don’t tell them about the table for the other things. So she didn’t realize there were other places to go and she was a little confused. She also had a little bit of trouble with the
money. She didn't get milk one day because she forgot that we had already paid for it the previous day (Nicole’s mother, October 2004).

The second mother elaborated on the cafeteria process:

I think they should explain to kids about money and how the whole cafeteria works, going through the lines and the tables and things like that, they have no idea. I have no idea (Tara’s mother, October 2004).

The bus ride was a source of discontinuity for one child because he was bullied. His mother remarked, “He was frightened when he was beaten up on the bus. But it was taken care of and now I’m not seeing that anymore (William’s mother, November 2004).”

In summary, study children experienced discontinuity in school culture, learning environment, conflict resolution, pedagogy, relationships with teachers and peers, and school procedures. Parents of study children experienced discontinuity in information sharing between teachers, communication, and opportunities for involvement in their child’s classroom.
8.0 DISCUSSION

The transition to school is seen as a period of change generally associated with stress and anxiety (Erikson, 1985) as well as excitement and enjoyment (Elliot & Lambert, 1985). Transition success is defined as the absence of major problems (Entwisle & Alexander, 1989). Successful transitions include emotional, social, and cognitive aspects. If children make successful transitions to school, they are likely to experience academic success (Fabian, 2003; Ramey & Ramey, 1994, 1998; Shotts et al., 1994; Yeboah, 2002), success throughout their primary school years, and success later in life (Broström, 2003; Gresham & Elliott, 1990; Ladd & Price 1987). Not all children experience success during the transition to school (Kienig, 2002; Pianta & Cox, 1999). While the transition to first grade offered new possibilities, and study children were excited about friendships and eager to learn new things, difficulties occurred in sustaining friendships and forging new relationships; the learning environment, pedagogy, and teacher expectations; and with the rules, routines, and procedures associated with the new environment.

Transitions can be influenced by cultural ideas of childhood, early schooling experiences, academic expectations, parental expectations, and personal competencies. Children bring to school a variety of background experiences, knowledge, and understandings; and consequently, they experience the transition to school in diverse ways (Rimm-Kaufman, Cox & Pianta, 1998). Similarly, teachers and parents have varying expectations and perspectives regarding the transition to school (Dockett & Perry, 1999). Other
factors, such as parent involvement and the amount of support provided during a transition (Entwisle, 1995), children's expectations (Broström, 1995; Christensen, 1998), and teacher expectations (Pianta & Cox, 1998, 1999) have a significant impact on transition experiences and the manner in which experiences are provided and interpreted. The factors that affect a child's transition to public school vary from individual to individual, and each factor works both independently and in conjunction with other factors to impact a child's transition. Each of these factors is likely to affect children and their capacity to adjust and to learn. The effect of each factor may vary according to each child's personality, background, and experiences.

Teachers have the potential to influence the outcome of transition as they employ teaching methods and strategies, establish classroom structure, routines and procedures, and implement rules and regulations. Differences between the kindergarten and first grade environments in this study were apparent in pedagogy, learning environments, readiness expectations, curriculum formats, and assessment practices.

As the study cohort of children from the kindergarten setting transitioned to new settings, they shared similar experiences and difficulties. Findings that significantly influenced children's transition in this study, from kindergarten to first grade included: (a) birth order, (b) relationships, (c) roles, (d) image and self-esteem, (e) development and personality, (f) ideology and pedagogy, (g) learning environment, (h) voice, (i) conformity, and (j) competencies.
8.1 The Role of Birth Order in Transition

Although there was notable variation in the time it took for children to complete the transition process, second birth order children made the transition more smoothly and in less time than did first birth order or only children. This was attributed to a variety of factors, including increased knowledge and familiarity with the school culture, structure, and procedures achieved through attendance at school events with older siblings; pre-established modes of communication; and the presence of older siblings to assume communicative, supervisory, and protective roles. Older siblings were able to offer accurate and detailed information about teachers, practices, homework, and rules and routines. They often functioned as a tour guide and established protective roles over their younger siblings, especially during the ride on the school bus.

8.2 Relationships

Establishing new friendships and relationships is a major factor in transitions. Children's entrance into public school involves identifying with new peers and teachers, adopting new reference groups and classmates (Entwisle, et al., 1987; Kakvoulis, 1994), and gaining acceptance into a new peer group (Ladd, 1990; Ladd & Price, 1987). The nature of relationships between and among children, peers, teachers, and educators has a significant impact on children's sense of belonging and acceptance within a school community (Dockett & Perry, 2001; Merritt & Dyson, 1992). Dunlop (2002) and Ladd, Birch, and Buhs (1999) suggest that a child's ability to form and maintain meaningful relationships is crucial to their transition success and influential in their school careers.
process of socialization is a crucial part of adjustment to the new environment, and a critical outcome of successful transition (Margetts, 2000). The ability to read others can ease a child's involvement and acceptance, thereby increasing social success in endeavors such as making choices about who to work with, play with, and who to avoid; and selection of friends (Fabian & Dunlop, 2002; Ladd, 1990).

In this study, all children were placed in first grade with an existing classmate or friend. There is growing evidence which suggests that successful transition to school is enhanced when children move to the same school as their early childhood education peers (Childcare Resource & Research Unit, 1994). In fact, transition success improved when a child had a sibling or close friend in the school or knew other children in the school (Elliot, 1998). Although each child made the transition with a classmate or friend and in many cases this had a buffering effect, competition among children for old friends and new friends was evident, especially on the playground. This was true of four of the ten children in this study. In one case, a child received counseling for difficulty maintaining old friendships while developing new relationships in first grade.

### 8.3 New Roles

Children's entrance into public school involves taking up a new role as a student (Entwisle, et al., 1987; Kakvoulis, 1994), and developing new academic standards by which to judge themselves and others (Entwisle, et al., 1987). During these transitions, children must cope with many new demands; experiencing an abrupt change in school environment (Kakvoulis, 1994), they
must embrace and accomplish new academic challenges (Bogat, Jones & Jason, 1980; Holland, et al., 1974; Kakvoulis, 1994), and learn new school and teacher expectations (Bensen, et al., 1979; Kakvoulis, 1994). This adjustment can be considered an ecological adjustment because children experience changes in identity, roles, and relationships (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

In addition to difficulties with friendships, some children experienced difficulty with their new role as a student. The role of student is framed by numerous factors including; the child's previous educational experience, the teacher's views of children, the classroom context and curriculum, and the relationships between home and school. These factors combined with the school setting required children to see themselves as the school sees them and to begin to think of themselves as students (Graue, 1992), judging themselves by new academic standards (Entwisle et al., 1987).

This new role as a student begins with and is defined by the distinction between work and play for both students and teachers (Graue, 1992). Children noted the distinction between work and play, and the absence of centers in first grade. The benefits of using a centers approach in primary classrooms through grade five have been documented. Centers are a highly effective tool to smooth the transition from kindergarten play-based learning to first grade seat-work and worksheets. Kindergarten teachers reported that centers function as important cooperative learning activities. Based on my observations, first grade teachers used centers as play or an activity to occupy free time. Receiving teachers' use of worksheet stations, instead of centers was not well received by study children.
Adjusting to new relationships and roles during transition can have lasting effects on a child's sense of well being and how they view themselves, the value they feel that others place on them, the way they are seen as learners, and how they learn. The construction of self emerges as children construct ideas about the social roles of teacher and student through their interactions in school (Kantor, 1988). In general, study children viewed themselves as capable and competent first graders. However, two children struggled with academic expectations and their role as a student.

8.4 Image and Self-esteem

All children experience changes in identity, roles, and relationships during transition (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). If transitions are difficult, these changes may result in regression, low self-esteem, and heightened sensitivity to personal image. Three children in this study experienced low self-esteem and saw themselves as unsuccessful students because they experienced difficulty related to academics (math and English) or were labeled as academically below grade level.

In addition, three female children experienced difficulty in the transition related to body image, appearance, or individuality. Parents commented on the fact that children voiced dislike or discomfort with their size and weight, hair color, dress appearance, or any behavior that deviated from the norm. These feelings were attributed to peer pressure, lack of conformity, and fear of risk-taking experiences during the transition. Feelings of low self-esteem based on looks and appearance have not been previously reported in the transition
literature for children of this age group. This could be a recent phenomenon, possibly influenced by the frequent exposure of these children, their peers, and older friends or siblings to television and magazine advertising. The extent to which these feelings occur in the first grade setting is a potential avenue for further research.

8.5 Development and Personality

A number of individual and personal factors can affect school transition. The factors that affect a child’s transition to school include cognitive and social development, self-esteem, and confidence of each child (Elliot, 1998); special needs, ethnic background, and cultural practices; and social skills, friendships and personality. Each of these factors is likely to affect children and their capacity to adjust and to learn. Children vary tremendously in the variety and depth of personal factors; consequently, they experience the transition to school in diverse ways (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 1998). Additionally, each factor works both independently and in conjunction with other factors to impact a child’s transition.

Three children experienced difficulty in transition related to their cognitive capability and competence. One child struggled with speech, language acquisition, reading, and writing because English was a second language for him and for his parents. The second child experienced transition difficulties related to exceptionally high cognitive competence. He was identified as being several grade levels above his classmates in reading, language, vocabulary and comprehension skills. Consequently, he was unchallenged and bored, and had
difficulty sitting still after quickly completing the same worksheets and assignments as his classmates. According to his parents, the child's boredom manifested itself into an abundance of energy and need for physical movement in the classroom. In addition, this child displayed withdrawal, stomach aches, fatigue, and other behaviors that appeared to suggest anxiety and depression. Although a child's withdrawal and failure to fully participate in classroom activities is not uncommon in children placed in totally different learning environments (Klerfelt & Graneld, 1994), the receiving teacher did not perceive these behaviors as indicative of transition.

A third child experienced difficulty in reading and was placed in Title 1 support services. According to both her teacher and mother, the child exhibited regressive behaviors at school and at home. Kienig (2002) suggests regressive behaviors may occur when a child is repeatedly faced with tasks beyond their capabilities without sufficient adult support. When a child experiences a loss of existing knowledge and skills there is a risk of seeing oneself as a passive and incompetent person. This can result in low self-esteem and insecurity (Broström, 2003). Although the child's parents and teacher provided evidence of the child's regressive behaviors, it is possible that the child could have experienced difficulty with transition and struggled with an underlying reading problem.

Transition is also affected by a child's personality. As predicted by sending teachers, three children were perceived as fiercely independent and strong willed because they questioned classroom structure, procedures, or timed events. Other children needed time to transition from one activity to another and
were perceived by receiving teachers as difficult and stubborn, unable to compromise or unable to follow rules.

8.6 Ideology and Pedagogy

Pedagogy refers to the science, art, and profession of teaching (Martin, 2001). In its broadest sense, the term encompasses a teacher’s philosophy about teaching; beliefs about children; development and learning theories; learning goals and outcomes; children’s capabilities; and how best to meet the needs of children (Martin, 2001). Several recurring threads that emerged in these data related to the views of early learning and pedagogy. Differences between sending and receiving teachers encompassed beliefs about children, beliefs about readiness, teaching philosophy, instructional approach; curriculum, and assessment. All of these factors coalesced to influence and shape the transition experiences of the study children and their parents. Mellor (1991) examined the structural divisions between pre-school and primary school and found that this division reflects major differences in pedagogy, teaching philosophy, and educational goals.

Beliefs about Children

An important component of pedagogy is the beliefs that teachers have regarding the children in their classroom (Hendrick, 1997; Fraser & Gestwicki 2000; Fu, Stremmel, & Hill, 2002). A comparison of sending and receiving teachers’ beliefs about children revealed significant differences. These differences were evident in sending and receiving teacher beliefs about study children prior to the children’s arrival in first grade.
At Mountain View teacher's beliefs about children and their capabilities seemed to be based on their academic performance, skills, and competencies. In particular, teachers appeared to formulate opinions about children based on informal observations and identified weaknesses extracted from formal tests administered during the first weeks of school. Teachers' expressed their beliefs about children by identifying individual social, behavioral, and academic weaknesses. Conformity was stressed over children's strengths and individuality.

At TCC, as stated by Kindergarten teacher, Sue, teachers believed that children were "competent, resourceful, and intelligent given the appropriate learning materials, resources, and supports (May 2004)." Developmentally appropriate materials and activities were combined with a responsive environment and flexible schedule. Children's uniqueness and individual capabilities and competencies were validated, valued, and supported throughout learning contexts and activities. In addition, teachers valued and respected children's ideas, work, and individual learning styles. This was often evidenced by documenting, displaying, and re-visiting children's work.

Beliefs about readiness skills

Readiness assumes that all children attain the same level of performance and competences at a single culturally defined point in time (Pianta & Walsh, 1996). The notion of readiness includes principles of child development and other child-centered practices. Used in relation to the start of formal (public) education, it represents the extent to which a child is capable of benefiting from
the activities, expectations and goals of a program (Graue, 1992; Meisels, 1999). A child is ready for school when s/he is in a position to fully participate in school life. "It is the combined result of having the processes, policies and activities which allow children to settle into school life, as well as the preparation children receive prior to entering primary school" (Yeboah, 2002, pg. 60).

Readiness standards assume children should fit a set of rigid expectations rather than the idea that programs need to adapt for children's individual variation and that they can reliably and validly measure young children's abilities (NAEYC, 1990). School readiness standards create the potential for accountability polices that may be harmful to or penalize young children (Meisels, 1992).

School readiness is a two-sided equation: a child's readiness for school and the school's readiness to receive a child. With regard to what a child brings to school, teachers and administrators need to move beyond a narrow and traditional, cognitive-academic, school-readiness orientation to include social-emotional skills and orientation which the child brings to school and the experiences the child has with the family and with non-parental child care prior to school entry (Belsky & MacKinnon, 1994). Successful transitions require consideration of children's previous knowledge, experiences, and expectations.

Yeboah (2002) asserts that a child's ability to adapt to the new school environment is a function of his or her readiness for school. Elliot and Lambert (1985), postulate that children who are not well prepared for school encounter difficulties settling into school. Children's adjustment to first grade may be influenced by teachers' and parents' perceptions of what skills and behaviors
children need for school success. Kindergarten teacher's stated that all study children possessed the necessary social, behavioral and academic readiness skills and behaviors to be successful in first grade. Although teachers noted that the degree of skills differed between individuals, they felt certain that the children were ready for the challenges and demands of first grade. However, in first grade, despite children's eagerness to fully participate in school life, receiving teachers reported that study children were socially, behaviorally, and academically, unprepared for the demands of first grade. Children's social and behavior shortcomings focused on the ability to resolve conflict, short attention spans, and high activity levels. Academic concerns focused on lack of attention to detail, essential reading and math skills, and competency in reading, spelling, and writing. Comparatively, sending and receiving teachers were generally in agreement about the "list" of essential readiness skills required for entry into first grade. However, these teachers differed in their expectations regarding the degree to which children should be proficient within specific readiness skills. For instance, sending teachers believed that children should have a knowledge of the letters and corresponding sounds of the alphabet, whereas, receiving teachers expressed that children should be skilled at sounding out words while spelling many correctly, in addition to properly forming each letter of the alphabet.

Kienig (2002) suggests that within the initial period of transition, repeated situations in which a child is presented with tasks beyond their capabilities and a simultaneous lack of adult support may result in a child's developmental regressing, causing sadness and even depression. Therefore, teachers should
make certain that the tasks children face are compatible with children's
developing capabilities. Klerfelt and Graneld (1994) found that if the learning
approach in the primary school is totally different from the child's preschool
(kindergarten) experience, the child withdrew from full participation in class
activities. My study confirmed this finding.

**Instructional Approach**

Early childhood educational approaches typically differ from primary
school educational approaches. During the preschool and kindergarten years
children are encouraged to explore and develop their potential in an environment
designed to promote oral, intellectual, physical, emotional, moral, and social skills
(Bredekkamp & Copple, 1996, 1997). The learning context is one in which
children are encouraged to initiate their own learning activities through play.
Within the primary school situation learning is more structured with the teacher
determining what the children do and learn (Yeboah, 2002).

Crone and Malone (1979) have suggested that if the benefits of pre-school
are to be carried over to the child's learning in primary school, the two settings
must offer continuous learning experiences. Curtis (1986) suggests that
discontinuities in curriculum content and differing ideologies of the pre-school
and primary educators (emphasis on social and personal development of
children in preschool, emphasis on teaching the basic skills of reading, writing,
and mathematics in the primary school) are areas in which children may
experience a lack of continuity which could lead to anxiety and distress and thus
hinder learning. My findings are consistent with Curtis' findings in relation to learning environment, curriculum content, and ideologies.

Teachers' instructional approaches reflected their views on development and learning. At TCC, teachers believed that children construct knowledge in a social context and in collaboration with peers and adults (teachers and parents). The primary goal for children was to work in partnership with others to develop ideas, topics of study that were meaningful and relevant to children while supporting the development of problem solving, theory building, critical thinking, and autonomy. The instructional delivery approach was achieved through project work that embedded literacy skills within the curriculum. At Mountain View, teachers believed that children acquire and develop knowledge individually, through the transmission of subject content knowledge. The instructional delivery approach was achieved through a drill and practice format, which almost always included worksheets. The primary goal for children was to develop skills and knowledge to succeed in reading, writing, spelling, and mathematics.

My observations indicate that in kindergarten, children worked towards becoming more autonomous and responsible in their learning endeavors. During project work, as children worked cooperatively to solve problems they developed social skills and critical thinking skills while becoming resourceful learners. Since children were given choice about what to work on and how to do it, they developed enthusiasm and excitement for learning.

In the kindergarten setting the daily schedule was flexible, children initiated activities, and interaction among children was encouraged, facilitated,
and supported. Teachers saw cooperative work among students as a regular and critical element for children's construction of knowledge. While in the first grade setting cooperation among children was viewed more as "not doing one's own work." Children were discouraged, and at times, scolded for leaving their seat to help one another with a math problem or spelling a word.

**Curriculum**

Teachers' selection and implementation of curriculum, instructional approaches, and assessment practices influence a child's transition and the learning environment. In many instances of transition difficulty, children's capabilities don't match teacher expectations. This can be further complicated if there is a mismatch between children's learning styles and teachers' instructional approaches. Significant differences existed between the curriculum, instructional delivery methods, and academic goals of the first grade and kindergarten environments. Tensions arose for study children and their parents between the early childhood pedagogy of challenging, provoking, and supporting learning through scaffolding and creating settings for child-initiated experiences, and the primary public school teacher's roles of imparting information or instructing children in largely groups. It became apparent that the move from the prior to the later led to problems for some children during the transition.

For uninterrupted learning to occur, curricular objectives should be designed to match each child's developmental level. Receiving teachers need to know what the child's accomplishments, strengths, and past experiences have been so that new ideas and experiences can be linked to prior ones. Children
build on their experiences and learn best when their self-esteem and security are not at risk as they meet new and challenging situations (Bredekamp & Copple, 1996, 1997). Even though curriculum and learning objectives and goals may be different, teachers can identify the underlying skills, concepts and competencies they seek for children and bridge the gap enabling children to be successful.

In this study's Kindergarten the emphasis was on the processes of development and learning. The curriculum was an emergent curriculum based on children's interests, needs, and capabilities. An emergent curriculum supported children's self-expression, creativity, and curiosity; while promoting exploration and discovery in a project based learning environment. Children acquired knowledge and skills across subject matter and applied critical thinking and problem solving skills while completing a project of interest and value to them. This approach fostered a sense of independence and autonomy among children because they were granted voice, choice, and respect through this emergent curriculum approach. Instructional delivery was achieved through center and authentic project work that embedded literacy skills within the curriculum framework.

The first grade curriculum was traditional, structured, teacher initiated, and teacher focused. The emphasis was on knowledge, skills, attitudes, and procedures related to teaching and instruction. Segmented by subject areas, the mode of delivery was predominately teacher lecture followed by individual seatwork, completing worksheets in reading, writing, spelling and mathematics. This achieved the goal of conformity among children. Children's academic skill
and competency was evaluated by timed activities (completion of worksheets), weekly tests, and homework. These differences created transition difficulties for children in this study, and have been shown to make transition more difficult for other children as well (Curtis, 1986; Honig, 1978; Kienig, 2002; Klerfelt & Graneld, 1994).

First grade teachers noted that they face pressure from accountability standards that currently focus on numeracy and literacy, to "push down" the primary school curriculum into the first grade and to replace child-initiated activities with teacher-directed ones, including use of worksheets, seat work, timed activities and tests. They also noted that philosophically, they didn't necessarily agree with this method of instructional delivery, but were accountable to state and federal mandates. The downward thrust of our educational system, according to Bredekamp and Shepard (1989) is not unusual today. This thrust has pressured many teachers to utilize practices conflicting with their philosophical beliefs so that students can meet the academic expectations of the next grade.

There is no clear dividing line between academics and other parts of a high-quality curriculum for young children (Hyson 2003). Children are learning academics from the time they are born through play, relationships, and informal opportunities to develop the basis of later knowledge in areas such as visual arts, science, mathematics, and literacy. As children transition into K-3 education, it is appropriate for the curriculum to pay focused attention to these and other subject matter, while still emphasizing physical, social, emotional, cognitive, and
language development, as well as connections across domains while maintaining active involvement in learning (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 2003). Furthermore, curriculum should focus on children's emerging knowledge and skill in all areas, using their curiosity, creativity and initiative, promote their developing attitudes as "learners", and lead to their recognition of their own competence (NAEYC & NAECS/SDE, 2003).

Curriculum Demands

The first grade curriculum requires specific goals to meet by the child regardless of the method of instruction. This requires that children be aware of and achieve these goals. Several parents voiced concern about reading and writing for their child citing that their child had said, "It is hard." When asked if she liked reading class, one child replied, "Yes," but was ambivalent about the difficulty of the subject and revealed the pressure associated with the expectation that she should be reading upon entry to first grade. Parents reported emotional stress in their child related to school entrance, the new role as a student, and acceptance by teachers and peers. Consequently, parents reported that their children exhibited increased sensitivity, fatigue, and in some instances regressive behaviors.

Assessment

In kindergarten children's learning was documented and assessed through individual portfolios, individual and group projects, journals, and participation in the community. Teachers created a developmental narrative profile, which summarized children's social, emotional, and cognitive growth while stressing
their interests, strengths, and individuality. Since this information was not based on findings from a standardized or formal test, and did not document social, behavioral or academic weaknesses and issues, receiving teachers dismissed the information as useless.

While acknowledging that sending teachers had forwarded student records, including study children’s narrative developmental profiles and skills checklists (Appendix I), receiving teachers expressed concerns about the lack of formal assessments administered at the kindergarten level at the TCC. They stated that the developmental profiles were anecdotal and did not provide adequate information about children’s difficulties or weaknesses. While they believed that children’s records contained a great deal of information, it was information that was not useful because it did not contain academic scores or information resulting from formal assessments. Receiving teachers ignored the literacy skills checklist that accompanied the developmental profiles. Furthermore, they did not value the identified individual strengths, interests, or development in the way TCC documented children’s growth, development, and learning experiences. While the developmental profiles and literacy skills checklist did provide information about individual strengths, they were limited in the depth of information provided about individual concerns.

Evaluation and assessment practices were significantly different between sending and receiving teachers. In first grade, the teachers in this study administered academic placement tests during the first weeks of school, weekly spelling and math tests, homework, and annual standardized tests in response to
state and national educational mandates. Teachers were pressured to rely heavily on testing practices as a result of the No Child Left Behind legislation. Perhaps most damaging is the fact that these tests were administered prior to completion of the transition process. In some cases, these tests were used to label children as deficient and start a tracking trajectory based on little data or data collected in the midst of a difficult transition period, when children may have been emotionally distraught and unable to perform at their normal level of ability.

In first grade, the teachers in this study administered formal tests to study children for reading and math placement purposes (Appendix J). Standardized and formal achievement tests, however may not accurately measure learning, disrupt the classroom, skew the curriculum, and may lead to anxiety, frustration, and stress in young children (Kohn, 1999). Consequently NAEYC discourages the administration of such tests to children age's three to eight. In their position statement on testing of young children, NAEYC (1988) voiced its opposition to standardized and formal tests stating that use of them only provides a snapshot of a child's growth, leads to developmentally inappropriate curricular demands and instructional practices such as tracking, and does not reflect current theory or research concerning development and learning.

This study documented the impact of formal testing administered during the period of transition. Study children experienced testing during a stressful transition; consequently three children were referred for additional educational services. Major changes in children's lives can influence transition and have lasting effects on their sense of well-being, how they see themselves, the value
they feel that others place on them, the way they are seen as learners, and subsequently, how they are able to learn. (Bertram & Pascal, 2002; Davis, 1995; Entwisle & Alexander, 1989; Ladd, 1990; Ramey & Ramey, 1998) Children's marks in first grade strongly forecast marks throughout their elementary school years, and are a more reliable predictor of future performance than test scores because they are sensitive to the child's gender, ethnicity, and economic background (Entwisle & Alexander, 1999).

8.7 Learning Environment

Transition requires adjustment from a previous learning environment to a new one. Generally, children who experience similar environments and expectations at home and school are likely to find the transition to school easier (Nelson, 1995). The converse is true as well; children who find school unfamiliar and unrelated to their home contexts tend to experience difficulty, confusion, and anxiety during the transition (Toomey, 1989). Children who experience similar learning environments, expectations, rules and routines in kindergarten and first grade will likely find the transition smoother. Likewise, children who experience dissimilar learning environments, expectations, rules and routines will likely experience difficulty, confusion and anxiety during the transition from kindergarten to first grade.

Challenges and difficulties are likely to arise from discontinuity in learning environments. Curtis (1986) identified changes in the physical environment, differences in classroom organization, discontinuities in curriculum content, and differing ideologies of teachers as areas where children experienced distress in
their transition to primary school. Dahlberg and Taguchi (1994) identified two social constructs of the child, the child in pre-school, and the child in primary school. These constructs identified the child as “nature” in the pre-school setting, and as “a cultural and knowledge producer” in the primary school setting. For children to transition successfully from early childhood education environments to primary school environments they must comprehend the primary school culture and learning contexts.

In her research on transitions, Margetts (1997) found that adjustment to school was easier when children were familiar with the new situation and parents were informed about the new school learning context and educational approaches. Although the sending and receiving teachers and schools forwarded school information to families, neither the children nor the parents in this study were well informed about the learning contexts or the school culture of the new setting, an important component of adjustment to the new school that makes transitions smoother for children and parents.

Learning environments were discontinuous in significant ways for study children and their parents causing a sense of powerlessness among them. In kindergarten, children were encouraged to explore and develop their potential in an environment designed to promote individuality, creativity, voice, choice, and collaboration among peers. Children initiated learning activities as a function of their interests, choice, strengths, and abilities through a play format. In first grade, the learning environment and curriculum was more structured with the teacher determining what children did, how they did it, and when they did it.
(Yeboah, 2002). The results of my study are consistent with the findings of Nelson (1995), Toomey (1989), and Curtis (1986). This difference is important because it foretells the overall sense of loss of voice and choice and increased powerlessness that was expressed as difficult by every child and by many parents.

8.8 Voice

In first grade, children were expected to do more listening than speaking within group discussions and conversations. Children were given noticeably less voice (participation) in conversations during morning meetings, whole group discussions, and student-teacher exchanges. During my observations, I noted that conversations which included the teacher and students in whole group and morning meetings lasted an average of 30 minutes less in the first grade setting than in the kindergarten setting. In addition to a decrease in the length of time that the discussion lasted, the depth and level of student participation was less. In general the first grade discussions and conversations lacked sufficient time for (a) open discussion (things that children wanted to talk about); (b) focused discussion (things the teacher wanted to talk about); (c) students to think, reflect, and articulate their thoughts; and (d) all children to contribute to the discussion. Study children were not accustomed to the teacher dominating the conversation.

In kindergarten, children and teachers typically greeted one another, planned the day, and began or continued previous discussions. During conversations and discussions children were given as much time as they needed to express ideas, articulate opinions, ask questions, and relate their interests and
experiences to the topic or curriculum being discussed. Kindergarten teacher’s listened carefully to children; their comments were respected and valued, and their ideas were validated by teachers. Teachers recorded children’s conversations as they unfolded during morning circle and other discussion times. Later teachers would document children’s work by preparing transcripts of the children’s conversations and distributing them to parents as a way to convey curriculum content and promote communication.

8.9 Conformity

In first grade, children were expected to conform to a structured environment that contained explicit rules, procedures, and routines that were teacher directed. The teacher determined what children did, how they did it, and when they did it. This finding was similar to the findings of Dahlberg and Taguchi (1994), Pratt (1985), and Yeboah (2002).

The first grade environment was a more formal arrangement where children were assigned to a seat at a table. There were fewer toys, centers, and choices for children. Activities and materials were chosen by the teachers and all the children were involved in the same activity at the same time. Learning activities were more structured with time constraints, and focused on learning the academic skills, thereby limiting children’s’ exploration and creativity. In addition, children were expected to be more or less at the same cognitive levels. Several children did not conform to this arrangement, creating stress for them, their parents, and their teachers.
In addition, there was an emphasis on "right and wrong" behavior, as well as working individually and quietly without getting up and moving around at will. First grade teachers had behavioral concerns about a number of study children's personal and social behaviors. In particular, these children questioned rules, procedures, routines, and curricular formats such as tests and worksheets that they did not understand or that were different from those previously encountered during their kindergarten experience. Children's questions and related behaviors were interpreted as challenging authority, rude, and disrespectful to teachers. Children's behaviors did not conform to the norm. Children's need for choice and voice regarding curriculum, instructional approaches, and classroom rules and routines was interpreted as inappropriate and socially unacceptable by receiving teachers. This may be attributed to the fact that families have empowered their children to seek knowledge, ask questions, and voice their opinions; having less to do with children's kindergarten experience.

8.10 Prior Competencies: Strengths or Liabilities?

Prior to and during the transition to school children develop attitudes, behaviors, and competencies associated with later academic and social success (Pianta & Cox, 1999). The analysis of these data suggests that although the Kindergarten teachers in this study felt that the children had skills and knowledge which made it possible for them to function in kindergarten, some children were not able to transform these competencies to the first grade context. Although children succeeded in coping with first grade life after the first weeks of school, some children still experienced difficulty well into the month of December.
A number of factors may be responsible. Did the children obtain a sufficient level of maturity, personal, or social development? Were their skills and knowledge sufficiently integrated to construct competencies? The move to primary school may be followed by a shift in emphasis from development to learning before a child is able to cope. Being able to participate in more formal instructional practices and curriculum-oriented activities relies on children's ability to be cognizant of, and reflect on their own knowledge and experiences (Pratt, 1985). Perhaps some children did not have this ability. Two other possibilities exist, contextual and situated learning or vast differences between the kindergarten and first grade school cultures.

Perhaps the issue can be better understood in terms of the influence of contexts and the connections among these contexts, commonly referred to as situated learning (Lave, 1997; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Rogoff, 1990). Lave and Wenger (1991) argue for social and contextual learning, which happens in a specific shared social practice. Thus learning is rooted in a specific situation; learning is situated. This contextual view doesn't see the child's learning as a cognitive structure in the child, but as shared social knowledge and skills learned in and related to a shared social practice. The child's competence is social in two ways; the child shares, learns, and masters his knowledge and skills together with others and these are tied up with the context they are learned in. In addition, these are not easily transferred to another social context. Rogoff (1998) argues that remembering is a socially situated activity and different sociocultural contexts create different memory-relevant learning environments and
consequently enhance different skills. Schooling also appears to underlie some to the cultural influences on memory (Cole, 1996; Rogoff, 1998).

In Lave's (1997) view, learning is seen as a "social process that rests on an understanding of social life as a matter of structure, immediate lived experiences, and of participation with others in ongoing social practice" (pg. 145). Lave's interpretation of situated learning is consistent with a Vygotskian (1978b) view which argues for the idea that child's individual learning consists of interactions between the child and the surrounding objects and people. Ideas are built socially, formed as a result of relationships and interactions with the people around them (Mehan, 1979). Perhaps study children who previously participated in a child-centered cooperative learning environment characterized by centers and project based curriculum, were unable to fully participate in a teacher centered environment characterized by independent activities, worksheets, and timed tasks.

Another possible factor may be attributed to large differences between the kindergarten and first grade school cultures. Some children were not able to make use of their acquired kindergarten competencies because life in kindergarten asked for different competencies. Kindergarten was characterized by the time, space, materials, and supports for children's own initiatives, activities and socialization. In first grade, children were expected to participate in teacher-initiated and directed activities which contained the traditional curriculum content. There was a contradiction between children's self-initiated and self-governed life in kindergarten and a more teacher-initiated and teacher-directed life in first
grade. Consequently children are forced to make an enormous shift in their behavior and learning. Some children struggled with this shift.

Children’s ability to adapt to a new setting and to benefit educationally from it may be reflected in the degree to which their sending and receiving teachers have collaborated in a shared conceptual framework of children’s competencies and learning (Dunlop, 2002). The knowledge, skills, and competencies that children constructed and relied on during preschool and kindergarten allowed them to be successful in a child-centered classroom, but not in the teacher-centered first grade classroom. Children found that those same competencies that were functional and valued in kindergarten did not work for them in this particular public school setting. When a child experiences a loss of existing knowledge and skills, there is a risk of seeing oneself as a passive and incompetent person. This can result in low self-esteem and insecurity, all of which may be a hindrance for the child’s opportunities to benefit from the social and educational life in school.

In light of the evidence that children moving between different learning environments and developmentally inappropriate classrooms exhibit more stress behaviors, it is especially important for teachers to follow developmentally appropriate guidelines. The same case can be made for primary teachers who receive children transitioning from a private kindergarten program to a first grade public school classroom. In the first grade classrooms, teachers included both developmentally appropriate and inappropriate activities. For example, teachers divided the curriculum into separate subjects, rather than integrating subjects into
meaningful activities in which children played an active role, implemented
teacher directed activities focusing on worksheets and individual seatwork, and
administered formal tests in the first weeks of school. Perhaps these
developmentally inappropriate practices reflect teachers' response to increased
pressure from state and federal mandates and other accountability measures to
emphasize academic skills and competencies in younger children to prepare
them for the skills necessary to be successful in the primary grades.

Continuity supports development. With continuity, young children and
their families are able to form meaningful relationships with teachers and peers
and to learn to anticipate the rules and expectations of an unfamiliar setting
(Peters, 2000). Continuity between settings balances new experiences with
previous and familiar ones. Learning is facilitated when children can choose
activities, make decisions about how to demonstrate their learning on a given
topic, and engage in conversations with friends while working (Espinosa, 2002).

8.11 Conclusion

My theoretical framework for this study is based on Bronfenbrenner's
(1979) eco-psychological perspective of the person-process-context model
where adjustment to a program or institution outside the family, such as the
transition to school, is defined as an ecological transition. This means during
transition there are changes in identity, roles, and relationships. “An ecological
transition whenever a person's position in the ecological environment is altered
as the result of a change in role, setting, or both (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 26).”
Interactions of a child in different social systems and interactions among these
systems is considered, school is understood as a microsystem, connecting school with the child's family, with school working as a mesosystem. Societal norms and values work within a macro-system level. The process of adjustment requires meeting the demands of these two environments. According to Bronfenbrenner (1989), the positive effects of the new environment are conditioned by whether or not the child is emotionally supported in this period.

Bronfenbrenner (1989) argued the importance of studying development in context, perceiving interrelated ecological systems on a number of levels. Each level is related to and influenced by the others with the microsystems of day-to-day experiences. In educational transitions, children occupy three environments or microsystems: their home, their pre-school, and their school world. Although each contains the developing person, there is a need to look beyond the single setting to the relationships between them. These interconnections can be seen as important for the child as events taking place within any one of the single settings. Bronfenbrenner (1979) calls these settings mesosystems. Necessarily, it is important that people occupying each level and each system are also active by interconnections (Dunlop, 2002).

Four underlying complexities of transitions emerged in my data (a) the importance of children's microsystems; their home, their pre-school and kindergarten, and their first grade public school world; (b) the transferability of previously acquired competencies, skills, and learning behaviors in the first grade learning environment; (c) conformity; the loss of voice, choice, and control over
children's learning; and (d) the tension between beliefs about DAP and compliance with legislative mandates such as NCLB.

8.12 Study Limitations

There are a variety of kindergarten program types and heterogeneity in the experiences and capabilities of children. Although kindergarten in the United States is a nearly universal experience for young children, it is not a uniform one (Zill, 1999). The kindergarten experiences of children are diverse. For example, some children attend kindergarten for a half day, others a full day, some attend kindergarten in the same public school as they will attend first grade, others attend kindergarten in private programs, then shift to public school to attend first grade, as they did in this study. Children also differ in their educational backgrounds and degrees of preparation for school.

This study focused on a particular group of children who transitioned from a private, not-for-profit University kindergarten program to first grade classroom in public school. Additionally, the receiving teachers of five study children declined to participate in this study. Most of the children had previously attended pre-schools and child care programs prior to kindergarten entry. In addition, parents stated that they placed their children in this kindergarten program in part because of the exceptional nurturance of teachers, the child-centered approach to learning, and the attention given to children's individual strengths, creativity, and unique competencies. This study lacks comparison with other groups of children that enter grade one from home, other centers with different philosophies, and public school kindergarten. Since this study was conducted
with a particular group of children in a specific setting, the transferability and generalizations of these findings are limited.

Another limitation of this study is my subjectivity. I was an administrative intern at TCC for one semester during my doctoral study giving me an "insider view" of TCC. My interest in transition stems from my training and 15 years of experience as an early childhood and elementary educator witnessing children's difficulties with transition. I have a privileged view of children as they grow, develop, and learn. My critical stance is based on the constructivist educational views of Piaget (1965, 1969), Dewey (1938), Vygotsky (1978b), and the Reggio Emilia approach (Cadwell, 1997). Furthermore, as an experienced educator, I value developmentally appropriate classrooms and practices. The academic nature of the early and primary grades has become in my view, inappropriate, placing unnecessary stress and anxiety on young children.
9.0 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TRANSITION PRACTICE AND POLICY

Given the variety of settings from which young children transition and as the number of Kindergarten programs increases in the private and public schools, educators need to examine and re-evaluate some of the policies and procedures that have traditionally guided the way children are introduced to school. On the national level we are becoming increasingly aware of the need to give all children, regardless of background or disability, the opportunity to learn and to be successful through learning. This is echoed in the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, which states that all children will start school ready to learn emphasizing the role that early experiences play in preparing children for successful schooling for school entrance. Yet, many educational practices at the pre-school, kindergarten, and first grade levels are not conducive to success for a large number of children (Gulley, Matthias & Zobairi, 1991).

School is a difficult period of adjustment for both children and parents. Early childhood educators, psychologists, pediatricians, and advocates for children view transition planning as a crucial component of all school programs. Successful transitions reduce stress for children, families, and teachers, and may have profound implications for success during the rest of a child's life (Shotts et al., 1994). By supporting children and families through the process of transition, the skills necessary for all the life-stage transitions that follow are modeled.

The importance of transition to school presupposes a need to identify and discuss ways of minimizing the negative effects on children's future learning and development. The fact that children in this study encountered difficulty during the
transition to public school confirms the necessity of recommending strategies and practices for parents, teachers, and administrators that promote and enhance smooth transitions to school.

Current best practice dictates that transitions be seen as a gradual and continual process, rather than a periodic one. Transition practices and responsibilities reach far beyond the simple physical transfer of children and their records (Lazzari & Kilgo, 1989). Successful transition involves on-going communication and continuous clarification of expectations and the building of bridges between the comfortable and familiar program and the new and unfamiliar program, as well as between parents and teachers. It also involves the ability to recognize the signs of transition stress and taking appropriate action on behalf of children and their families.

9.1 Signs of Transition Stress

Difficult transitions generally produce certain behaviors in young children. While all children display stress at times, severe stress is indicated when a child consistently displays several stress behaviors over an extended period of time. Signs of transition stress include a variety of behaviors (Brazelton & Sparrow, 2001; Cantor, Paige, Roth, Romero, & Carroll, 2004) such as:

1. Difficult separations from parents and siblings.
2. Frequent worry about where one is going after school.
3. Not wanting to go to school or frequently complains about school.
4. Repeated complaints of stomach or head aches.
5. Frequent tardiness or absences from school.
6. Regressions such as thumb sucking, infantile speech, or bedwetting.
7. Frequent bathroom accidents or soiling oneself.
8. Cries easily and frequently.
9. Extreme tiredness or fatigue.
10. Difficulty staying focused or on task.
11. Difficulty transitioning from activity to activity.
12. Creates diversions from school work.
13. Complains school is too hard.
14. Demonstrates poor work habits.
15. Frequently negatively compares self to others.
16. Complains about lack of friends.
17. Shows little or no interest in academics or school activities.
18. Exhibits feelings of isolation and loneliness.
19. Appears withdrawn or depressed.
20. Exhibits frequent aggressiveness.

9.2 Children

A transition process should be in place for all children to acclimate to new environments, teachers, and peers, and to new routines, schedules and rules at a gradual pace. This gradual pace increases a child’s comfort level and reduces anxiety about school. Children should have some voice about those aspects of the classroom atmosphere, structure, and routine in which they are expected to participate in for the next year. In my experience as an early childhood classroom teacher, practices that alleviate anxiety and reduce stress include
children’s participation in the process of rule making. If children are given opportunities to contribute to the discussion about rules before they are expected to abide by them they are more likely to value them. Children are not responsible or mature enough to make all of the classroom rules and decisions, nor should they. I believe that children have rights in our society and should be included in some aspects of classroom control. For children, this participation facilitates a sense of community, individual rights and responsibility, and a sense of belonging and ownership of the classroom (DeVries & Kohlberg, 1987; DeVries & Zan, 1994; Bredekamp and Copple, 1997). In short, it eases transition and accelerates a child’s ability to learn.

Carr (1997) emphasizes the transactional model of learning which says that seeking children’s perspectives is vital for the bridging of the child-adult gap and the co-constructing of mutual understanding between adults and children in a place of learning. Carr (2000) found that a child’s voice may influence teaching and learning. This assumes that both teacher and learners voices will, and should, define the intent and the learning of the educational setting.

Although learning should be continuous and interrelated, early childhood education and public school programs are disparate and unrelated due to differing philosophies and structure. Thus, parents, teachers, and administrators are faced with the challenge of joining together to promote continuity, bridging the differences between settings, and smoothing transitions to enable children to continue to grow, develop, and learn. Learning and development are facilitated when conversations between teacher and learner are characterized by optimal
conditions of reciprocity, progressively increasing complexity, mutuality of positive feelings, and a gradual shift in the balance of power toward the learner (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Smith (1999), and Moore and Dunham (1995), found that learning and development are facilitated by reciprocity and joint attention between both children and adults, revealing joint understanding about the learning process and about one another. Children can be coached by both parents and teachers to take an active role in their understanding and discussion of their learning.

9.3 Parents

Parents can alleviate anxiety and stress thereby smoothing transitions by becoming effective advocates for their children and others (NAEYC, 1990, 2000; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1997; U.S. Department of Education 1992). They can hold schools accountable for what they say they do in their mission statements. Parents can also become politically involved in state issues and federal policies such as standardized testing, accountability, and the No Child Left Behind Act (NAEYC, 1988, 2003).

Public school entry can be a time of dramatic change for a child, as well as parents. Concerns about separation from their child, the safety and care aspects of the new setting and lack of in depth and on-going communication provided by new teachers may cause anxiety in some parents. This anxiety easily can be transmitted indirectly to a child (Fabian, 1998). Preparing children for the transition to school can assist them in building a strong foundation for their educational future. To prepare children and alleviate anxiety in both children and
parents, parents could establish practices, routines and schedules, and initiate on-going discussions with their child prior to school entry in September (Hendrick, 1997; Fraser & Gestwicki 2000; Fu, Stremmel, & Hill, 2002).

Practices that parents could initiate include touring the new school, playground, and classroom; and visiting the teacher to acclimate children to the new learning environment. Discussion points may include planning and discussing the route and mode of transportation to school, teacher expectations, and new schedules and routines to ease transition for children.

Parents could review the route to school and mode of transportation with their child and map the route from their home to their child's school. To provide support they could discuss this route with their child, and then drive the route together, asking the child to be the co-navigator. Parents could point out landmarks along the way while timing how long it takes to arrive at school from home. If the child is going to be dropped off somewhere other than home after school, this information could be discussed as well. Engaging in this type of activity will reassure both children and parents that the child knows the way to day care, school, and back home.

Visiting the teacher and the classroom before the school year begins is another proactive activity that will support parents and children in the transition. Parents can call the school and make an appointment to visit their child's teacher and to tour the school building, playground, and other areas of interest. They could seek out and tour the cafeteria, library, computer lab, gymnasium, music, and art classrooms. In addition, parents can help their child find the most direct
routes to the classroom, bathroom, main office, and Nurse's office. This will alleviate fears and anxieties about the structure and locations of important school areas. Finally, parents can introduce themselves and their child to the classroom teacher and become familiar with the organization and details of the classroom, such as the locations of the sink, bathroom, water fountains, closets and cubbies and other important classroom features. This will facilitate a sense of security and safety in the transitioning child.

Perhaps most importantly, parents can establish schedules and routines with their child prior to the start of school. Parents could adjust their child's schedule and identify and establish routines at home before the summer ends. Bedtimes may be established, practiced, and maintained. Wake-up times and breakfast times may also be established, practiced, and maintained for two weeks prior to the start of school. Adhering to these schedules will make the transition to school much easier for all concerned.

To help their child adjust to school routines, parents and children can identify, establish, and practice school related routines at home. Routines may include hanging coats and backpacks in the same place each day, selecting and placing clothes out before going to sleep at night, and reading together for 20 minutes each night. These routines will carry over into the school routine, reduce anxiety and stress, and smooth the transition for child and parents.

9.4 Teachers

Transitions are co-constructed in social processes and embedded in social contexts (Griebel & Niesel, 2003). The need for both sending and
receiving teachers assume the role of facilitator in the transition process is important. Involving children, parents, and others in the process requires both sending and receiving teachers to step out of the traditional boundaries of the classroom and into the schools and homes of children to establish connections that facilitate smooth transitions. Successful transition requires an organized and efficient transition plan that ensures effective and on-going communication between parents and teachers, as well as between sending and receiving teachers (NAEYC, 1990, 2000; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1997; U.S. Department of Education 1992).

9.4.1 Sending Teachers

It is imperative that sending teachers communicate with receiving teachers critical information that may contribute to the successful transition of children (NAEYC, 1990, 2000; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 1997; U.S. Department of Education 1992). This information may include children's abilities, strengths, weaknesses, and challenges. It is crucial that any social, behavior, or learning problems be shared with receiving teachers, in addition to information about the readiness skills and behaviors, procedures, routine and rules, and the curriculum content and expectations of first grade. Prior identification of the critical first grade skills and behaviors allows sending teachers to introduce these to children within the Kindergarten learning environment. I recommend that sending teachers incorporate some of these elements into their own classroom routine and provide children with opportunities
for supported practice prior to the end of the school year thereby helping them become familiar with new expectations.

To alleviate children's anxiety about their new first grade classroom and teacher, and to facilitate receiving teachers understanding of children's strengths, interests and Kindergarten learning experiences, I recommend that sending teachers develop and institute a scheduled "Moving Up Day" for children, in which they visit the new school and meet their first grade teacher. Children could bring and share their Kindergarten portfolios with first grade teachers during this classroom visit. This visit could be done as a whole class or in smaller groups of children in early June. As an icebreaker, teachers could ask children to take a few minutes to share and explain some of their favorite work samples from Kindergarten. This forum has great potential for a teacher to learn about individual children, and for children to learn about their new teacher in a compact time frame.

Since children find it difficult to transfer skills and knowledge from one educational setting to another, the process of information sharing through a child's kindergarten portfolio can assist children in verbalizing their interests, strengths, and capabilities while meeting their new teacher (Hendrick, 1997; Fraser & Gestwicki 2000; Fu, Stremmel, & Hill, 2002). Such an activity could provide the necessary time required for teachers and children to learn about one another, establish positive relationships, and provide a forum on which to build subsequent relationships. Additionally, this would provide a shared starting point for receiving teachers to develop curriculum and instructional approaches that
acknowledge children’s learning styles. As annually scheduled practice, it has the potential to greatly reduce transition stress and anxiety for children, parents, and teachers.

Additional activities for children and sending teachers included in “Moving Up Day” could incorporate a tour of the school facilities, including recess on the playground, and eating lunch in the school cafeteria. These activities could acclimate children to the procedures and processes associated with navigating the lunch line and paying for lunch, while providing children practice opportunities with their Kindergarten and first grade teachers’ support. These simple activities have the potential to alleviate children’s fears and concerns, thereby reducing transition stress, and potentially eliminating difficult behaviors that might otherwise occur during the first months of the school year. In sum, sending teachers can invite receiving teachers to visit their classrooms, observe children, and facilitate dialogue about transition.

9.4.2 Receiving Teachers

Successful induction into primary school is influenced by several factors associated with the receiving teacher: (a) acceptance and understanding of student’s academic and personal records; (b) recognition of children’s previous learning environment, learning style, and individual factors, and (c) creation of a continuous curriculum, instructional approach, and assessment technique (Bredekamp & Copple, 1996; 1997; Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1992). Continuity of these factors will empower children, speed adjustment and learning, and
reduce the time required by a teacher to regulate or modify behaviors in the new
learning setting.

To facilitate understanding of student's academic and personal records,
establishing transition meetings to discuss individual children's records between
sending and receiving teachers would be beneficial (NAEYC, 1990, 2000; U.S.
Department of Health and Human Services 1997; U.S. Department of Education
1992). In addition, regardless of the format used to evaluate children (narrative
vs. standardized test scores), receiving teachers would benefit from
acknowledging a child's cognitive competencies including the social, emotional,
and academic strengths of a child, in addition to the child's weaknesses. Finally,
to achieve an accurate and complete understanding of a child's social, emotional,
and cognitive assessment, receiving teachers could inquire about a child's
background, including previous knowledge, understandings, and learning
experiences.

Measuring a child's isolated academic skills and neglecting the effects of
learning styles and personal strengths is detrimental to a child's adjustment in
any new learning environment. While these differ widely from child to child, the
skills, competencies, and individual strengths that are acquired, valued, and
appreciated in Kindergarten should not be seen as weaknesses or deficits in first
grade. These skills and competencies provide a foundation for children's
subsequent learning.

It is imperative that receiving teachers recognize individual learning styles
and elements of the child's previous learning environment and provide learning
experiences that build on previous experiences. New learning experiences will be most effective and successful when they are connected to the child’s preferred learning style, current knowledge and understanding, and previous experiences (Bredekamp and Copple, 1997).

Discontinuity existed between the Kindergarten and first grade curriculum in this study. Acknowledgment of this discontinuity in curriculum content and instructional approaches by teachers is needed prior to the beginning of the school year. Sending and receiving teachers can minimize this discontinuity by co-constructing curriculum, instructional approaches, and assessment practices that bridge the gap between programs and grades (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997; Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1992).

Receiving teachers can promote continuity between learning environments by offering children similar supplies and materials, providing similar learning environment elements, by displaying flexibility in curriculum content and assessment practices, and by incorporating centers into their daily routine. By incorporating more child-centered activities in their classrooms that require active engagement, teachers can provide learning experiences that build on children’s previous Kindergarten experiences while connecting to child’s learning style, current knowledge, and understandings.

Play can be an important link to a child’s success in first grade. Play is the optimal learning activity in the context of a more structured and academically demanding environment (DeVries, 2001; DeVries & Kohlberg, 1987). The elements of play: spontaneity, self expression, flexibility, and pleasure can be
recreated and achieved through use of centers that actively engage children, offer choices about curriculum and activities, and provide movement, while allowing children to be imaginative, creative, and have a voice in their learning (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997). Play merges into work as children develop a sense of purpose and desire to create quality work (DeVries, 2001). Children's curiosity and creative-thinking and problem-solving abilities are developed in an atmosphere that encourages active exploration, welcomes unconventional ideas, and fosters multiple avenues for self-expression (Vandenberg, 1980).

Creating the capacity for play in the early grades can provide a transition to the increased structure and performance demands associated with reading, writing, and standardized testing currently characteristic of the primary grades (Bodrova & Leong, 2003). Learning environments that include centers have flexible expectations and goals for children's behavior and educational outcomes (Seefeldt & Wasik, 2002). These environments foster risk taking, individual thinking, and the generation of diverse ideas and viewpoints. Activities include open-ended materials for exploration and problem solving; instruction combines open-ended questions and discussions in the context of hands-on activities. These types of activities may help bridge the divide between Kindergarten and first grade by engaging children in familiar materials and activities, while supporting the requirements of the first grade curriculum.

By continuing instructional practices and assessment techniques implemented during Kindergarten, receiving teachers can bridge the gap between learning environments; reduce children's stress and anxiety, and
smooth transitions. These practices will ease transition for children and teachers while ensuring developmentally appropriate practices and learning environments for children in first grade.

In addition to scheduling meetings with sending teachers to discuss and align curriculum content and instructional approaches, receiving teachers could visit Kindergarten classrooms to meet children, and to observe instructional practices and routines in the Kindergarten learning environment (Hendrick, 1997; Fraser & Gestwicki 2000; Fu, Stremmel, & Hill, 2002). Additionally, this would allow teachers to meet children in their classrooms (a familiar environment) and provide an opportunity for observation and authentic assessment of children.

The importance of welcoming new children and their families into an unfamiliar setting cannot be overemphasized. Receiving teachers can be more attentive and sensitive towards the process of transition, taking children’s and parents’ perspectives, needs, and concerns into account. Receiving teachers can also ease the transition for children and parents by conducting home visits to establish relationships, mutual understanding, and goals for children prior to the beginning of the school year. Home visits may serve as the foundation for trust, mutual understanding, and positive communications that support a child during transition (Hendrick, 1997; Fraser & Gestwicki 2000; Fu, Stremmel, & Hill, 2002). By nurturing families’ skills in coping with transitions very early on, families can become empowered; knowledgeable, functioning team members of their child’s education.
9.5 Administrators

Transitions can be improved and supported when teachers and administrators move beyond a narrow and traditional school-readiness orientation to include socio-emotional skills that consider the emotional climate of the home (Belsky & MacKinnon, 1994; Erickson & Pianta, 1989). Lazzari and Kilgo (1989) argue for increasing teachers' and administrators' sensitivity to the effect of transitions on children and families with regard to changes in status, new professional personalities, novel expectations and unfamiliar peer groups.

Transitions are likely to be successful if children are gradually introduced to new school processes when they transfer to primary school. Schools can systematically develop transition plans and procedures to implement as part of a teachers' general responsibility. School and program administrators can see transition as a gradual process and plan accordingly. A requirement to document, monitor and evaluate school policies and practices in relation to transition to school is necessary to smooth transition for children, parents, and teachers. Early childhood and primary school policies could support smooth transition to school, by mutually complementing what happens at each phase to ensure successful transition.

Administrators can support teachers' efforts to plan for successful transition by providing adequate amounts of release time to attend planning meetings with sending teachers and scheduled visitations to incoming children's classrooms and homes. Release time for sending and receiving teachers to plan transition is essential to children's successful transition in their new school.
environment. Administrators can support this process by providing adequate release time in the spring of each year for sending and receiving teachers to meet and (a) identify essential readiness skills and behaviors deemed necessary for success in Kindergarten and first grade; (b) acknowledge and discuss differences in curriculum content and assessment practices; (c) identify and discuss differences in instructional approaches and learning environments within each setting; and (d) discuss individual performances, note strengths and weaknesses, and identify instructional needs of each child.

It is imperative that administrators acknowledge and validate sending and receiving teachers' efforts to co-construct curriculum, instructional approaches, and assessment techniques that bridge the gap between programs and grade levels to facilitate smooth transitions. The recognition by administrators that ongoing post-transition support such as continued information sharing and communication between teachers and parents will be necessary to ensure successful transition of all children. Administrators can support teacher initiatives by incorporating time within the context of the workday for such practices. This could be achieved through the paid extension of a few additional workdays of teachers' service at the end of the school year.

Transition needs to be conceptualized as a process that includes planning, preparation, implementation, and monitoring. Additionally, it must be viewed and understood in terms of a process that leads to changes in identity, roles, and relationships. Because academic difficulties in students of all ages can often be traced back to problems that began during transitions to school in
the first years of early schooling (Belsky & MacKinnon, 1994), a thorough understanding and appreciation of the transition process is needed by administrators and other educational professionals.

In sum, current best practice dictates that transitions be seen as a gradual and continual process, rather than a periodic one. Transition practices and responsibilities reach far behind the simple physical transfer of children and their records (Lazzari & Kilgo, 1989). Successful transition involves on-going communication and continuous clarification of expectations and the building of bridges between the comfortable and familiar program and the new and unfamiliar program, as well as between parents and teachers.
REFERENCES


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APPENDIX A: IRB STUDY APPROVAL

UNIVERSITY OF NEW HAMPSHIRE

Office of Sponsored Research
Service Building
51 College Road
Durham, New Hampshire 03824-3585
(603) 862-3564 FAX

LAST NAME Harper
FIRST NAME Laurie
DEPT Education Department, Morrill Hall
APP’L DATE 4/11/2003
OFF-CAMPUS 30 Surrey Run
IRB # 2932
ADDRESS Dover, NH 03820
REVIEW LEVEL EXP
DATE OF NOTICE 4/14/2003

PROJECT Elements of transition: Perspective of students, parents & teachers
TITLE The Institutional Review Board (IRB) for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research reviewed and approved the protocol for your study as Expedited as described in Federal Regulations 45 CFR 46, Subsection 110(b)(1) category 7, with the following contingencies. Once you have responded to the stated contingencies to the IRB’s satisfaction, you may begin involving human subjects in your study.

- The investigator needs to revise the Informed Consent/Assent Letter for Student Participants to reflect participation of the children, not the parents as the parents will complete a separate consent form for their participation. For instance, the second sentence of the first paragraph should read, “I am writing to invite your child to participate,” and the first sentence of the second paragraph should read, “If you give your permission for your child to participate in this study, I will also ask your child if s/he would like to participate. If s/he indicates that s/he does not want to, I will not ask your child any questions.”

Please forward a copy of the revised consent form to the IRB for the file prior to distribution.

The IRB made the following comments:
- In order to protect the privacy of potential subjects, the CDSC staff should distribute the letters to parents.
- The investigator will probably need to get IRB approval for use of the data from the NICHD Study on Early Child Care if she plans to use the raw data.

Approval for this protocol expires one year from the approval date above. At the end of the approval period you will be asked to submit a report for this study with regard to the involvement of human subjects. If your study is still active, you may apply for extension of IRB approval through this office.

The protection of human subjects in your study is an ongoing process for which you hold primary responsibility. In receiving IRB approval for your protocol, you agree to conduct the study in accordance with the ethical principles and guidelines for the protection of human subjects in research, as described in the following three reports: Belmont Report; Title 45, Code of Federal Regulations, Part 46; and UNH’s Federalwide Assurance of Protection of Human Subjects. The full text of these documents is available on the Office of Sponsored Research (OSR) website at http://www.unh.edu/osr/compliance/Regulatory_Compliance.html and by request from OSR.

Changes in your protocol must be submitted to the IRB for review and approval prior to their implementation. If you experience any unusual or unanticipated results with regard to the participation of human subjects, report such events to this office within one working day of occurrence. If you have questions or concerns about your study or this approval, please feel free to contact me directly at 862-2003. Please refer to the IRB # above in all correspondence related to this project. The IRB wishes you success in your research.

For the IRB,
Julie F. Simpson
Regulatory Compliance Manager

cc: File
John Hornstein, Education

339
April 12, 2004

Harper, Laurie
Education - Morrill Hall
5 Surrey Run
Dover, NH 03820-4441

IRB #: 2932
Study: Elements of transition: Perspective of students, parents & teachers
Review Level: Expedited
Approval Expiration Date: 04/11/2005

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB) has reviewed and approved your request for time extension for this study. Approval for this study expires on the date indicated above. At the end of the approval period you will be asked to submit a report with regard to the involvement of human subjects. If your study is still active, you may apply for extension of IRB approval through this office.

Researchers who conduct studies involving human subjects have responsibilities as outlined in the document, Responsibilities of Directors of Research Studies Involving Human Subjects. This document is available at http://www.unh.edu/osr/compliance/IRB.html or from me.

If you have questions or concerns about your study or this approval, please feel free to contact me at 603-862-2003 or Julie.simpson@unh.edu. Please refer to the IRB # above in all correspondence related to this study. The IRB wishes you success with your research.

For the IRB,

Julie F. Simpson
Manager

cc: File
John Hornstein

Research Conduct and Compliance Services, Office of Sponsored Research, Service Building,
51 College Road, Durham, NH 03824-3585 * Fax: 603-862-3564

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Dear Parents,

I am conducting a research project to find out about the effects of transition from pre-school to first grade. I am writing to invite your child to participate in this project. I plan to work with approximately 10 students and their parents and teachers in this study.

If you give your permission for your child to participate in this study, I will also ask your child if s/he would like to participate. If s/he indicates that s/he does not want to, I will not ask your child any questions. I will be observing and interviewing children in May of 2004, in September of 2004 and again in October of 2004. I will take observational notes, photographs and audiotape or videotape the interviews, which will last approximately 15 minutes. The purpose of the interview will be to gain insights into the school ethos and culture and what is involved during the process of transitioning from pre-school to first grade for young children.

The potential risks of participating in this study are minimal. There are not any experimental procedures being used or any foreseeable risks or discomforts to the subjects. Data collection involves observations and interviews. Observations will be conducted in the classroom. Interviews will be conducted with children, parents, administrators, care providers and teachers.

While your child will not receive any compensation to participate in this project, there are anticipated benefits to the field of education regarding an improved understanding and knowledge about the transition of young children from pre-school to first grade. Participation is strictly voluntary; refusal to participate will involve no prejudice, penalty, or loss of benefits to which your child would otherwise be entitled. Furthermore, if, at any time during the study your child changes his/her mind, he/she can stop participating. Likewise, parents have the option of withdrawing their child from the study at any time.

The investigator seeks to maintain the confidentiality of all data and records associated with your participation in this research. You should understand, however, there are rare instances when the investigator is required to share personally identifiable information (e.g., according to policy, contract, and regulation). For example, in response to a complaint about the research, officials at the University of New Hampshire, designees of the sponsor(s), and/or regulatory and oversight government agencies may access research data. You also should understand that the investigator is required by law to report certain information to government and/or law enforcement officials (e.g., child abuse, threatened violence against self or others, communicable diseases). Data will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my office; only I will have access to it. Participants will remain anonymous or referred to by
pseudonyms. Following completion of the study and the writing of my thesis, all original recorded data will be destroyed.

I will conduct the research work. I am a doctoral student at the University of New Hampshire in the Department of Early Childhood Teacher Education. If you have any questions about this research project or would like more information before, during, or after the study, you may contact Laurie J. Harper at 603-740-7414 or by e-mail at Harpelj@aol.com. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact Jennifer Simpson in the UNH Office of Sponsored Research at 603-862-2003 to discuss them in confidence.

I have enclosed two copies of this letter. Please sign one indicating your choice and return in the enclosed envelope. The other copy is for your records. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Laurie J. Harper
Project Director

Yes, I, ________________________________ consent/agree to allow my child to participate in this research project.

No, I, ________________________________ refuse/do not agree to allow my child to participate in this research project.

I will tell your child that I am a researcher and I would like to observe and participate in their classroom for the next few weeks. I will then ask your child, "Can I join your in your classroom and ask you some questions about you, what you are learning, your teacher and school?" The student's response will then be noted and witnessed.

Witness for child assent:

__________________________________________________________

__________________________________________________________

Signature Date
APPENDIX C: IRB INFORMED LETTER OF CONSENT FOR ADULTS

Dear Parents and Teachers,

I am conducting a research project to find out about the effects of transition from pre-school to first grade. I am writing to invite you to participate in this project. I plan to work with approximately 10 students and their parents and teachers in this study.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to answer a series of interview questions in May, September, October and possibly November of 2004. I will take notes, and audiotape the entire interview, which will last approximately 30 minutes. The purpose of the interview will be to gain insights into the school ethos and culture and what is involved during the process of transitioning from pre-school to first grade for young children. I will ask you to keep a journal to record your thoughts, concerns and insights regarding your child’s transition to first grade.

The potential risks of participating in this study are minimal. There are not any experimental procedures being used or any foreseeable risks or discomforts to the subjects. Data collection involves observations and interviews. Observations will be conducted in the classroom. Interviews will be conducted with children, parents, administrators, care providers and teachers. While you will not receive any compensation to participate in this project, there are anticipated benefits to the field of education regarding an improved understanding and knowledge about the transition of young children from pre-school to first grade. Participation is strictly voluntary; refusal to participate will involve no prejudice, penalty, or loss of benefits to which you would otherwise be entitled. If you agree to participate and then change your mind, you may withdraw at any time during the study without penalty.

The investigator seeks to maintain the confidentiality of all data and records associated with your participation in this research. You should understand, however, there are rare instances when the investigator is required to share personally identifiable information (e.g., according to policy, contract, and regulation). For example, in response to a complaint about the research, officials at the University of New Hampshire, designees of the sponsor(s), and/or regulatory and oversight government agencies may access research data. You also should understand that the investigator is required by law to report certain information to government and/or law enforcement officials (e.g., child abuse, threatened violence against self or others, communicable diseases). Data will be kept in a locked file cabinet in my office; only I will have access to it. Participants will remain anonymous or referred to by pseudonyms. Following completion of the study and the writing of my thesis, all original recorded data will be destroyed.
I will conduct the research work. I am a doctoral student at the University of New Hampshire in the Department of Early Childhood Teacher Education. If you have any questions about this research project or would like more information before, during, or after the study, you may contact Laurie J. Harper at 603-740-7414 or by e-mail at Harperlj@aol.com. If you have questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact Jennifer Simpson in the UNH Office of Sponsored Research at 603-862-2003 to discuss them in confidence.

I have enclosed two copies of this letter. Please sign one indicating your choice and return in the enclosed envelope. The other copy is for your records. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Laurie J. Harper
Project Director

Yes, I, ______________________________ consent/ agree to participate in this research project.

No, I, ______________________________ refuse/ do not agree to participate in this research project.

Date ______________________________
APPENDIX D: SPRING INTERVIEW QUESTION GUIDE

**Student Questions:**
What do you like about kindergarten?
What do you dislike about kindergarten?
What are your favorite activities or centers?
Tell me about your friends at kindergarten?
What do you like to do together when you play?
Tell me about your teachers?
What do you like about them? What do you dislike about them?
What are some of the rules in kindergarten?
What happens when you break a rule? What does your teacher do?
Are the rules hard for you? Which rules are hardest?
In kindergarten, do you have a journal that you write in?
What do you learn about (study) in kindergarten?
What is the hardest work for you (reading, writing, spelling or math)? Why?
What have been some of the things that you will remember about kindergarten (activities, projects, events, people and things)?
What is homework? Do you have any in kindergarten?
Do you think you will have any homework in first grade? How much and what?
What do you think first grade will be like? What will be the same and different?
What things will you learn about (study) in first grade?
What are you most excited about when you think about moving to first grade?
Will you ride the bus?
Have you visited your new school? Have you met your teacher?

**Parent Questions:**
How long has your child been attending this preschool before entering kindergarten?
Is this your first child to attend this kindergarten?
What are some of the hopes and academic or social goals you had for your child in kindergarten? Have these been achieved?
What opportunities, learning experiences, projects and special events that your child has participated in at this school stand out in your mind?
Can you identify those activities, events, routines and rules or structures that your child likes and dislikes about kindergarten?
How would you rate your child’s kindergarten experience on a scale of 1-10; 1 being a negative experience and 10 being a positive experience? Why?
Describe your child’s classroom atmosphere; what are some of the elements?
Describe your child’s teacher (teaching style, personality and interactions with children)
Can you identify any areas—academic, procedures or structures, which you feel are not addressed adequately in kindergarten?
Do you feel that there is a good match between your expectations of kindergarten and your child’s teacher in regard to actual practices and structure?
Tell me about the discipline plan of your child's teacher? Are you supportive of this method? Why? Does your child respond well to this approach?
Are there behavioral problems or concerns that you are aware of with your child?
How often is your child absent from kindergarten?
In your opinion, what are the essential readiness skills a child requires for entering and succeeding in first grade?
What do you feel your child is most ready for (or will be most successful in when) in entering first grade?
What do you feel your child is least ready for (or will be least successful in when) in entering first grade?
May I look at your child’s academic records?
Do you anticipate any difficulties related to your child’s transition from kindergarten to first grade?
Have you noticed any fears or anxiety with your child related to the upcoming transition? Would you explain these to me?
What do you think your child’s concerns might be with the transition?
If you could choose your child’s first grade environment, what elements would you be looking for (teaching style, values, learning atmosphere)?
What are some of the hopes and educational goals you have for your child in first grade?
Are you aware of any ways the school tries to help children transition into public school?
Are there things that you will do to prepare your child for the transition?

Teacher Questions:
Describe the emotional climate of your classroom?
What are the social, emotional and educational goals you have for students?
Describe your teaching philosophy, beliefs about children and educational practices.
Compare / contrast your classroom and program with a public school kindergarten.
Describe your instructional goals and approaches in reading, writing and phonics.
What curriculum materials, approaches or program do you use to teach reading?
Tell me about the scope and sequence of this.
How often are individual students from the study group tardy or absent?
Can you tell me about your classroom management and discipline system?
Do you use time outs as a behavioral / discipline strategy? Who initiates time outs?
Do you have student behavior concerns in your classroom? What triggers behavior problems?
What are the essential readiness skills needed for first grade entry and success?
Are there students that don’t possess the needed readiness skills for first grade?
Can you tell me about your students’ academic strengths and weaknesses?
Do you feel they will be socially prepared for first grade?
Do you feel they will be academically prepared for first grade?
Describe the amount and degree of parental involvement in your classroom.
Describe the ways in which you communicate with parents about their children. What challenges do you anticipate for students' transitioning to first grade? What do you feel will be the biggest issue or challenge for students, parents and families making the transition to first grade in a public school? What practices does the school have in place to address transition concerns and ease the transition to first grade? As a teacher, what will you do to support students and their families as they transition into first grade?
APPENDIX E: FALL INTERVIEW QUESTION GUIDE

Student Questions:
What do you like about first grade?
What are your favorite activities?
What do you dislike about first grade?
Is first grade the same or different from kindergarten? Please explain how.
Tell me about your friends. Who are they and what do you like to do together?
Tell me about your teacher? Do you like him/her? Why?
What are some of the rules in first grade?
What happens when you break a rule? What does your teacher do?
Which rules are hardest for you?
What projects, activities and fun things are you doing in first grade?
Which grade (kindergarten or first) is hardest and why?
What is the hardest subject for you reading, writing, spelling or math? Why?
Tell what homework is. Do you have homework? How often and how much?
Are there things that you do in first grade that you didn’t do in kindergarten?
What are they?
Do you have a playground? Tell me about it?
How often and for how much time do you go outside to play?
Do you have enough time at school to do things you like? Please explain.
What did you like best about your kindergarten school?
Is there anyone, thing or activity that you miss about kindergarten?
What do you like best about your first grade school?

Parent Questions:
Describe your child’s teacher (personality, interactive and teaching styles).
Describe your child’s classroom atmosphere; what are some of the elements or characteristics that stand out for you?
Can you identify those activities, events, routines, rules or structures that your child likes about first grade?
Can you identify those activities, events, routines, rules or structures that your child dislikes about first grade?
Do you feel that there is a good match between your expectations of first grade and your child’s teacher in regard to actual practices, classroom structure and your child’s experiences thus far?
Tell me about the discipline plan of your child’s teacher? Are you supportive of this method? Why? Does your child respond well to this approach?
Are there behavioral problems or concerns that you are aware of with your child?
Do you feel that there are quality educational experiences being provided for your child?
What opportunities, learning experiences, projects and special events that your child has participated in at this school stand out in your mind to date?
How would you rate your child’s first-grade experience on a scale of 1-10; 1 being a negative experience and 10 being a positive experience? Why?
Can you identify any areas—academic, procedures or structures, not adequately addressed in first grade?
What is your level of participation at the school?
How often is your child absent from first grade?
How has your child adapted to the new first grade environment?
When do you think the child will adapt to the new environment?
Do you have any social, emotional or behavioral concerns regarding your child’s transition?
Are there specific areas or instances that are particularly challenging for you or your child?
Have you noticed any fears, anxiety or problems associated with your child’s transition to first grade? Would you explain these to me?
When did these problems begin? Have they been resolved? How?
What steps were taken by the teacher/school to resolve any transitional issues?
How are your child’s kindergarten and first grade experiences alike and different?
What are some of the hopes and educational goals you have for your child in first grade?
How are your child’s kindergarten and first grade experiences different?
Are you aware of transitional practices or procedures at this school? Explain.
Are there any things you did with your child to prepare them for the transition to first grade?
What, if any, transitions recommendations would you make to ease the process for children?

*Teacher Questions:*
Describe your teaching philosophy, beliefs about children and educational practices.
Describe the emotional climate of your classroom and students?
What are the social, emotional and educational goals you have for students?
Tell me about your classroom management and discipline system?
Do you use time outs as a behavioral/discipline strategy? Are these initiated by students or teacher directed?
Do you have any behavioral concerns for students in the study?
What triggers behavior problems?
Describe your instructional goals and approaches in reading, writing and phonics.
What curriculum materials, approaches or program do you use to teach reading?
Tell me about the scope and sequence of this program.
What are the essential readiness skills needed for first grade entry and success?
Do you feel that the study students are socially/academically prepared for first grade?
Are there study students that don’t possess the needed readiness skills for first grade?
Can you tell me about the study students’ academic strengths and weaknesses?
Describe the amount and types of parental involvement in your classroom.
Describe the ways in which you communicate with parents about their children?
Have you noticed any fears, anxiety or problems associated with study student’s transition to first grade? Explain these. When do kids get frustrated? Have these issues been resolved? What steps were taken to resolve them? How often are individual students from the study group tardy or absent? Do you have any social, emotional or behavioral concerns regarding any study child’s transition? Are there specific things that are particularly challenging for you or study students? What was the biggest challenge for students, parents and families making the transition? As a teacher, what did you do to ease the transition for children and their parents? What did the school do to ease the transition for children and their parents?
APPENDIX F: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION FORM

Name: ____________________________________________________

E-mail address: _____________________________________________

Phone number(s): ___________________________________________

Child's name: _______________________________________________

Names and ages of siblings____________________________________

Child's age: _______________ Child's gender: ______F ______M

Child's Birth Order: __________________________________________

What school district will your child be attending in the fall of 2004? 

__________________________________________________________

Please identify the Ethnic category with which you identify:

____ Black/African        ____ Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander
____ White               ____ Native American/Alaskan Native
____ Asian/Asian American    ____ Middle Eastern
____ Hispanic or Latin American    ____ Other, Please Specify:

My participation in my child's classroom:

___ Active involvement ___ Somewhat active ___ No involvement

My experience with the transition to school has been:

___ No experience, this will be my first.

___ Direct experience, with another child (Please explain).

May I contact you for further participation in this study? ____yes ____no

Best times/dates to call:_______________________________________
APPENDIX G: DATA ANALYSIS CODES AND CATEGORIES

Study Participants: Children, Parents, and Teachers

- Perspectives
- Expectations
- Concerns

- Continuity
- Discontinuity

Friends
Playground
Teachers

School Culture
Rules & Routines
Social Adjustment
Teacher
Pedagogy
Stress and Anxiety
Communication
Parent Involvement
Information Sharing

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APPENDIX I: KINDERGARTEN ASSESSMENT

The Child Center Kindergarten
Individual Learning Profile

Name: ___________________ Date of Birth ____________________
Date: ____________________

Jan. June

Literacy Development

Reading:
- - - - Chooses to read/listens to books autonomously
- - - - Enjoys books and listens attentively to stories
- - - - Predicts what might happen next in a story
- - - - Reads familiar words and names
- - - - Reads books with enjoyment using picture and context clues
- - - - Uses sound/symbol cues to read a story

Writing
- - - - Recognizes upper case letters
- - - - Writes upper case letters
- - - - Recognizes lower case letters
- - - - Writes lower case letters
- - - - Writes a story using words and illustrations
- - - - Writes 1-5 words independently when writing
- - - - Uses environmental cues when writing
- - - - Demonstrates left to right progression
- - - - Beginning to use vowels
- - - - Writes a story using illustrations
- - - - Estimates with increased accuracy
- - - - Understands the terms more and less

Knows consonant sounds: some most all

Utilizes consonant sounds: - - beginning - - ending - - medial

Language Development
- - - - Uses language to service needs
- - - - Listens and attends in small and large groups
- - - - Expresses ideas clearly and confidently
- - - - Makes comments appropriate to discussion
- - - - Follows verbal instructions
- - - - Relays 3-5 story
- - - - Experiments with rhyming
Development of Creative Expression
--- Demonstrates willingness to discover, explore and experiment with a variety of media
--- Uses detail, decoration and elaboration
--- Reflects originality, imagination creativity
--- Enjoys and participates in music and movement activities
--- Enjoys and values own art work

Mathematics Development
Patterns
--- Identifies — Creates — Extends
--- Identifies and draws basic geometric shapes
--- Writes numerals
--- Counts by rote to
--- Demonstrates one to one correspondence
--- Recognizes numerals to 20
--- Sorts and classifies objects

Social/Emotional Development
--- Shows pride in work and accomplishments
--- Seeks help when needed
--- Understands rules and is able to be redirected
--- Displays self-control
--- Copes with changes and transition
--- Seeks other children to play with
--- Considers feelings and viewpoints of others
--- Uses words to resolve conflicts
--- Is willing to try new activities
--- Participates in group activities

Problem Solving
--- Shows initiative in seeking answers to questions independently
--- Solves minor challenges
--- Attempts brainstorming with the group
--- Recognizes there can be more than one solution
--- Shows willingness to be part of group solutions

Work Habits
--- Growing attention span
--- Focuses on task at hand
--- Works and plays cooperatively
--- Cleans up with reminders
--- Uses materials appropriately
--- Finds materials for tasks independently
Completes tasks autonomously
Actively participates in center time without need for constant guidance or redirection

Motor Development
Fine Motor
- - - - Shows hand preference
- - - - Uses drawing/writing utensils with control
- - - - Uses scissors with control
- - - - Buttons and zips
- - - - Ties

Gross Motor
- - - - Is developing good balance and coordination
- - - - Can hop, jump and run
- - - - Can gallop and skip
- - - - Pumps on swings
- - - - Seeks physical challenges
- - - - Is aware of body in space

Key: Child exhibits skill or behavior:
I-independently
E-with emerging independence
S-with teacher support
N-not observed
APPENDIX J: FIRST GRADE ASSESSMENT

NAME _______________________________    LETTERS: UC ___
DATE _______________________________    LC ___

LETTER IDENTIFICATION

Underlined ones = unknown

OXABTCLRIDPNF
EHGMKZYWSQUVJ 26
oxcalptmkzewr
jyfnshevubdigq 26

CONSONANT SOUNDS

BCDFGHJKLMNPRSTVWXYZ 19
CH SH TH WH 4

WORD RECOGNITION

Preprimer = the to is and 5
Primer = like he yes that was 5
1st = stop going has after fly 5

NUMBER RECOGNITION

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18
19 20 20
**WRITING**

**Name:**

**Dictation:**
Say to the child:
"I am going to read you a story. When I have read it through once I will read it again very slowly so that you can write down the words in the story." (Read the test sentence at normal speed) "Some of the words are hard. Say them slowly and think how you would write them." Dictate slowly.

I have a big dog at home.

today I am going to take him to school.

If the child has trouble with a word say: "You say it slowly. How would you start to write it... What else can you hear?" If the child can't complete the word say: 'We'll leave that word. The next one is..."

**PHONEMIC AWARENESS**

**Rhyming** You tell me a word that rhymes with:

   cat _____ brother _____

**Sound Segmentation** (use 4 colored blocks in a row) Words are made up of sounds. Let me show you the sounds in 'me'. (slide 1 block for each sound) Now it's your turn. Use the blocks to show me the sounds you hear in:

   toe _____ cat _____ mice _____

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**Sound Blending**  Words are made up of sounds. I’m going to tell you the sounds of a word and see if you can guess the word. Listen: ’/t/ /l/ ’ ‘tie’ (say each sound with a brief pause between each) Now it’s your turn:

m - ea - t  n - a - p  b - oa - t

**Sound Deletion:** I’m going to say a word. Listen carefully and do what I ask you to do. Say ‘cowboy’. Now say ‘cowboy’ again but don’t say ‘boy.’

That’s it. Now try these:

Say ‘raincoat.’ Now say ‘raincoat’ but don’t say ‘coat.’

Say ‘yellow.’ Now say ‘yellow’ but don’t say ‘o.’

Say ‘meat.’ Now say ‘meat’ again but don’t say /m/.