THE TRANSITION FROM PREKINDERGARTEN TO KINDERGARTEN FOR CHILDREN WITH AND WITHOUT DISABILITIES: COMPARING ENGAGEMENT AND VALUE RATINGS OF PREKINDERGARTEN AND KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS IN TRANSITION-TO-KINDERGARTEN ACTIVITIES

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Transition to kindergarten is defined as an important milestone for young children. Transition from prekindergarten to kindergarten sets the stage for formal school. Academic success, parental involvement and teacher-to-teacher support are all the building blocks to future success for children with and without disabilities. As educators and researchers, we recognize the importance of relationships among key players (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000) in this important transition. The Ecological and Dynamic Model (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000) emphasizes the importance of relationships among these key players for achieving successful kindergarten transitions. Furthermore, most of the recommended transition practices focus on relationship-building through communication among and/or between key players. Although the magnitude of relationship-building is recognized in the literature, the lack of interagency communication and/or relationship building continues to create barriers to successful transitions. For example, key players such as parents, prekindergarten teachers, and kindergarten teachers do not always communicate sufficiently to provide smooth transitions for young children with and without disabilities. Further complications are created by the lack of value placed on the

relationship between key players by teachers. Transition to kindergarten continues to be defined as a stressful time for all families and teachers alike.

Consequently, this study's purpose was to examine the activities that prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers engaged in during the transition to kindergarten for children with and without disabilities and the value they placed on these activities. More specifically, this study utilized The Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition (EDM) to define key players and the importance of interconnectedness of key players during transition. This study further examined what activities prekindergarten teachers and kindergarten teachers engaged in to support children with and without disabilities, families of children with and without disabilities, kindergarten and prekindergarten teachers, peers, and the community during the transition to kindergarten and the types of transition activities both sets of teachers valued. This information yielded important insights about the extent and value both types of teachers placed on relationship-building with key players during this critical time in a child's development.

The data collected in the survey of 35 prekindergarten teachers and 45 kindergarten teachers in southwestern Pennsylvania demonstrated that both prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers engaged in a variety of transition activities. The results also revealed that both sets of teachers valued the transition activities even if the teachers did not always engage in those activities.

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PREFACE

This dissertation would not have been possible without the on-going support and guidance of my Dissertation Committee Chair, Dr. Louise Kaczmarek. Her long hours of dedication and patience to my work are much appreciated. Dr. Kaczmarek continued to support me along my journey as I overcame the many challenges and obstacles that life brings.

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1.0 INTRODUCTION: TRANSITION FROM PREKINDERGARTEN TO KINDERGARTEN

The beginning of kindergarten is a milestone anticipated by families of all young children (Gerlock, 1985; Horowitz, Kaloi, & Petroff, 2007). Recently, transition to kindergarten has become a major area of attention and focus (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000). The renewed sense of interest is based on many societal and educational factors. Rimm-Kaufmann and Pianta (2000) pointed out that new demands on public schools, the change in the family, and the element of diversity within the public school setting have brought the transition to kindergarten to the forefront of education reform.

For children with disabilities, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) defines transition as a coordinated set of activities for a student designed within an outcome-oriented process, which promotes movement from one program to another. Research indicates that the transition of children from one educational program to another can be stressful; such transitions are not only changes in physical space, but also and perhaps more importantly, carry an emotional component for families of both children with and without disabilities (Pain & Fowler, 1981; Fowler, Chandler, Johnson & Stella, , 1986; Spiegal-McGill, Reed, Konig, & McGowan, 1990; Troup & Malone, 1999; LaParo, Pianta, & Cox, 2000; Bohan-Baker & Little, 2004).

The transition from early childhood special education to public school is a change not only for the child with disabilities but also for the family (Hains, Fowler, & Chandler.1988; Hanline &

Halvorsen, 1989; Conn-Powers, Ross-Allen & Holburn. 1990; Hamblin-Wilson & Thurman, 1990; La Paro, Pinata, & Cox, 2000; Fenlon, 2005). Parental needs must be responded to with similar care and consideration as those of the children because change in educational services affects not only the children, but also all others who are important in their lives (Bronfrenbrenner, 1977). The primary goal that exists for children with disabilities during transition is twofold. First, it is important to minimize any disruption of the child's education, and secondly, the family's services should be maintained to the fullest extent possible (Repetto & Correa, 1996; La Paro, Pianta, & Cox, 2000).

Although the transition of children with disabilities from prekindergarten programs to public school has received increasing emphasis over the past 10-20 years (Hamblin-Wilson & Thurman, 1990;The Division of Early Childhood, 1993; IDEA, 1997; Troup & Malone, 1999; La Paro, Pianta, & Cox, 2000), issues related to the transition of children generally has been more recent. Societal changes as indicated above have brought kindergarten readiness to the forefront of education. The foundation for understanding the complex transition from prekindergarten to kindergarten begins with the description of the preschool classroom and its expectations or as we are more apt to call it today -- the prekindergarten classroom.

1.1 THE PREKINDERGARTEN PROGRAM

Two important changes have affected early childhood education over the past 10 –20 years. Kindergarten curriculum has become more academic (Kemp & Carter, 2000) and preschool education has become much more available to all children (Kemp & Carter, 2000). Preschool has also become more important to our society as marking the start of education for many children. Prekindergarten education refers specifically to the last year of preschool, the year

prior to the start of kindergarten. What are the key components that make up a prekindergarten classroom?

1.1.1 Curriculum

Prekindergarten education focuses on the overall development of each child, or in other words, the whole child. Play and socialization are stressed in the prekindergarten classroom. Curricula often focus on developmental domains within a context of developmentally appropriate practices. Bryant et al. (2002) recognized that a "tension" between academically-oriented programs and play-based programs exists. Most states do not require prekindergarten programs, but rather offer such programs. Hence, most states do not require specific curricula, but rather require that programs address identified standards, such as the Head Start Performance Standards, the Standards of the National Association for the Education of Young Children, or a state developed system, such as the Pennsylvania Early Learning Standards (Byrant et al. 2002).

Challenges occur when attempting to provide universal and comprehensive (Goldsmith & Meyer, 2006) prekindergarten programs. The process of "educationalization" of early childhood education is occurring throughout the nation in relation to the care and education of young children (Kagan & Kaurez, 2007). Kagan and Kuarez (2007) describe the term educationalization as the process in which formal school values have directly influenced and begun to change preschool, child care and prekindergarten programs. The Kagan and Kaurez argument for the educationalization of early childhood education is based on four issues: (1) the focus of early childhood education on the achievement gap between children from low socio economic populations because they enter school already academically behind other children (Hernandez, Denton & Macartney, 2007); (2) the investment of business professionals in early childhood education in order to improve academic outcomes and eventually the business work

force; (3) the national priority that all children enter school "ready to learn"; (4) the call by the No Child Left Behind Act that requires kindergarten to twelfth grade schools to demonstrate accountability through on-going assessment and evaluation of child outcomes.

Although there has been a filtering down of curricula from kindergarten to preschool there still remains a developmental contrast between classrooms. In the prekindergarten classroom, children play in small groups in centers that are intended to be self-motivating. Most prekindergarten classrooms provide choices such as dramatic play, art, blocks, fine motor play, books and quiet areas, and sensory opportunities. Teachers monitor and embed goals into free playtime. Furthermore the work of children in prekindergarten becomes that of developing strong social competence within preschool, home, and the community.

1.1.2 Teacher-to-child ratio

Teacher-to-child ratios may range from as little as 2 adults to 12 children to 2 adults to 20 children in preschool classrooms for four-year-old children (Breddekamp & Copple, 1997). The ratio allows for small group interactions as well as one-to-one interactions between teacher and children. Teacher-to-child ratio decisions play a key role in how prekindergarten classrooms are structured. The recommended ratio is inconsistent across preschools and states (Byrant et al., 2002). The number of adults ultimately affects hiring, cost of a program, and the quality of interactions between adults and children (Byrant et al. 2002).

1.1.3 Teacher qualifications

Teacher qualifications in prekindergarten vary across different school districts and states. Many prekindergarten teachers are not expected to hold a four-year degree or a certification (Kaurez, 2005). Qualifications can range from a Bachelors Degree with a teacher certification to a two-year degree or certification such as an Associates Degree to Child Development Associate

Certificate. Byrant et al. (2002) reported that 22 states required a four-year degree in their state prekindergarten programs. Bryant et al. (2002) reviewed the literature on teacher qualifications and found that teacher education is most related to the quality of the education delivered in classrooms.

1.1.4 Social emotional development

Social emotional development is a central focus of the prekindergarten curriculum. Social competence, self-regulation, friendships and emotional development are held in high importance in prekindergarten, which helps prepare children for the kindergarten setting (readiness). Young children who have higher social competence tend to participate more in school and are more socially accepted by peers and teachers alike (Raver & Knitzer, 2002). Furthermore, early social competence in children predicts how well they perform academically later in formal school (Raver & Knitzer, 2002).

1.1.5 Parent-professional partnerships.

Parent-parent and parent-teacher partnerships are facilitated easily at the preschool level (La Paro, Kraft-Sayre, & Pianta, 2003). A drop-off and pick-up site creates opportunities to build relationships between families and teachers. Most prekindergarten programs function based on a family-focused model that values strong relationships between the caregiver/parent and the teacher (Kemp & Carter, 2000; Bohan-Baker & Little, 2004). Prekindergarten often emphasizes parent-teacher communication and parent-parent contact (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000). Research indicated that strong family involvement at the preschool level predicts later academic success and parent involvement within school systems (Kreider, 2002).

1.2 EARLY CHILDHOOD SPECIAL EDUCATION

For children with disabilities, the prekindergarten experience is often different than for typically developing children. Depending on the individual strengths and needs of each child, the program will vary. Many children with disabilities will be included into typical prekindergarten programs and others will attend specialized settings. With these differences in mind, let us consider the key components that make up early childhood special education.

1.2.1 Curriculum

Academics/Curricula are typically based on the child's individual needs. In early childhood education, children with disabilities most often attend typical preschools and prekindergarten programs where the curriculum is adapted to meet their needs. Therapies and goals are embedded into the typical preschool program (Bailey, 1997).

1.2.2 Teacher-to-child ratio

The prekindergarten staff to child ratio is usually about two personnel to between twelve and twenty children, and even lower when children with disabilities are included (Hains, Fowler, & Chandler, 1988; Johnson, Chandler, Kerns, &Fowler, 1986; Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000). Many more professionals work in classrooms when children with disabilities are included. A special educator, regular educator, one or two classroom assistants, and any therapists that are needed by individual children are often a daily part of the classroom. As a team, professionals work with the family to provide the child with the most effective education possible.

1.2.3 Social emotional development

Social-emotional development is an important focus of the prekindergarten curriculum that is maintained in the education of young children with disabilities. Children with disabilities and

those at risk for disabilities often need extra supports when it comes to making friends, interacting with children and adults and overall social competence and self-regulation. Depending on the individual needs of each child, social emotional development may be a key component to the IEP.

1.2.4 Parent-professional communication and partnerships

Many researchers have emphasized the importance of collaborative partnerships between families of children with disabilities and professionals (Dunst & Trivette, 1989) because it facilitates a better sense of empowerment and creates higher levels of satisfaction with services. Blue-Banning et al. (2005) underscored that the importance of early childhood special education is to "create collaborative partnerships throughout the preschool years and to prepare parents to be effective partners with special services they encounter as the child grows older" (p.168). Fenlon (2005) stated that using a collaborative approach to transition can increase success in school.

Dunst, Trivette, and Deal (1994) described the characteristics of a collaborative partnership as including trust, mutual respect, open communication, active listening, openness, flexibility, caring, shared respect, and full disclosure. Because it takes a continuous effort to define and establish collaborative partnerships, and there is no one formula to accomplish this task, it is crucial to view families as individuals with a set of strengths, wishes, and hopes for their children. Successful collaborative partnerships take time, energy and commitment.

1.3 THE KINDERGARTEN PROGRAM

Prekindergarten programs and kindergarten programs differ drastically. The start of kindergarten is a joyous yet anxious time for young children and their families (Fenlon, 2005). It is thought to be one of the most anticipated developmental milestones. As parents we often ask teachers if our children are ready for kindergarten. The anticipation is in part due to the fact that kindergarten is thought to be a rite of passage to formal school.

1.3.1 Curriculum/Academic expectations

Kindergarten has witnessed a "downward spiral" of curriculum that has created more academic expectations for young children (Kemp, & Carter, 2000). Troup and Malone (1999) indicated that the kindergarten day is typically made up of whole group instruction and independent work times that require a greater attention span and less play than is expected in preschool. In 80 % of the classrooms observed in Troup and Malone's study, workbooks and skill sheets were utilized. Children were encouraged to raise their hand in order to ask a question.

Kindergarten opens the door to academic goals and challenges. The ecology of kindergarten focuses on specific academic goals related to numbers and literacy (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000). As Rimm-Kaufmann and Pianta (2000) articulated "the way that these goals are tethered to success in later grades ushers into kindergarten an emphasis on formal instruction -- instruction that has an intent of raising a child's skill level (p.493)". The most obvious and straight-forward shift that occurs in kindergarten is that of "academic achievement".

1.3.2 Teacher qualifications

Although preschool, prekindergarten and child care teachers are not required to hold certificates or degrees (Kauerz, 2005), kindergarten teachers in the United States are expected to have a Bachelor's Degree and a teaching certificate in order to be employed in a public school setting.

1.3.3 Teacher-to-child-ratio

The teacher-to-child ratios will most likely increase as a child leaves preschool and enters kindergarten. Kindergarten classrooms include 18-27 children to one teacher and sometime two adults. As the number of children increases in kindergarten, a change in child-teacher interactions is observed (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pinata, 2000; Early, Pianta, & Cox, 1999). The change in interaction can potentially affect the social attachments that are made between children and adults and among children within the kindergarten classroom. As with prekindergarten classrooms, kindergarten classrooms that include children with disabilities are often provided with additional personnel although this is not always the case (Johnson, Chandler, Kerns, & Fowler, 1986; Fenlon, 2006).

1.3.4 Social-emotional development

Social emotional developmental goals are not often clearly stated in kindergarten curriculums unless it is on simple checklists that are based on classroom and school rules and rule-following. Such important aspects of development as attachment, social competence, emotion regulation and emotion knowledge do not fully fit into the kindergarten equation in most public school programs (Raver, Garner & Smith-Donald, 2007).

Social emotional development appears to be an important component of a successful transition as perceived by teachers. Kindergarten classrooms offer complex social and emotional systems for children to navigate; children who have more sophisticated social skills

upon entry to kindergarten often are perceived by teachers as being more successful (Rimm-Kaufmann, Pianta, & Cox, 2000).

There is little research to indicate what role social competence plays in academic success (Raver et al., 2007). Raver et al. (2007) cited some research that suggests that children who have higher emotional control/knowledge had better abilities to focus and stay on task than do children with lower social emotional scores (Nelson et al., 1999). Furthermore, it appears that children who are able to understand and control emotions predict more advanced cognitive and language competence (Izard et al., 2001).

1.3.5 Parent-professional partnerships

Although parent-professional partnerships in formal school settings can increase academic success (Krieder, 2002; Henderson & Berla, 1994), Krieder (2002) reported that many families did not visit the elementary school prior to the first day of school. Communication is often more formal and less frequent than in the preschool setting (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000). Furthermore, there tends to be less parent-to-parent interaction and contact. The main difference for families of children with disabilities is that they begin a family-professional partnership through the IEP process much sooner than families of typically developing children (IDEA, 1997).

1.4 THE TRANSITION FROM PREKINDERGARTEN TO KINDERGARTEN

The transition to kindergarten involves many complicated issues for children, families, and professionals. Recent laws, policies, and regulations have largely set the stage for such

complications and have forced the transformation of conceptualizations of kindergarten readiness. This section will consider these two issues for children with and without disabilities.

1.4.1 Law, policies, and regulations

Transition from prekindergarten to kindergarten is governed by many different policies depending on the community that the child lives (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000). Policies vary from community to community as well as from preschool agencies to kindergarten/school age agencies. Our country is in the process of systematizing early childhood education (Kagan & Kaurez, 2007) by attempting to bring together early childhood education and care and to provide a systematic way to increase quality and collaboration between and among programs. The following section address federal and state policy that is relevant to the transition to kindergarten for young children with and without disabilities.

1.4.1.1 Federal transition policy that pertains to all children

In this era of accountability (Meisels, 2007), Head Start and Early Head Start through its National Reporting System (NRS) has focused its accountability efforts on preparing children for elementary school (Meisels, 2007). In addition, Head Start is working to align its policies with No Child Left Behind (NCLB) by creating or improving early learning standards (Horowitz, et al., 2007).

1.4.1.2 Federal Policy that pertains to children with disabilities

The reauthorization of IDEA PL 105-17 (1991) defined transition services as a coordinated set of activities for a student, designed within an outcome-oriented process. The amendment made some alterations to the transition process. Parents of children with disabilities need to be part of the transition team and be given on-going feedback regarding their child's progress (Wolery, 1999). After prekindergarten, when a child turns five, he/she "ages out" of services intended for

children from three to five years old. The child is by law referred for evaluation in order to determine what services are required in a school age program in order to support the child's individual needs. The IDEA states clearly that parties from early intervention, public school, and families need to be in attendance at the transition meeting. To determine the most appropriate placement and entry into kindergarten, formal testing occurs which documents the child's disability. The multidisciplinary team writes the IEP together and decides what services will be provided and in what setting they will occur (Wolery, 1999). After this process is completed, typically children will remain in their preschool program for several months and then have a summer break before entering a kindergarten program. Unfortunately, this can cause a disturbance in the child's education or skill development. This is of particular concern for children with disabilities due to the need of continuity of valuable services that can be disrupted by the summer break. Also, communication lines can be lost between family and teacher/professionals during the break. This can create unfortunate opportunities where partnerships are disrupted and require reconnection when the school year begins in the fall.

The IDEA Amendment passed 6 years later provided some guidelines pertinent to transition from prekindergarten programs to kindergarten. The goal articulated the worth of family involvement and participation in the overall educational process (Rosenkoetter, Whaley, Hains & Pierce, 2001), including the determination of educational placement in the least restrictive environment and the special education and related services required by the child to be successful (Fenlon, 2005). Although the transition process is legally mandated, IDEA does not provide a clear outline of procedures for the process (Troup & Malone, 1999). Later, the reauthorization of IDEA in 2004 promoted realignment with NCLB guidelines to improve early kindergarten readiness for all children, with an emphasis on children with disabilities.

1.4.1.3 State transition policy that refers to all children

An analysis of kindergartens policy at the state level indicated that transition policies are not aligned with elementary schools or early learning programs (Kauerz, 2003). Pennsylvania does not require young children to attend kindergarten nor does it require school districts to provide kindergarten (Kaurez, 2003). This maintains true for many states (for example only nine states implement a required kindergarten classroom for each school district). As a result, policies for the transition to kindergarten are based on individual school districts.

1.4.1.4 State transition policy that refers to children with disabilities

By law, all states must have a state-level transition agreement for children moving from preschool to kindergarten through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act of 2004. A transition without interruption in program, and with appropriate procedural protections, is required under 20 U.S.C. Section 1419, and under Pennsylvania's State Special Education Plan.

1.4.2 Kindergarten readiness

Transition to kindergarten is often associated with kindergarten readiness (Horowitz, et al., 2007, Pianta, Rimm-Kaufmann, & Cox, 1999). What, how, and when skills are taught to preschoolers in preparation for kindergarten continues to be a question in educational reform, especially now with pressure for states to develop and enhance their prekindergarten programs in order to prepare young children for kindergarten (Byrant, et al. 2002). Doucet and Tudge (2007) summarized two important distinctions related to readiness, that of educational theory and legal requirements. Educational theory seeks to understand child development and when children are ready to learn academic tasks that are part of formal school whereas legal requirements are in

place to assure that states provide timelines and age requirements so that all children are receiving appropriate formal education (Doucet & Tudge, 2007).

School readiness has been at the forefront of educational research and policy since the 1990's when a push for "all children to start school ready to learn" was published as a National Educational Goal (Meisels, 1999). The statement that hoped for all children to start school ready to learn has created a new era of research and inquiry into how to prepare all children for school.

Meisels (1999) provided four conflicting conceptions of learning readiness. The first is described as the Idealist/Nativist view that claims that children are ready for kindergarten when they are able to attend, process directives, interact with peers, and accept direction from adults. The second conception comes from what is referred to as the Empiricist/Environment view that tells us that the environment plays a key role in the child's readiness to learn, particularly the expectations provided by the school system of what behaviors are acceptable. Third, the Social Constructivist view focuses on how our culture defines readiness, taking into account the views/perceptions of key players in the transition from prekindergarten to kindergarten. Fourth, the Interactions view places the influence on the interaction between the child and the environmental influences. This philosophy goes one step beyond the social constructivist view by analyzing the bi-directional influences of the child's abilities and the environmental influences. The Interactionist view best matches the ecological effects model of transition, which provides a framework for the current study.

Research has demonstrated that young children who are preparing for kindergarten by attending prekindergarten and who obtain certain developmental, academic, and social goals will be more successful than those children who do not (Horowitz, Kaloi, & Petroff, 2007). However, no specific set of skills have been identified that consistently predict children's

readiness for formal school. The debate that emerges is whether to utilize the prekindergarten years as opportunity to prepare/train children for kindergarten. For those that take the position that prekindergarten should prepare children for "real school", then prekindergarten inevitably becomes the transition year that kindergarten has been in the past (Kemp & Carter, 2000).

1.4.3 Early Childhood Special Education and Kindergarten Readiness

Early Childhood Special Education has a long history of preparing children with disabilities for the next program based on their Individual Education Plans (IEP). Very often the skills that are addressed on an IEP focus on a child's "survival" in the next placement. The matching of skills is not easy due to the great variation in preschool educational philosophies and practices especially as compared to kindergarten (Troup & Malone, 1999; Love, Logue, Trudeau, & Thayer, 1992).

Matching skills from prekindergarten to kindergarten is often a difficult task due to the many variations on classrooms, programs, and teachers (Kemp & Carter, 2000; Troup & Malone, 1999). Troup and Malone found (1999) that most of the kindergartens that they observed required children to have certain behavioral and functional skills to be successful at table activities, using multi-step directions, completing worksheets, raising one's hand for questions, managing personal items, and having adequate self-help skills. Kemp and Carter (2000) also found that on-task behavior and following directions were the survival skills that predicted optimal success in kindergarten. Interestingly, this same study found no differences of success among the varying levels of disability, although children who were typically developing were more successful at following directions and on-task behavior.

1.5 THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: MODELS OF TRANSITION

Rimm-Kaufmann and Pianta (2000) present four models of transition based on research, policy and practice. The models provide a way of examining how parents and professionals view the transition from preschool to formal school. Ultimately, in this section the Ecological and Dynamic Model (EDM) will provide a means to reframe thinking about the transition to kindergarten for children of all abilities.

1.5.1 Model 1: Child Effects Model

Often families and professionals view transition as a one-time event that begins in the spring and lasts until the fall of the start of kindergarten and then is completed (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2004). This "one time event" model of transition focuses on the direct effect that the child has on the transition. For example, individual characteristics such as cognition, poverty, language, gender, and temperament would predict how "Ready" a child is for kindergarten (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000). The Child Effects Model places most of the value on child characteristics/readiness for the next placement. The child-centered approach offers good information to research and practice, but is limited in its scope of fully understanding complicated factors. It is not the whole answer for providing smoother transitions and long-term understanding of the effects that transition has on children, families, professionals and communities.

1.5.2 Model 2: Direct Effects Model

Others view transition as a means of linking families and schools throughout a period of time (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2004). The Direct Effects Model proposes that the transition to kindergarten has a "unidirectional" effect on children (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000). This

model considers the back and forth effect of children and environment (teacher, class size, neighborhood violence, etc.) throughout the transition to kindergarten. For example, it has been demonstrated through research that the more a child takes advantage of educational resources, the greater the direct positive effect on the child's academic outcomes (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000).

When researchers have utilized this model of investigating transition to kindergarten, they have moved beyond looking at the child as the only factor significant to readiness to an interactive model in which outside variables are considered (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000). This body of research has provided more in depth insight into the transition to kindergarten and has broadened our knowledge of kindergarten readiness.

1.5.3 Model 3: Indirect Effects Model

Other researchers have come to view the transition as an on-going interactive process that involves many key players (Bohen-Baker & Little, 2004). This model of transition to kindergarten considers the importance of the indirect factors that interact with one another (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000). For example, when children play with peers in their neighborhoods and attend the same schools, they become familiar with friends and parents who then provide them a certain comfort level within the school. Furthermore children and families become more supported and feel more ready for the kindergarten experience (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000). The indirect effect of peer interaction on school success is considered in this model. The Indirect Effects Model addresses both the direct effects (child characteristics) and indirect effects (relationships in neighborhoods that extend into the classroom) (Rimm-Kaufmann & Piantia, 2000).

When researchers utilize this model they examine an outside influence on academic success and provide information on how the interconnectedness affects the transition to kindergarten. One example provided by Rimm-Kaufmann and Pianta (2000) is research on family involvement in the school system. Family involvement can provide more consistent communication between home and school. Increased parent and teacher partnerships also lessen the stress for children who are experiencing the transition to kindergarten. More cohesive transition to kindergarten for children and families also predicts higher academic success.

1.5.4 Model 4: The Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition

As the description of prekindergarten to kindergarten transition unfolds, it becomes obvious that this is a confusing concept with many factors that play into a successful experience. The Ecological and Dynamic Model developed a way to examine and define these intricate interactions between people, events, and institutions (Rimm-Kaufmmann & Pianta, 2000). Kraft-Sayer and Pianta (2000) built on past ecological models of human development and family systems theorists such as Bronfenbrenner and Morris.

Similar to Bronfenbrenner's model, the Ecological and Dynamic Model emphasizes that change (transition to kindergarten) occurs through many changing interactions between child, school, classroom, family, and community. The interactions work to affect development and outcomes for young children during transition that can develop patterns and relationships that move beyond the one-time event way of thinking about transition to a more comprehensive view.

A new ecology of school develops from prekindergarten to kindergarten that is formed by past and present interactions between teacher, parent, peers and community members. This model suggests that the quality of the interactions that occur during transitions can predict future connectedness between school, home, and community. The main difference that this model

applies compared to previous models is that of relationships from one placement to the next, which emphasizes that many key players need to be involved in the process on a changing and dynamic schedule (Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000).

When researchers utilize the Ecological and Dynamic Model of transition they are able to recognize and investigate the child outcomes and effects as well as the meaning of the changing relationships during the transition to kindergarten (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000). Furthermore, when researchers utilize this framework it is possible to move beyond the effects to the relationships and patterns that develop over time.

One example provided by Rimm-Kaufmann and Pianta (2000) is that of Epstein's research completed on the changing communication patterns between families and the prekindergarten teacher and families and kindergarten teacher. Families adapt to new means of communication when their children transition from prekindergarten to kindergarten. Less frequent, more formal and less positive communicating creates different relationships between school and home which forces families to reorganize how they develop relationships with teachers and school systems. Through Epstein's (1996) research, a shift has occurred in the way that a family communicates with their child's school that has changed relationships that ultimately affect the child's school competence and patterns of relationship development. The example provides a means to re-conceptualize the transition to kindergarten by considering how parent teacher partnerships are developed and maintained and how those partnerships/relationships can ultimately affect academic success.

The Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition helps us understand the complicated interactions between families, children, schools, and communities that influence the quality of the transition from prekindergarten to kindergarten. This model provides a reference for the

interconnectedness of the child outcomes, and relationships between family, school, peers, and neighborhood context through a changing and dynamic ecology. Now it is important to further define who is involved in the changing relationships that effect the transition to kindergarten.

1.6 ROLES IN THE ECOLOGICAL AND DYNAMIC MODEL

In order to better understand how complicated the transition to kindergarten can be, it is useful to examine each role of central key players during the transition process. It is important to begin with the child.

1.6.1 Role of all children

The child is the reason that this event is occurring; therefore the child's role is most significant. It is essential to not lose track of the individual needs of the child. This should maintain true for children with and without disabilities. Some child-focused issues have been identified concerning the transition to kindergarten. Kindergarten-age children are thought to be experiencing a change in "developmental agenda" (Rimm-Kaufmann &Pianta, 2000). Various cultures mark this point in development as a time of changed expectations that mark the beginning of formal education. For example, increased independence and responsibility is not only valued in kindergarten in our country, but it is expected.

There exist so many new and different expectations in kindergarten. Children in this transition often need time to adjust to many new learning styles such as the increased demands of the new environment and changes in child-to-teacher ratios, rules, routines, and social experiences (Fowler, 1982; Hains, Fowler, Chandler, 1988; Repetto & Correa,1996; Wolery, 1989). While several commonalties exist across children in transitional situations, it is imperative to recognize

and plan for the unique needs and requirements exhibited by individual children and their families, whether transitioning to specialized or inclusive kindergarten classrooms (Chandler, Fowler, & Lubeck, 1986).

1.6.2 Role of children with disabilities

The idea of transition to kindergarten has not always been a "rite of passage" for children with disabilities (Farran & Shonkoff, 1994). Historically children with disabilities were not included in school, not to mention worthy of the consideration of kindergarten readiness. Since the passage of P.L. 94-142 (1975) children have legally been protected from exclusion from the public school system. This has brought children with disabilities and their families into the realm of school readiness and has created a wealth of information on transitions for children with disabilities. Many aspects of service delivery for children with disabilities create more complicated transitions for children with disabilities than children without disabilities. Such issues as labels, placements, and service delivery models complicate an already stressful process (Farran & Shonkoff, 1994).

1.6.3 Role of all families

Early Childhood Education prides itself on being family-centered. The role of the family during transition to kindergarten is as varied as individual families. There is no definition of family role and often times the differences between relationships in preschool and kindergarten can blur the lines of responsibility as the transition occurs. When children and their families enter kindergarten, they often feel isolated or "left out" of the process (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2004). Though families report isolation, research tells us that family involvement predicts school success (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2004). The contrasting views make it difficult to clarify the specific roles families decide to take during the transition process.

In general families often take on certain roles. For example, no matter what a child's developmental level, parents need information about program availability, liaison agencies, personnel schedule adjustments, and specific skills needed for their child to be successful in that program (Johnson, Chandler, Kerns & Fowler, 1986; Fenlon, 2005). Therefore, many parents take on the role of information seekers and givers -- visiting programs, registering a child for kindergarten, and providing information.

1.6.4 Role of families of children with disabilities

Families of children with disabilities need to play many of the same roles as families of typically developing children; however, there are often added and unique sets of responsibilities and concerns (Fenlon, 2005). In many instances families tend to be an untapped source of support in transition programming (Hains, Fowler, & Chandler, 1988).

Parents are the most important teachers, they are decision makers during development of Individual Educational Plan (IEP) goals, and they become advocates for the child as well as for the programs that serve their children throughout the educational years (Hains et al., 1988). They often become experts in their child's disability, but just as importantly they need to become experts in the laws involving their child's legal rights. Other overwhelming roles of families of children with disabilities include maintaining supports and specialized services, educating school districts regarding legal rights, visiting programs, meeting with therapists and teachers, seeking out parent support and coordinating and distributing information about the child and the child's disability (Fenlon, 2005).

The role that a particular family adopts in the transition process is many and varied, and not all parents can and will adopt each and every role (Hains, et al., 1988). Often times families of

middle to higher SES have more resources that allow them to become an more active part of the team.

1.6.5 Role of the prekindergarten teacher

The Prekindergarten teacher may carry a large portion of the responsibility during the transition process. In the literature the prekindergarten teacher is regarded as the sending teacher, who knows the child who is transitioning to kindergarten and often becomes an advocate for the child and the family during the process. The prekindergarten teacher usually reports to the parents regarding development, abilities and kindergarten readiness. The prekindergarten teacher may develop and implement a preschool program that prepares the child for kindergarten. The parents often are able to count on the teacher for support and guidance during this process if they have made a connection with that teacher (Kreider, 2002). The prekindergarten teacher could become a liaison between the parent and the kindergarten program.

1.6.6 Role of the kindergarten teacher

During the transition from prekindergarten to kindergarten the kindergarten teacher is referred to as the receiving teacher. The receiving teacher needs to assume a very crucial role for all children during transition. Teacher roles can very across communities and school districts depending on a multitude of factors (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2004). The reality of what should happen and what does happen continues to create obstacles to best practices. However the role of the kindergarten teacher prior to the start of school should include: contacting families of preschool children prior to kindergarten entry, inviting families and children to visit in the spring before kindergarten, preparing and disseminating learning activities, conducting family meetings and/or attending IEP meetings, partnering with parent –teacher associations, providing

information to families about kindergarten, making home visits, and establishing support groups (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2004).

1.6.7 Roles and relationships

The Ecological and Dynamic Model stresses that the relationship between key players as one of the most significant component to success. In the attempt to integrate the model and the roles of each person, one can refer back to each relationship/connection. For example, the child and the parent, the parent and the prekindergarten teacher, the parent and the community, the parent and the kindergarten teacher, the prekindergarten teacher and the child, the prekindergarten teacher the community the prekindergarten teacher and the kindergarten teacher, kindergarten teacher and the child, the kindergarten teacher and parent, the kindergarten teacher and the prekindergarten teacher.

1.7 RECOMMENDED PRACTICES

Recommended practices for transition into kindergarten have been identified in order to guide families and professionals through the kindergarten transition year. Recommendations for a smooth and successful transition to kindergarten began to emerge from various fields of practice as each profession began to recognize the need for supporting families of young children during this critical time. It is important to keep in mind that about 20% of schools in the U.S. participate in policies and practices for transition to kindergarten (Ferguson & Clark, 2007).

The following section will define and organize the empirical underpinnings related to recommended practices based on individual fields of study.

1.7.1 Early childhood education

The field of early childhood education has recognized this time period in development as vital for young children and their families. Early Childhood Education professional organizations and research have provided a set of recommended practices for transition from prekindergarten to kindergarten.

1.7.1.1 Guiding principles

Research suggested that programs should utilize three inter-related guiding principles for successful transition to kindergarten. The three principles are as follows: reaching out, reaching backward in time, and reaching with appropriate intensity to families (Pianta, Rimm-Kaufmann, & Cox, 1999).

First, "reaching out to families" means that school districts provide families with information about transition and specific timelines for kindergarten registration and that they support families in making placement decisions. Reaching out can be thought of as the school districts way of connecting with families. The first step begins the process of building strong school-family partnerships. The partnerships are then available to establish communication and support systems to implement effective practices during transition to kindergarten.

Second, "reaching backward in time" refers to the establishment of communication and partnerships by school district staff with families prior to kindergarten entry. This requires teacher, principals, and other administrators to build a relationship between the child/family and the childcare/prekindergarten setting with an overall goal to increase family involvement and ease the transition. Further research supports the idea of reaching out to families prior to the transition to kindergarten (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2004; Ferguson & Clark, 2007).

Last, "reaching with appropriate intensity" is defined as using many different strategies for establishing family-school partnerships and facilitating successful transitions. Pianta et al. (1999) define both low and high intensity activities. A low intensity activity would be defined as a large group strategy that is part of a broad list of recommended practices. Examples include, sending home a welcome letter to all families from a particular school or classroom or hosting a kindergarten information day for all families attending a school. A high intensity activity would be defined as a more individualized, personal strategy. For example, a kindergarten teacher may make a home visit or individual phone calls to specific families and children. Although, a home visit to twenty families would require significant time and energy, it may increase family involvement throughout the elementary years. Both high and low intensity strategies are important to the transition process.

Because research has indicated that family involvement increases success during transition (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2004), the recommended three-step approach created a proactive stance between families and professionals to begin the formal school rite of passage. Research supports the three-step approach that recommends multi-year interventions, meaning that it is recommended to start transition a year before the transition to kindergarten and continue to prepare and work on transition and parent partnerships throughout the early elementary years in order to facilitate strong family participation to the formal school experience. The National Head Start/Public School Early Childhood Transition Demonstration Study (Ramey, Ramey, Phillips, Lanzi, Brezausek, & Katholi, 2000) and the Chicago Longitudinal Study (Reynolds, Temple, Robertson & Mann, 2001) both recommended providing intervention/activities over many years. For example, the Chicago Longitudinal Study provided services to children and families from preschool to third grade that assisted families with the transition into elementary

school. Results indicated that the children who participated in the study had higher achievement later in school, which tells us that continuing to partner and develop relationships with families beyond the onetime event ("the transition") can increase academic performance and school readiness.

1.7.1.2 High quality transitions: ECE research

With the three principles mentioned in mind, Bohan-Baker and Little (2004) provided a list of recommended practice that are supported by many researchers. These are: (1) Periodic contact with families of preschool children; (2) Periodic contact with children themselves; (3) Invitations to visit kindergarten in the spring; (4) Preparation and dissemination of home learning activities; (5) Implementation of family meetings; (6) Partnerships with local PTA/PTO; (7) Dissemination of information to parents; (8) Implementation of home visits; (9) Provision of support groups; (10) Facilitation of early registration; (11) Provision of Bilingual aides if needed.

1.7.1.3 High quality transitions: NAEYC

At a National Association for the Education of Young Children (2003) conference early childhood educators, professionals and some kindergarten teachers collaborated to develop a set of recommended practices for transition. The list included: providing a wide range of events prior to kindergarten, utilizing routine meetings, creating portfolios, encourage peer networking, support parents, and personalize the new school and teachers.

Many researchers provide lists of strategies or activities that can enhance the transition experiences. The activities can be divided into the previous guiding principles, reaching out, reaching back and reaching with appropriate intensity. If schools and prekindergarten programs come together and implement activities based on the three guiding principles then it might be

possible to create stronger and lasting connections between families, prekindergarten programs, kindergartens and the community.

1.7.2 Early childhood special education

Before policy and established research guided the need for better transition practices, researchers and practitioners came together to spearhead a movement within early childhood special education to create awareness for improved transition practices. After recognizing a need for change, Vincent (1981), Fowler (1982) and others advocated through research and national and state conferences to create guidelines in order to improve the transition experience for children with disabilities and their families (Rosenkoetter, et al. 2001). Susan Fowler and her colleagues were at the forefront of this advocacy for change, and continued to produce research and disseminate information in order to improve and support families. Through the years research has come to recognize that many aspects of children's lives effect positive transitions, as is recognized in the Dynamics Effects Model described earlier.

1.7.2.1 High quality transitions: ECSE research

As stated earlier, children with disabilities are faced with added challenges during the transition to kindergarten. Wolery (1999) summarized four main goals that should be taken into account during the transition to kindergarten for families and children with disabilities. First it is essential for young children with disabilities to maintain continuity of their services through the transition. Second, there should not be any disruptions to the services/program for family services and supports. Third, it is important to prepare young children with disabilities for the next setting (template matching) by understanding the expectations that are in place in kindergarten. Finally all legal requirements must be met during the transition to kindergarten (Wolery, 1999).

Wolery (1999) further identified four areas related to transition that need to be considered in implementing a successful transition: interagency coordination, sending program responsibilities, receiving program responsibilities, and supporting families and children. Most recommended practices and research on transition in ECSE fall into one of the four major issue categories.

Many research studies have identified recommended practices that indeed fall into Wolery's four categories. For example, identification of school program differences (Troup & Malone, 1999), family involvement (Hains, Fowler & Chandler, 1988; Spiegel-McGill et al., 1990; Fowler, Schwartz, & Atwater, 1991; Fenlon, 2005; Rous, Myers, & Stricklin, 2007), communication between school settings (Fowler, 1982; ; Rous & Myers, 2006), implementation of home visits (Ferguson & Wood, 2005), focusing on individual needs (Rous, 2008), building relationships between professionals and parents (Ferguson & Wood, 2005; Rous & Myers, 2006), identifying goals and timelines (Rous, 2008), establish a planning team (Rous, 2008), focusing on the individual as opposed to the labels, administrative support, timely transition, and survival skills/readiness taught (Troup & Malone, 1999; Rous, 2008) have all been cited as important practices to create smooth and successful transitions to kindergarten for children with disabilities. Clearly the transition to kindergarten for children with disabilities shares similar experiences to those of typically developing children, but there exists a unique set of circumstances for children with disabilities such as IEP placement issues, added supports and services.

1.8 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Transition to kindergarten has long been studied by educational researchers, practitioners and administrators. Transition from prekindergarten to kindergarten sets the stage for formal school. Academic success, parental involvement and teacher-to-teacher support are all the building blocks to future success for children with and without disabilities. As educators and researchers, we recognize the importance of relationships among key players (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000). We have seen how the Ecological and Dynamic Model (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000) emphasizes the importance of relationships among key players for achieving successful kindergarten transitions. Furthermore, most of the recommended practices cited earlier also focus on relationship-building through communication among and/or between key players. Although the magnitude of relationship-building is recognized in the literature, the lack of interagency communication and/or relationship building continues to create barriers to successful transitions. For example, key players such parents, prekindergarten teachers, and kindergarten teachers do not always communicate sufficiently to provide smooth transitions for young children with and without disabilities. Further complications are created by the lack of value placed on the relationship between key players by teachers and administrators.

Consequently, this study proposes to examine the activities that prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers engaged in during the transition to kindergarten for children with and without disabilities and the value they place on these activities. This information is intended to yield important information about the extent and value both types of teachers place on transition activities among key players during this critical time in children's lives.

2.0 PERCEPTIONS OF THE TRANSITION TO KINDERGARTEN

The ecological roles of each of the players in the transition process have already been examined; however, research on the perceptions and beliefs that teachers and parents hold with respect to transition are imperative to consider, because those perceptions and beliefs provide insight into the existing relationship between key players. It further defines what perceived activities occur and what barriers exist for key players during transitions to kindergarten. The purpose of this section is to examine existing research on these perceptions. First, parents of typically developing children will be reviewed. Second, the perceptions of parents of children with disabilities will be investigated. Last, teacher perceptions about the transition into to kindergarten will be examined.

2.1 VOICES OF PARENTS OF ALL PREKINDERGARTEN CHILDREN

Historically, a one-sided role has been defined for families. The role is defined by the school system and often does not pursue equal partnerships and respect (Doucet & Tudge, 2007). Kreider (2002) interviewed 23 parents of typically developing children who attended an early childhood program (prekindergarten). Parents indicated that they experienced three feelings when their children transitioned to kindergarten: happiness, sadness, and worry. For instance, happiness was related to parent identification of children as being "ready" for kindergarten based on the pre-academic progress made in preschool. The parents perceived their children as smart and curious and ready to learn in a kindergarten setting. Sadness on the other hand, was often correlated with a parental sense of loss. Parents felt the transition to kindergarten as a significant developmental milestone that marked the end of time spent at home and the beginning of time spent in school.

Social skills, friendships and possible vulnerability were an example of parental perceptions related to worry. Krieder's research shows us that parents view this time as a critical milestone.

I will utilize the following categories developed from the literature as a framework for presenting parental views of transition to kindergarten: parent professional partnerships, perceived activities that support families, perceived concerns regarding children's social emotional development.

2.1.1 Parent-professional partnerships

Parents stressed that they felt strongly about partnering with teachers and schools to provide the best educational experiences regarding the transition to kindergarten for their children (Krieder, 2002; Pianta, Kraft-Sayre, Rimm-Kaufman, Gercke, & Higgins, 2001, 2001; Becker-Klein, 1999; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre,1999). Families indicated that it is easier to partner/have a relationship with the prekindergarten teacher as opposed to the kindergarten teacher (Kreider, 2002; Pianta, et al., 2001). Similarly, parents reported that the prekindergarten staff served as a positive support system (Pianta et al., 2001). This research may suggest that the model of family-centered practices is more accepted at the early childhood level; hence the concept may be a tool for improving transitions to kindergarten by integrating more family-centered practices.

Kreider (2002) reported that parent involvement is closely related to how welcome the family felt from the beginning of the elementary school experience. Parents reported that often times the beginning involvement in activities and/or programs predicted their involvement later in the school year (Krieder, 2002; Pianta& Kraft-Sayre, 1999). In Krieder's study, many parents reported that they never visited or had any pre-experiences at the schools where their children planned to attend kindergarten. Similarly, Pianta et al.'s (1999) work suggested that parents reported that the transition was easier if they had previous experiences and familiarity with the

school. Prekindergarten and kindergarten programs need to continue to work towards providing more welcoming and inviting events for new parents in order to foster positive relationships.

Parents also reported that they most wanted to maintain a trusting relationship with the professionals who were and will be involved in the education of their children (Kreider, 2002). Krieder used the term "trusting and lasting connections" between parents and teachers. This type of partnership does not happen easily nor does it occur quickly. It seems that communication is also part of a trusting relationship. Parents reported that open communication between the family and the teacher helped to ease the transition (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre., 1999). Further, a study by Becker-Klein (1999) linked positive communication to higher parent involvement in the school program. By creating strong relationships, families gained trust towards teachers and school personnel who care for their young children.

2.1.2 Parent perceived supports and important transition activities

Parents reported having many ideas as to how they might be supported through certain activities such as gaining information prior to the start of kindergarten, prekindergarten activities such as a school visit, and solving basic problem all prior to the start of formal school.

Families continue to report that they desired more information prior to and during the transition to kindergarten (McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGennaro, & Wildenger, 2007; Krieder, 2002). The ability to differentiate between low and high intensity might enable families and professionals to individualize information and provide many different opportunities for families to receive information. Low intensity events (Pianta &Rimm-Kaufmann, 1999) include kindergarten information night, open house, picnics, and kindergarten fairs to encourage early family involvement and a sense of belonging. High intensity activities include creating child portfolios, memory books, or photo journals of prekindergarten and/or kindergarten visits as well as phone

calls and home visits. An excellent example of providing information is to encourage peer networking among parents, which represents a source of information and a support system for new families.

Many families expressed interest and need in being introduced to teachers and professionals who will be in their children's school prior to the start of kindergarten (Krieder, 2002). Parents reported that early information is valued if done in a positive manner (Pianta & Kraft-Sayer, 2003). The initial contact that is made by the elementary school can be a great tool if completed in a way that establishes partnerships as opposed to providing directives. It is essential to recognize parent concerns and the need for providing ample information, special events, and routine meetings in order to encourage parental involvement and ease the transition (Krieder, 2002; La Paro, Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2003; NAEYC, 2001; McIntyre et al., 2007).

Parents who participated in pre-visits and information sessions reported that such activities as routine meetings, paperwork, child testing, or siblings already attending the elementary school prompted their early interactions with the elementary school and teacher (Kreider, 2002). Visiting the school and classroom prior to the entry of kindergarten is a fundamental strategy reported by families. Three types of visits were reported to be useful by families: a parent visit, child visit and teacher visit (Rous et al., 2007). The parents reported that they felt that visiting the kindergarten classroom the fall before their child went to kindergarten provided insight into what their family should expect. The child visit was also reported as useful for the child's understanding of where they would attend school the following year. Finally, both prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers visiting each other's programs were reported as supportive to promote partnership and interagency collaboration. Parents reported that there were many issues that needed to be solved or planned for prior to their child entering school that caused

stress and anxiety. Some examples of problems included transportation, housing, employment, and childcare (Krieder, 2002). Families would like to problem solve prior to the start of school. Many concerns may be community related. The school can provide a great opportunity for families to link to outside resources.

2.1.3 Parental concerns related to social-emotional development

Families' concerns are often related to the need for their children to develop friendships (Krieder, 2002). In this same study the parents who were reported being happy about the transition, viewed their children as smart, curious, and ready for new friendships and social opportunity. Families continually reported that they worry about behavioral expectations in kindergarten (McIntyre et al., 2007). This indicated that an important aspect to social emotional development in kindergarten is related to the perception that the parents hold about their children's social competence. Without always being cognizant of the relationship between social emotional competence and successful transitions, parents reported that friendship is a key to successful social emotional development in kindergarten. The transition to kindergarten is more successful for children who were reported to have high social emotional competence (Raver, 2002).

In summary, families of young children without disabilities are thinking about the transition to kindergarten. Issues that concern them include: developing parent-teacher partnerships, supports and activities for receiving information, and on-going social emotional needs of their children.

2.2 VOICES OF PARENTS OF CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

Families of children with disabilities transition from prekindergarten to kindergarten with concerns, but often have very different experiences and perceptions from those of families of typically developing children. Kindergarten transition can be anxiety provoking and complicated for families of children with disabilities (Fenlon, 2005). A smooth transition from prekindergarten to kindergarten can predict future success of transitions (Hains et al. 1983; Rosenkoetter, Hains & Fowler, 1994; Rous, Myers & Stricklin, 2007). The following sections, developed through an analysis of the existing research, will more closely examine parental perception of kindergarten transition for families and children with disabilities: parent-professional partnerships, parent-perceived supports and important transition activities.

2.2.1 Parent-professional partnership

Special education has a unique history related to parent- teacher partnerships. Parents as advocates have paved the way for stronger parent - teacher relationships/partnerships. What does research tell us that parents believe about the important parent-teacher partnership?

Collaboration between parents of children with disabilities and professionals during the move from preschool to formal school is critical for planning the transition. Parents conveyed that professional communication was extremely important and that they perceived themselves as part of the planning team during the transition to kindergarten (Johnson et al., 1991., Hanline & Halorsen, 1989; Conn-Powers, Ross-Allen, & Holburn, 1990, Hanline, 1993; Rous, 2008; Nieves, 2005; Rous, Myers, & Stricklin, 2007) In the research of Johnson et al. (1986), not one parent reported leaving the decision-making process solely to professionals rather they viewed it as team decision-making process. Both formal and informal contacts with professionals were reported as supportive

to transition to kindergarten (Johnson et al., 1986). In contrast, some parents reported that even though they felt part of the transition team, they wanted more inclusion in the process (McIntyre, et al., 2007).

The parent-professional partnership is one of the most important aspects of a successful transition to kindergarten for families of children with disabilities (Worley, 1999). Wolery (1999) further explains that families hope to feel that they will be welcomed in a new school, that school personnel will listen to their requests/needs, that their children's teachers will care, that they will be included in all decisions that will affect their children, and finally, that they will establish mutual trust with the school. Indeed, the relationship and communication between parents and professionals are among the most important strategies for successful transitions (Rous & Myers, 2006).

2.2.2 Parent perceived supports and transition activities for children with disabilities

First, receiving information is a recurrent aspect of transition not only for families of typically developing children, but also for families of children with disabilities. Parents of children with disabilities also reported that receiving information is imperative (McIntyre, Blacher, & Baker, 2007; Rous & Myers, 2006; Nieves,2005). Hamblin-Wilson and Thurman (1990) reported that the families who indicated the most satisfaction with the transition process also indicated receiving the most information and feeling the most supported. Interestingly, some findings indicated that parents with higher educational levels were most satisfied with the explanations surrounding the amount of information provided during this process (Johnson et al., 1990; McIntyre et al., 2007).

Families of children with disabilities reported that they needed extra information regarding related services, understanding legal rights under IDEA, and inclusive opportunities in school and at home in order to ease the transition to a new school (Hanline & Halvorsen, 1989, Hamblin-

Wilson & Thurman, 1990; Rous & Myers, 2006; Rous, Myers, & Teeters, 2007). In Rous et al. (2007) research, parents reported that they felt that the IEP meeting was an essential tool for bringing together staff from both programs and to meet new staff.

Second, social support was important to families of children with disabilities during the transition to kindergarten (Rous & Myers, 2006; Rous, Myers, & Stricklin, 2007). Formal and informal supports can assist families through this difficult process. Formal supports are defined as support provided by professionals whereas any person that the individual family deems as important can provide informal supports.

Families identify formal supports as important to successful transition to formal school. Parents of children with disabilities reported that they received more formal support from early childhood special education programs versus the school age programs into which their children were transitioning (Hamblin-Wilson & Thurman, 1990; Hanline & Halvorsen, 1989). Parents of children with disabilities reported that they felt a need for overall support from both agencies during transition, but especially from administrators (Rous et al., 2007). More specifically, some parents reported establishing a trusting relationship with one professional throughout the process, which provided a guide and formal support system (Hanline & Halvorsen, 1989). Some families sought out an educational advocate to provide more formal support during this time of change (Hanline & Halvorsen, 1989;)

In addition to formal professional support, informal supports are identified as being important. Research tells us that families count on other family members and other parents to gain support (Hanline & Halvorsen, 1989). Though most families reported that they relied on professionals for some level of support, parents and family members provided the strongest

emotional support. Listening and providing kind and positive comments were listed as important emotional supports.

Third, parents reported that one of their concerns prior to sending their children with disabilities to an inclusive kindergarten was that of physical safety (Hanline &Halvorsen, 1989; Rosenkoetter & Shotts, 1997; Nieves, 2005). Safety related to emergency situations such as falling on the playground, getting lost or sexual physical abuse were all reported to be pre-transition concerns for parents (Hanline & Halvorsen, 1989). Parents reported fears related to not knowing what to expect in the new setting (Fowler, Schwartz, & Atwater, 1991). Another related issue to that of safety were the concerns that arise when sending a child with a disability on school bus. Parents reported being skeptical about the bus ride due to lack of communication and safety needs of children (Rosenkoetter et al., 1993)

Fourth, school visits were reported as being imperative to families prior to the transition to kindergarten (Johnson et al., 1986; Rous et al., 2007). Much of the research on parental perceptions related to parental ideas of what makes for a successful transition. Parents reported that the pre-transition visit provided an opportunity to observe the kindergarten routine, the teacher, and the classroom (Johnosn et al., 1990; Rous, 2007). Parents reported that the more visits that were conducted, the more comfortable they were with the transition (Johnson et al., 1986). This helps professionals to understand that family comfort level may be correlated with the time families spend becoming comfortable in the next setting. This reiterates that parents of children with disabilities have the same concerns as families of typically developing children, but often an added list of worries and challenges to overcome.

2.3 BARRIERS TO SMOOTH TRANSITION: A COMPARISON

Parents of both children with and without disabilities reported that there existed many barriers to successful transitions to kindergarten. Lack of communication and collaboration between key players is a crucial problem that can cause disruptions to the transition planning team for families of children with disabilities (Nieves, 2005; Rous, 2007). While families of typically developing children also reported that they felt that communication was important, but often times this referred to gaining information regarding the new school, individual child strengths and needs, and general information about kindergarten (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 1999), as opposed to families of children with disabilities who reported needing information on safety, IEP's, the school bus (Hanline & Halvorsen, 1989; Rosenkoetter & Shotts, 1997).

Although families of typically developing children and families of children with disabilities hoped for prekindergarten visits and activities (Krieder, 2002; Rous et al., 2007), families of children with disabilities worried more about the disruption of continuity of services between many key players such as school, home and community (Wolery, 1999). The discontinuity can possibly contribute to the problems associated with transition due to loss of individual readiness skills. All parents desired particular activities such as a visit to the school, teacher phone calls, and information. The difference for families with disabilities is that they also needed information on related services, busing and special health care issues.

All parents reported that they desired certain activities to help smooth the process. All parents hoped that their children would obtain appropriate skills so that they could be successful academically (McIntrye et al., 2007; Kreider, 2002). All parents hoped that their children would make friends, follow directions and adjust well to the new setting (Wolery,1999; Krieder, 2002;

McIntyre et al., 2007). With those factors in mind, families of children with disabilities had the added concerns of obtaining appropriate services and appropriate placements, safety in terms of disability, and attitudes that are held by other children and professionals about disability. As we reframe the way that transition is viewed it is important to describe where families fit into the Ecological and Dynamic Effects Model of Transition. Outside of the child, an on-going interaction is occurring between teacher, peers, community and family (Kraft-Sayer & Pianta, 2000). The development and interactions of relationships among and between these individuals has a lasting and important effect on the transition process.

2.4 VOICES OF TEACHERS

As mentioned in earlier section, prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers play a key role in the transition from prekindergarten to kindergarten. The interactions and "connectedness" that the teacher establishes with the child and family can predict future success in school and throughout the educational years (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2004; Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000). Troup and Malone (1999) highlighted that positive teacher attitudes play a key role in including children with disabilities into a regular education kindergarten classroom. A positive attitude can support a smoother transition process; however, it cannot change the reality of programs that have developed unrealistic expectation and do not provide developmentally appropriate practices (Troup and Malone, 1999). This section will review the kindergarten transition practices of prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers and their perceptions about the transition to kindergarten.

2.4.1 Kindergarten teachers

This section will examine kindergarten teachers reports regarding kindergarten transition activities, kindergarten readiness and/or survival skills for children with and without disabilities. It will further investigate kindergarten teacher perception research about home visits and transition trainings.

2.4.1.1 Kindergarten Teacher reported transition practices (activities) for all children

La Paro, Pianta, and Cox's study (2000) utilizes data from a 1996 survey by the National Center for Early Development and Learning (NCEDL) (n=3595). Kindergarten teachers reported that they commonly used the following activities as transition tools: sending a letter to parents, holding

an open house, and sending a brochure home. Less commonly used transition activities included home visits and individual phone calls to the all children in the class. Only 4% of the teachers reported setting up a home visit with the families and only 9% reported calling families. Teachers reported that they tend to use teacher and/or child-oriented activities as opposed to family-oriented activities. Although, eighty percent of teachers reported that they utilized some type of transition practices from prekindergarten to kindergarten for all children, the activities are usually directed to the whole class and occur after the start of school.

In another study (La Paro, Kraft-Sayre & Pianta., 2003), teachers and parents were interviewed regarding the use of activities such as kindergarten orientation, newsletters and meeting the kindergarten teacher. Kindergarten teachers reported that they utilized school-wide activities as opposed to any specific transition activities. Kindergarten teachers did report that they sometimes met with prekindergarten teachers regarding specific needs of individual children who would enter their kindergarten classroom. La Paro et al. (2003) also concluded that kindergarten teachers reported that when they used certain transition activities they believed were useful. All kindergarten teachers reported that some prekindergarten children had visited their classroom prior to the new school year. At closer examination of the results, activities that teachers reported using were after formal school started and tended to involve a community coordinator or a school-wide program. For example, eighty-three percent of teachers reported that they sent a letter home to families after the start of school. Seventy-seven percent of teachers reported that an open house was offered to all families.

Kindergarten teachers reported that it is uncommon for them to initiate or coordinate strategies for transition with prekindergarten teachers (La Paro et al., 2000; La Paro et al., 2003; Horowitz et al., 2007). Further, teachers reported that their transition practices were not based

on specific policies proposed by the school or school district (Early, Pianta & Cox, 1999) and those informal practices were not coherent across classrooms within their schools. Barriers to the implementation of transition activities included lack of time and pay over summer, delays in obtaining class lists, lack of district plans, and absence of training on transition (La Paro et al., 2003; Kaufmann, Pianta, & Cox, 2000; Horowitz et al., 2007).

2.4.1.2 Kindergarten teacher perceptions of transition (activities) for children with disabilities

Horowitz et al. (2007) reported that 2.9 million children who are school-aged receive special education support. Children with disabilities who attend inclusive kindergarten classrooms are involved to the same transition practices as other children in the classroom. However, they also have an added set of circumstances during their transition to kindergarten and into the formal school setting.

In a focus group study of families and practitioners, it was determined that three main strategies were critical to transition to kindergarten for children with disabilities (Rous et al., 2007). First, a supportive infrastructure was needed to support families and staff. This included appropriate paperwork, written materials, and policies to guide the process. Second, relationships between agencies needed to be facilitated in order to ease stress. Third, alignment across programs would help to define expectations and related services. For children with disabilities, the highest rated transition activity by teachers was reported to be reading written records and contacts with prekindergarten teacher (LaParo et al., 2000). It cannot be assumed that because more children with disabilities are being placed in inclusive kindergarten classrooms that the transition process is improving for them (Troup & Malone, 1999).

Perhaps the most difficult role of the kindergarten teacher is to adjust expectations in order to accommodate a child with disabilities. Adaptation and attitudes towards children with disabilities can make a situation positive or negative. Yet there appears to be no research reported in the literature that deals with these issues or whether kindergarten teachers see themselves as implementing unique activities to help children with disabilities and their families transition to kindergarten.

2.4.1.3 Kindergarten teacher perceptions of readiness for all children

Individuals form perceptions by their own worldviews and experiences. Examining the perceptions of kindergarten teachers with regard to kindergarten readiness provides a vehicle to gain insight into factors that affect their thoughts on the topic.

The following study also utilized data from the National Center for Early Development and Learning with a sample size of 3,595. Fifty-two percent of children as viewed by teachers transitioned to kindergarten in a successful manner (Rimm-Kaufmann, Pianta, & Cox, 2000). In the same study teachers reported that 32% of children had a moderately successful entry into school, meaning they had at least "some problems," and an additional 16% of children had real difficulty. Teachers also reported that half of children who entered kindergarten had some difficulty with following directions, academics, independence and organization. Teacher reports were mostly characterized by describing behavioral issues as opposed to developmental problems such as a speech delay.

In a study conducted by Pianta and Stuhlman (2004), 490 children were followed in the transition from prekindergarten to kindergarten and then to first grade. The results of this study suggested that teachers who view their relationship with young children as close as opposed to conflicted, will also view the child as more academically and socially successful. It is interesting

that the teacher positive perception of their relationship with children from early on remained the same into first grade. Further research supports that teachers view social skills and social competence as important components to successful transition to kindergarten and learning (Lin, Lawrence, & Gorrell, 2003). Other specific characteristics of school readiness as reported by teachers included being physically healthy, able to communicate needs, and enthusiasm about learning (Welch & White, 1999).

There are many factors that are related to how teachers judge/perceive children and their behaviors. Ethnicity and SES play a role in the behavioral expectations/judgments of children in kindergarten classrooms. Rimm-Kaufmann, Pianta, and Cox (2000) reported that kindergarten teachers perceived problem behaviors that interfered with learning as related to school metropolitan status, poverty levels, and minority composition. The study also pointed out that children who live in poverty may be experiencing many school-related stressors such as larger class sizes and lack of home-to-school communication that may socialize them to have higher rates of behavioral issues in school.

It appears that kindergarten teachers perceive that not all children enter school "ready" to learn. Important indicators of readiness, as viewed by teachers, appear to be related to social competence as opposed to academic readiness. There are so many components that need to be factored into school readiness that it is difficult to fully understand readiness and its relationship to transition. Teachers agree that kindergarten is becoming more academic and pressure to meet academic standards become an obstacle for creating child- centered and developmentally appropriate classrooms (Parker & Neuharth-Pritchett, 2006).

2.4.1.4 Kindergarten Teacher reported readiness/survival skills for children with disabilities

Kindergarten teachers (n=71, from 17 school districts) completed a survey in order to identify specific skills children with disabilities needed to be successful in kindergarten. Self-help skills ranked as the most important skill (Troup & Malone, 1999). After self-help the following skills were identified in descending order of importance: social skills, attending, reading readiness, following rules, name recognition and printing name, number recognition, color recognition (Troup & Malone, 1999). An interesting result for this survey showed that teachers rated self-help skills, independence, and social skills (58%) much higher than pre-academic skills (13%). This finding corroborates the finding that teachers perceive social competence as more important than pre-academic skills for children with disabilities and typically developing children (Lin, Lawerence, & Gorrel, 2003; Kemp & Carter, 2000). Older research also sought to determine what skills children needed to survive in an inclusive classroom (Hains, Fowler, & Chandler, 1986; Sainto & Lyon, 1989). The results indicated that children need to be able attend in large groups and needed little one to one attention as opposed to having strong academic skills (Rule, Fiechtl, & Innocenti, 1990). It is clear that researchers and professionals hope to look to the next placement in order to define what children with disabilities in prekindergarten are expected to accomplish to be successful in kindergarten.

2.4.1.5 Kindergarten teacher perceptions of a school/home visit for all children

A home or prekindergarten visit is reported by families of children with disabilities (Troup & Malone, 1999) and families of children without disabilities (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2004) as a positive way to connect to the school and school professionals. How important is a home visit from the teacher's point of view?

In study conducted by LaParo et al. (2000), only 2.86% (n=3,595) teachers reported making a home visit to children receiving special education prior to the start of school and 2.04% of reported making a home visit to typically developing children. However, teachers often report that lack of time and money do not allow for them to conduct home visits even if they feel it is an effective tool (Pianta et al., 1999).

In a survey, 99% (71 teachers) kindergarten teachers reported that they desired to conduct an observation at the prekindergarten prior to the start of kindergarten (Troup & Malone, 1999). Ninety-eight percent of teachers reported that they perceived that the observation could positively affect the child's success (Troup & Malone, 1999). In that same survey, 51% of teachers recommended 2-3 observations of the child in the preschool setting. However, in reality this does not often occur for either families of children with and without disabilities.

2.4.1.6 Kindergarten Teacher Training related to transition

In a survey conducted by the NCEDL (1996), 3,595 kindergarten teachers were surveyed regarding many aspects of transition to kindergarten. Early, Pianta, and Cox (1999) reported on this important data. Teachers reported that few (22.7%) were specifically trained in transition to kindergarten strategies and activities. When asked from where they received information on kindergarten transition, teachers reported that they mostly obtained information from other teachers, then journals, and then from other school personnel. Teachers reported that the lack of transition to kindergarten training has been a barrier to successful implementation of transition activities and planning (Early et al., 2001; Cox, & Pianta, 1998). Of the teachers who responded to the questionnaire, 46.5 % had obtained a master's degree or higher with an average of 11 years of kindergarten teaching experience and 1-2 years in the upper or lower grades.

2.4.2 Prekindergarten teachers

Rous, McCormick, and Hallman (2007) summarized the following findings in a research brief. The most common reported transition to kindergarten practices used by prekindergarten teachers were sending parents information on kindergarten, arranging for the class to visit a kindergarten, and meeting with kindergarten teachers to discuss curriculum. The survey indicated that prekindergarten teachers who had classrooms in elementary schools participated in more kindergarten transition activities than those who were not affiliated with schools. Only 44% of prekindergarten teachers reported having training related to transition to kindergarten (Rous et al., 2007).

La Paro et al. (2003) also found that most prekindergarten teachers arranged for and visited a kindergarten classroom. In this specific study, all children visited a kindergarten classroom and 90% of the prekindergarten teachers reported that they visited a kindergarten classroom. Prekindergarten teachers reported attending a spring kindergarten orientation (60%) and providing records about the children in their classrooms with the elementary school (60%). Very few prekindergarten teachers reported that they met with the individual teacher or a representative from an elementary school. All in all, prekindergarten teachers appeared to engage in somewhat more intense transition activities than did kindergarten teachers, whose efforts primary occurred once the children were in their classrooms. The research indicated that both prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers believe in the positive outcomes of transition activities, but those barriers prevent implementation.

2.4.2.1 Families of all children versus teacher perceptions of transition to kindergarten

This section will provide a simple comparison of perceptions of transition between parents and teachers of all children. First, communication between home and school is imperative for

successful transitions. The research indicated that teachers and parents perceived communication and partnerships very differently. Teachers reported that they used parent-teacher communication and participating in low intensity activities that fit every child's need for smoother transitions (Pianta, Cox, Taylor & Early, 1999). Parents of children with disabilities reported that communication, partnerships, supports, information, teacher attitude, the IEP and placement decisions were all perceived as being important tools during transitions. Parents of all children reported that they desired to have connections with the people who will be working with their children.

As for survival skills, it appears that parents are more concerned about academic success and skill preparation (Horowitz et al., 2007) than teachers who look for social competence, self-help skills, ability to attend in a large group setting, following directions and passive listening (Rimm-Kaufmann et al., 2000;).

Parents are worried about receiving ample information about their child's individual needs as well as kindergarten and the transition. Professionals do not always fulfill the parental need for information. Teachers are not taking on a role of planning for the transition to kindergarten (Horowitz et al., 2007). Parents are often seen as the team leader, but established transition teams do not often exist. Teachers report and worry about the lack of time, money and planning that does not allow for supportive transition to happen and information to be given appropriately (Pianta, et al., 1999).

In conclusion, Rosenkoetter emphasized the following:

> Transitions force people to make choices. Transitions bring program personnel face-to-face with their own philosophies and practices in comparison with those of one or more programs. Transitions force families to define not only their children's recent successes

but also the child's performance in comparison to other children…Families are asked to clarify their own hopes and expectations for the future. (p. 11)

Clearly the transition to kindergarten creates many opportunities, some stressful and others exciting. It is a time in a child's development that our culture labels as a rite of passage. Policy, research, and practice have an opportunity to come together to support strengthen and improve the manner that children and families experience this rite of passage.

Although all key players seem to be thinking about transition to kindergarten and recognize the magnitude that it plays in a family's life, there exist differences in how families and professionals view this critical time. It seems apparent that parents of both children with and without disabilities desire more specific activities/ ideas regarding transition. As early childhood special educators and advocates for families in transition, it becomes clear that we need to listen to the concerns and perceptions of parents and continue to create and work towards better partnerships that can assist in the improvement of the complicated transition to kindergarten.

2.5 RATIONALE FOR FUTURE STUDY

Challenges in providing smooth transitions are not new to the fields of early childhood education and early childhood special education. Research continues to remind us that the transition to kindergarten is one of the most significant events in the education of young children with and without disabilities. Bohan-Baker and Little (2004) point out that though a priority has been set to create continuity of services between prekindergarten and kindergarten (National Goals Panel, 1998) and a discourse has been on-going in both early childhood education and early childhood special education, strong transition practices are often the exceptions in practice.

As the literature review indicated, the partnership between the prekindergarten teacher and the kindergarten teacher are often overlooked in practice. The intent of this proposed study is to compare views of prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers about the transition to kindergarten. More specifically research indicates a need to further investigate the views that prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers' hold about what activities they engage in to help children with and without disabilities transition to kindergarten. Furthermore this study will examine what activities prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers perceive to be important. Their responses will provide insight into the extent to which relationship building represents a critical and valued part of the transition to kindergarten in current practice.

3.0 METHODS

Transition to kindergarten is a trying time for prekindergarten and kindergarten programs, children and parents alike. As indicated previously, it is extremely critical for families and professionals to partner during this transition so that all children can optimally benefit from the move to formal education. Parents have indicated that support from prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers is crucial to a successful transition to kindergarten (Wolery, 1999; Krieder, 2002; McIntyre, et al., 2007; Pianta & Kraft-Sayer, 2003). Support provided by teachers, as we know, varies depending on many variables such as family needs, professional understanding, and administrative guidelines (Early, Pianta, & Cox, 1999). Often families and teachers have reported that communication and partnership are strained (Pianta & Kraft-Sayer, 2003).

The Ecological and Dynamic Model (EDM) of Transition to Kindergarten stresses that relationships and partnerships between key players is a way to provide "shared connectedness" between and among individuals involved in such transitions (Pianta, Rimm-Kaufmann & Cox, 1999). Consequently, it was important to gain information from both preschool providers and kindergarten teachers in order to understand how they contributed to this "shared connectedness" among key players.

The intent of this study was to compare the practices and activities used and valued by prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers to enhance the transition to kindergarten for children with and without disabilities. This study utilized the idea of the Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition in the design of a survey for each group of teachers.

3.1 THE RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What activities do prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers implement to achieve the transition to kindergarten for children with and without disabilities? What activities do they value? More specifically, the following questions, which have emerged from the literature review, will be addressed in this study:

1. What activities do prekindergarten teachers engage in to support children with and without disabilities, families of children with and without disabilities, kindergarten teachers, peers and the community during the transition to kindergarten? What transition activities do prekindergarten teachers value?
2. What activities do kindergarten teachers engage in to support children with and without disabilities, families of children with and without disabilities, prekindergarten teachers, peers and the community during the transition to kindergarten? What transition activities do kindergarten teachers value?
3. How do engagement and value ratings of matched activities of prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers compare?
4. How do engagement and value ratings of prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers compare for matched activities directed to children with disabilities?
5. How do the relationship levels of the prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers' responses compare?
6. How do the relationship levels of the prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers' responses compare for activities directed to children with and without disabilities?

3.2 PARTICIPANTS

Study participants included 35 prekindergarten Head Start teachers and 45 kindergarten teachers in southwestern Pennsylvania and the West Virginia Panhandle. To participate in the study, the prekindergarten teachers had to have children in their classrooms that were transitioning to kindergarten in the coming year, including at least one child with an Individual Education Plan (IEP). Kindergarten teachers had at least one child with a current IEP in their classroom.

3.2.1 Prekindergarten selection

Head Start administrators in the geographical areas of Beaver and Westmoreland Counties in Pennsylvania and the Panhandle of West Virginia were contacted to inquire about the participation of their prekindergarten teachers in the completion of an email or mail survey. When the administrators agreed to participate in the study, the researcher obtained from them a list of all teacher email addresses. Next, an invitation to fill out the survey was sent by email to the teachers. The invitation/letter was placed on Survey Solutions, an internet survey service, and sent by mass email along with the survey. The letter greeted the teachers and extended an invitation to fill out the survey. The teachers were encouraged to email the researcher with any questions or concerns regarding the study. All teachers remained anonymous and each survey was assigned an identifying code. This was to protect confidentiality in the completion of the survey so that respondents would be assured that their administrators would not have access to their opinions. Finally at the end of the survey the teachers were given the opportunity to send an address to the researcher in order to receive a $5.00 gift card to Panera.

Completion of the electronic survey yielded a low rate of return (40%) as only 16 of 40 pre-kindergarten teachers returned their surveys. Gift cards were sent to all 16 of the electronic survey respondents. The researcher then contacted an administrator at the Intermediate Unit. The researcher was given permission to bring hard copies to an in-service training workshop for Head Start, prekindergarten, and kindergarten teachers that was held in August 2010. The researcher was asked to drop-off 50 surveys based on expected prekindergarten attendance with self-addressed envelopes to the site in Westmoreland County where the in-service training was to take place. The conference coordinator made an announcement to the attendees during the in-service training that the survey was available for them to pick-up after the conference. Due to the manner in which the conference coordinators allowed the surveys to be distributed, the exact count of prekindergarten teacher attendees is unknown. Nineteen additional prekindergarten teachers completed and mailed back the survey. The return rate for hard copy surveys yielded 38%. There was an overall return rate of 39% based on the assumption that there were at least 50 prekindergarten teachers in attendance at the conference. The researcher sent out an additional 18 Panera gift cards as compensation for filling out the survey. In total, 35 prekindergarten teachers responded to the surveys of which 34 were sent gift cards as compensation. This excludes one participant because she did not provide a mailing address to send a Panera gift card.

3.2.2 Kindergarten selection

Principals of elementary schools that serve the same geographic area as the Head Start programs were contacted directly to inquire about potential kindergarten teachers to complete the Kindergarten Teacher Survey. Due to the need for more subjects, other school districts were contacted by phone and email. Those areas included the Fox Chapel School District and the Baldwin School District. The researcher developed a guide to follow when talking with the

principals via phone (i.e., Talking Points, available as Appendix F). After permission was granted from the principals, an email list was generated to contact kindergarten teachers. A letter was sent by email on Survey Solutions asking teachers to participate by filling out a survey, providing other options for receiving the survey if they preferred, and encouraging the teachers to contact the researcher if they had questions or concerns. The surveys completed by these kindergarten teachers also remained anonymous as they were also given a numerical code to protect their identities.

Seventeen of 40 email surveys were returned by the kindergarten teachers, which was a 43% return rate. Gift cards were sent to 17 of these respondents. The researcher also received permission from the Intermediate Unit to drop off 50 Kindergarten Teacher Surveys in self-addressed envelopes to the same in-service training held in Westmoreland County as mentioned in the previous section. In addition to the 50 Kindergarten Teacher Survey hard copies sent to the conference, two school districts (i.e., Fox Chapel and Baldwin) were contacted and 10 additional surveys were distributed by mail to individual teachers in those districts. The surveys were sent back to the researcher during the same timeframe as the surveys distributed at the conference, so it was not possible to determine where each survey was from. In total 60 hard copy surveys were distributed. Twenty-eight out of 60 surveys (47% return rate) were returned. The overall return rate for the kindergarten teacher survey was 45%. This was based on the assumption that at least 50 kindergarten teachers attended the conference. The researcher sent a Panera gift card to all but three teachers as compensation for filling out the survey. The three teachers who did not receive a gift card indicated that they did not want compensation. In total, 45 kindergarten teachers responded of which 42 were sent Panera gift cards for returning completed surveys.

3.3 SURVEY DESIGN

Two surveys, one for prekindergarten teachers and one for kindergarten teachers, were developed (See Appendices B and C). The two surveys were designed to examine the high and low intensity activities that teachers might engage in to enhance relationships with key players in the transition process. Some of the activities referred to all children while others referred solely to children with disabilities. These activities were then grouped according to the following five relationship levels developed from the Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition -- the relationship between (1) the child and the family; (2) the family and the teacher; (3) the prekindergarten teacher and the kindergarten teacher; (4) the child and peers: and (5) the child and the community. In addition to the activities actually engaged in by the teachers, the survey was also designed to compare the value teachers placed on these various activities.

Some survey items of specific transition activities from the Prekindergarten Survey matched those on the Kindergarten Survey. Other survey items did not match one another because there were many transition activities that were unique to either prekindergarten or kindergarten programs. Appendix D depicts survey item numbers that match one another and those items that are unique to each individual survey. An asterisk is placed next to each survey number item that is specific to children with disabilities.

The draft survey was piloted by emailing them to three prekindergarten teachers (i.e., private preschool, public preschool, church nursery school) and three kindergarten teachers (i.e., one private school kindergarten teacher and two urban public school kindergarten teachers). The pilot surveys assisted the researcher to clarify items that might be in question and to gain important feedback about the process and development of both surveys. The pilot survey data

was reviewed and used mostly to re-word survey items that were unclear to the teachers filling out the survey. For example, kindergarten teachers reported that they were not used to contacting or communicating with prekindergarten teachers. Item numbers 19, 31, and 33 were reworded slightly, but were still included in the survey. The pilot surveys were also utilized to set-up and structure the data analysis. After modifications were made to the surveys, each was entered into Survey Solutions Internet-based Survey Company (See Appendix E). Survey Solutions is a computer/internet program system that assists the researcher in placing the survey on-line and sending it to an established email list at an established time.

Each survey document consisted of two sections. Section I of the survey included questions related to demographics. Section II of the survey included closed questions related to transition to kindergarten for children with and without disabilities. Section II of both surveys was based on the previously mentioned design giving the teachers the opportunity to identify the activities they engaged in by answering "yes" or "no" and then specifying the value they placed on each using a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (not at all valuable) to 5 (extremely valuable).

3.4 DATA ANALYSIS

The data collected from the two sets of surveys was compared using descriptive statistics. The information gathered was used to compare and contrast the opinions and practices given by the two groups of survey respondents in order to answer the research questions. The data was transferred from the survey directly into the SPSS Program. The researcher entered the data from both the hard copy surveys and the electronic surveys by hand into SPSS. Both prekindergarten and kindergarten data were entered and coded by number into SPSS Statistics 19 Premium. A

coding system was used to identify each question in the surveys. Percentages were used to describe the responses of each group's engagement in specific activities and their ratings of value to address research questions 1 and 2.

Comparisons between the two sets of teacher data were then made to address research questions 3, 4, 5, and 6. In addition to the descriptive analysis, activity and relationship level comparisons between the groups of teachers were conducted using the Fisher's Exact Test. An independent t-test was conducted to determine statistical significance between the mean value ratings of the two groups of teachers. In completing the comparisons, the Null Hypothesis proposed that there would be no significant difference between prekindergarten teachers and kindergarten teacher's results in engagement in transitions activities. In addition, the Null Hypothesis stated that there would be no difference in the rating of importance of transition activities. The Alternative Hypothesis stated that more prekindergarten teachers would report engaging in transition activities than kindergarten teachers. In addition, the Alternative Hypothesis stated that prekindergarten teachers would rate transition activities as being more important than kindergarten teachers.

4.0 RESULTS

Thirty-five (35) prekindergarten Head Start teachers and 45 kindergarten teachers completed and returned the survey by email and by mail. There was an overall response rate of 39% for the prekindergarten teachers. The prekindergarten email survey and the hard copy survey yielded 40% and 38% response rates, respectively. There was an overall response rate of 45% for kindergarten teachers. The kindergarten internet survey response rate was 43% and the hard copy survey yielded a 47% return rate.

The demographic information of the respondents is reported in Table 4. In general, the kindergarten teachers had slightly more overall teaching experience and slightly more years within one school compared to prekindergarten teachers. As expected, the kindergarten teachers had more and higher educational degrees and higher teacher to child ratios. An interesting demographic statistic was that prekindergarten teachers had more transition-to-kindergarten training opportunities.

Table 4. Demographic Information for Prekindergarten (16 internet surveys; 19 hardcopy) and Kindergarten (17 internet surveys; 28 hardcopy) Teachers

	Prekindergarten Teacher N=35	Kindergarten Teacher N=45
Average years teaching with current agency/school (SD)	7.8 (7.0)	9.6 (7.7)
Average years teaching experience (SD)	11 (7.6)	12.5(7.9)
Average # of children with IEP per classroom (SD)	3.3 (2.0)	2 (1.9)
Average Teacher to child ratio (SD)	1 to 8 (1.6)	1 to 19 (3.9)
Percentage Master's Degree	11%	71%
Percentage Bachelor Degree	46 %	29%
Percentage Associates Degree	43 %	0
Percentage with Transition to Kindergarten training	75%	38%

4.1 RESEARCH QUESTION 1 & 2: ACTIVITIES RELATING TO THE CHILD

The first data set for research questions 1 and 2 examined activities that prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers engaged in to enhance their relationships with children, both with and without disabilities during transition to kindergarten. Data relating to engagement will be presented first followed by ratings of importance.

4.1.1 Prekindergarten teachers

As can be seen in the results displayed in Table 5, the one activity that was engaged in by 100% of the teachers was giving parents information about their child's pre-academic performance. Almost all teachers also reported that they talked to families about kindergarten readiness, directly spoke to a child about their transition to kindergarten, and gave families literature about transition to kindergarten. It was less common for prekindergarten teachers to provide input into the development of special transition materials for both children with and without disabilities. Finally, contacting early intervention staff prior to the start of kindergarten and providing media such as DVDs, videos, or internet links to families were the two activities fewer prekindergarten teachers engaged in.

The activity most valued by the prekindergarten teachers was giving parents information about their children's pre-academic performance, the one that all prekindergarten teachers reported doing. This activity also had the lowest standard deviation, which indicated that most of the teachers rated the activity similarly. By and large, the relative rankings of value were in accordance with the percentages of engagement.

Table 5. Percentage of Engagement in Child-Focused Transition Activities and Mean Value Ratings of Prekindergarten and Kindergarten Teachers for Matched Survey Items

	Prekindergarten Teachers N=35		Kindergarten Teachers N= 45	
Survey Item	%	Mean Value Rating (SD)	%	Mean Value Rating (SD)
Provided families with literature about transition	89	4.4 (0.81)	73	4.3 (0.97)
Talked to families about kindergarten readiness	97	4.6 (0.74)	89	4.5 (0.89)
Talked directly to one or more children about their transition to kindergarten	97	4.6 (0.61)	76	4.4 (1.0)
Gave parents media to help their children with the transition to kindergarten	32	3.6 (1.13)	29	3.9 (1.16)
Gave parents information about their children's pre-academic performance.	100	4.7 (0.46)	71	4.2 (1.0)
Gave input into the development of transition materials for children to help them better understand the upcoming transition to kindergarten.	74	4.3 (0.83)	71	4.2 (1.0)
*Provided EI staff with information about transition to kindergarten to help them prepare children with disabilities for kindergarten.	74	4.3 (0.99)	36	4.3 (0.97)
*Gave input into the development of special materials for children with disabilities in order to prepare them for kindergarten.	60	4.1 (0.98)	41	4.2 (1.09)

*Activities specific for children with disabilities.

4.1.2 Kindergarten Teachers

As displayed in Table 5, one of the most common activities that kindergarten teachers engaged in was to talk with incoming families about kindergarten readiness prior to the start of kindergarten. Another highly reported activity was for teachers to speak directly to children about their transition to kindergarten. Sending home children's literature about transition to kindergarten before the first day of school, providing families with information about their children's pre-academic skills, and providing input to the preparation of transition materials to help children transition to kindergarten were additional activities in which many kindergarten teachers engaged.

There were three activities in which fewer kindergarten teachers engaged. The least likely activity was to provide families with media such as DVDs and internet links. The two other activities that were not commonly engaged in were creating transition materials for students with disabilities and communicating with EI staff prior to a child coming to kindergarten.

The highest valued activity for kindergarten teachers was to talk to families about kindergarten readiness (4.5). For the most part, kindergarten teachers ranked all of the activities as being "Very Valued" whether they reported engaging in the activities or not. The lowest valued activity, which was giving parents media, was also the activity in which they least engaged.

4.2 RESEARCH QUESTION 1 & 2: ACTIVITIES RELATING TO THE FAMILY

This data set examined activities that prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers engaged in to enhance their relationships with the families of children, both with and without disabilities during transition to kindergarten.

4.2.1 Prekindergarten teachers

As seen in Table 6, the most common family-related activity that prekindergarten teachers engaged in was to listen to family concerns. One hundred percent of the prekindergarten teachers reported that they engaged in this activity. Two other very common activities were to provide families with general information (97%, see Table 6) and to provide families with information about specific schools (89%, see Table 7).

Several activities that were less commonly reported were problem solving and discussing kindergarten visits with families of children with and without disabilities. Only about half of the prekindergarten teachers arranged for families to visit kindergarten classrooms in elementary schools and talked to families about kindergarten visits. Even less common was for prekindergarten teachers to accompany families of children with or without disabilities on kindergarten visits prior to the start of school.

The average value ratings for this group of prekindergarten teachers fell within a fairly narrow range of 3.9 to 4.4, suggesting that they considered all activities to be very valuable. The highest valued activities were to arrange visits to kindergarten classrooms, listen to families' concerns about starting kindergarten, and provide general information to families.

Table 6. Percentage of Engagement in Family-Focused Transition Activities and Mean Value Ratings of Prekindergarten and Kindergarten Teachers for Matched Survey Items

	Prekindergarten Teachers N=35		Kindergarten Teachers N= 45	
Survey Item	%	Mean Value Rating (SD)	%	Mean Value Rating (SD)
Provided general information to families about developmental milestones and kindergarten readiness	97	4.4 (0.65)	84	4.4 (0.86)
*Listened to concerns of families of children with disabilities children about transition to kindergarten	94	4.5 (0.61)	80	4.6 (0.83)
Problem solved issues about kindergarten transition with families of typically developing children.	79	4.3 (0.86)	67	4.4 (1.0)
Listened to concerns of families of typically developing children about transition to kindergarten.	100	4.4 (0.7)	84	4.5 (0.84)

*Activities specific to children with disabilities

Table 7. Percentage of Engagement in Family-Focused Prekindergarten Transition Activities and Mean Value Ratings of Prekindergarten Teachers

Survey Item	%	Mean Value Rating (SD)
Provided information to parents about specific schools that the children would attend in the fall.	89	4.2 (0.97)
Arranged for a kindergarten visit for an individual child/family.	51	4.4 (0.76)
Accompanied children with disabilities and/or families on a kindergarten visit.	31	4.0 (1.1)
*Discussed kindergarten visits with families of children with disabilities after they occurred.	50	3.9 (1.2)
Accompanied children without disabilities and/or families on a kindergarten visit.	40	4.0 (1.1)
Discussed kindergarten visits with families of children without disabilities after they occurred.	66	4.0 (1.1)
*Provided general information to families of children with disabilities about kindergarten activities such as orientation, registration, information events.	88	4.0 (0.82)

*Activities specific to children with disabilities

4.2.2 Kindergarten teachers

The activities most engaged in by kindergarten teachers were those that generally focused on the families of the incoming children, such as participating in a kindergarten information night, sending a general welcome letter, and organizing events that brought families to the school before and after the transition (see Table 8). As seen in Table 6, fewer kindergarten teachers reported listening to the concerns of families of children with and without disabilities.

Table 8. Percentage Engagement in Family-Focused Kindergarten Transition Activities and Mean Value Ratings of Kindergarten Teachers

Survey Item	%	Mean Value Rating (SD)
Participated in a kindergarten information night, orientation, or other events that families attended.	94	4.8 (0.65)
Organized or helped organize events that brought children and families to the new school prior to the start of school. .	89	4.6 (0.80)
Participated in events that brought incoming kindergarten families (with or without children) to the school after the first day of school.	89	4.6 (0.78)
Contacted families of children who would be in the classroom prior to the first day of school.	30	3.2 (1.3)
Talked face-to-face with incoming families about kindergarten before the first day of school.	89	4.6 (0.84)
*Invited families of children with disabilities to meet to learn more about the classroom.	53	4.5 (0.92)
*Contacted at least one family of a child with an IEP by phone prior to the start of school	27	4.3 (0.95)
*Met with individual families of children with disabilities prior to start of school	38	4.1 (1.2)
Invited families to come to the classroom to learn more about kindergarten after the first day of school.	86	4.2 (0.99)
Sent a welcome letter in September to all families in the classroom.	96	4.5 (1.0)
*Sent an individual welcome letter in September to families of children with disabilities.	16	4.5 (0.93)
Linked families with the PTO/PTA	61	3.6 (1.1)

*Activities specific to children with disabilities

The activities that the fewest kindergarten teachers reported engaging in were contacting a family with a child with an IEP, meeting with families of children with disabilities, or sending an individual welcome letter to the family of a child with a disability. The least common activity was to send an individual letter home to a child with a disability to welcome them to the new kindergarten classroom.

The highest valued activity was to participate in kindergarten information night, orientation, or other school events that incoming families attended. Two similar activities that teachers highly valued were to organize events that brought families to the school both before and after the transition. In general most activities were rated as being very valuable, whether the

teachers engaged in the activities or not. Interestingly, all of the activities were rated as being very valuable, except for linking families to the PTO/PTA and contacting families prior to the start of kindergarten.

4.3 RESEARCH QUESTION 1 & 2: ACTIVITIES RELATING TO THE TEACHER COUNTERPART

This data set examined activities that prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers engaged in to enhance their relationships with each other, including activities for children with and without disabilities during the transition to kindergarten.

4.3.1 Prekindergarten teachers

As seen in Tables 9 and 10, prekindergarten teachers as a group reported most often that they knew kindergarten transition policies and discussed kindergarten readiness with kindergarten teachers. Only 60% of prekindergarten teachers reported that they contacted kindergarten programs to gain information about kindergarten information nights for families at their centers. A little more than half of the teachers reported attending a training that focused on kindergarten transition.

More than half of the prekindergarten respondents reported engaging in activities that required them to talk directly to the kindergarten teachers. Seventy five percent (75%) of teachers discussed kindergarten readiness with at least one kindergarten teacher, whereas 60% of teachers reported that they contacted at least one kindergarten teacher by phone to gain information about transition.

About half of prekindergarten teachers engaged in activities that required them to contact kindergarten teachers about individual children. For example, half of the prekindergarten teachers reported connecting a kindergarten teacher with support personnel to plan for a child with a disability. Similarly, 44% of the prekindergarten teachers spoke to kindergarten support personnel about a specific child with a disability who would be in their school for kindergarten. Compared to the child and family activities, these prekindergarten teacher-to-kindergarten teacher activities were engaged in by fewer prekindergarten teachers overall.

In general, all of the activities were rated as being "Very Valuable" by the teachers. The lowest ranked activity was to facilitate communication between support personnel for children with disabilities and the kindergarten teacher. Even when prekindergarten teachers reported that they did not engage in certain teacher-to-teacher activities, they still ranked those same activities as being very valuable.

Table 9. Percentage of Engagement in Teacher- Focused Transition Activities and Mean Value Ratings of Prekindergarten and Kindergarten Teachers for Matched Items

	Prekindergarten Teachers N=35		Kindergarten Teachers N= 45	
Survey Item	%	Mean Value Rating (SD)	%	Mean Value Rating (SD)
*Was frequently in contact with EI support staff in order to discuss kindergarten options for children with disabilities	80	4.3 (0.87)	58	4.4 (0.95)
Contacted at least one teacher by phone to gain information about the program that a child would be attending or was attending.	60	4.2 (0.95)	24	3.5 (1.2)
Contacted school districts to find out dates of special transition events or to provide dates of special transition events.	71	4.5 (0.80)	36	4.1 (1.1)
Discussed kindergarten readiness with more than one kindergarten/prekindergarten teacher.	75	4.4 (0.83)	64	4.2 (1.2)
Attended trainings that focused on kindergarten readiness or transition to kindergarten.	58	4.4 (0.86)	71	4.4 (0.92)
*Facilitated communication with parent permission between support personnel and kindergarten teachers so that they could plan for transitions for an individual children with	50	4.0 (0.88)	69	4.5 (0.93)

disabilities.				

*Activities specific to children with a disability

Table 10. Percentage of Engagement in Teacher- Focused Prekindergarten Transition Activities and Mean Value Ratings of Prekindergarten Teachers

Survey Items	%	Mean Value Rating (SD)
Provided kindergarten teachers with child information with parental permission.	74	4.5 (0.83)
Knew kindergarten transition policies of districts transitioning children would attend.	88	4.4 (0.82)
*Spoke to district support personnel with parental permission regarding specific strengths and needs of a child with a disability aside from the IEP meeting	44	4.3 (0.90)

*Activities specific to children with a disability

4.3.2 Kindergarten teachers

As reflected in Tables 9 and 11, the activity that the most kindergarten teachers engaged in was attending trainings that focused on transition. Over half of kindergarten teachers reported that they talked to support personnel from the prekindergarten about a child with disabilities that would be attending their classroom. Kindergarten teachers also reported that they sometimes discussed kindergarten readiness with prekindergarten teachers as well as providing those same teachers with information about kindergarten readiness (64-65%).

The least engaged in activity was contacting prekindergarten teachers to gain information about a prekindergarten program that a child was attending (24%). Only 36% of kindergarten teachers reported that they gave prekindergarten centers/schools dates regarding kindergarten events and/or contacted prekindergarten teachers to obtain information about specific children that would attend their classrooms in the fall.

Most activities were rated as being "Very Valuable." The most valuable activities rated by kindergarten teachers were working with support personnel and attending trainings about transition to kindergarten. The lower valued activities involved calling the prekindergarten teachers to obtain information. The ratings corresponded to the activities that were least likely to occur.

Table 11. Percentage of Engagement in Teacher- Focused Kindergarten Transition Activities and Mean Value Ratings of Kindergarten Teachers

Survey Items	%	Mean Value Rating (SD)
Provided prekindergarten teachers with information about specific kindergarten readiness skills to help children prepare for kindergarten.	65	4.6 (0.91)
Contacted at least one prekindergarten teacher about individual children who were transitioning.	36	3.6 (1.1)
*Attended at least one IEP meeting for a transitioning child with a disability prior to the start of kindergarten.	42	4.3 (1.1)
*Contacted at least one support person about a transitioning child with disabilities prior to the first day of school	67	4.4 (0.84)

4.4 RESEARCH QUESTION 1 & 2: ACTIVITIES RELATING TO THE PEERS

This data set examined activities that prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers engaged in to enhance relationships between transitioning children, including activities for both children with and without disabilities.

4.4.1 Prekindergarten teachers

The results displayed in Table 12 indicate that almost all prekindergarten teachers reported that they discussed with families the importance of friendships (97%). Many prekindergarten teachers reported that they attempted to facilitate relationships between children who would

attend the same school for kindergarten. Just a little more than half of the prekindergarten teachers reported that they paired a child with a disability and/or attempted to connect families to one another knowing that the children would attend the same kindergarten.

As illustrated in Table 12, the activity most valued by prekindergarten teachers was to communicate to families about the importance of friendship and social emotional development. Facilitating relationships of children who would attend the same kindergarten was also reported as very valuable. The least valued was to connect families to one another whose children would attend the same kindergarten (school) in the fall. The mean value rating corresponded to how often the activities were reported to occur.

4.4.2 Kindergarten teachers

As indicated in Table 12, the two most common activities reported by kindergarten teachers were facilitating relationships between peers (typically developing peer to peer) and talking with families about the importance of friendship and social emotional development. About 30% of kindergarten teachers reported that they connected families to one another who came from the same preschool, worked to pair children with a disability to a child that they knew from prekindergarten, and connected families of children with disabilities from prekindergarten to kindergarten.

The most valued activity for Kindergarten teachers was to talk to families about the importance of friendship and social emotional development. The other three activities -- facilitating relationship of children who were from the same prekindergarten program, the attempt to connect families who came from the same program, and pairing a child with a disability with a typically developing child -- were ranked as Valuable. These results reflect how often the teachers engaged in the activity.

Table 12. Percentage of Engagement in Peer- Focused Transition Activities and Mean Value Ratings of Prekindergarten and Kindergarten Teachers

	Prekindergarten Teachers N=35 (SD)		Kindergarten Teachers N= 45 (SD)	
	%	Mean Value Rating	%	Mean Value Rating
Facilitated relationships of children who would be attending the same school for kindergarten	86	4.2 (0.99)	62	3.6 (1.2)
Attempted to connect families to one another whose children would attend the same school	54	3.4 (1.3)	30	3.2 (1.1)
*Paired at least one child with a disability with a typically developing child who would attend the same kindergarten prior to transition	52	3.9 (1.0)	33	3.8 (1.0)
Communicated to at least one family of a child in my classroom about the importance of friendship and social emotional development	97	4.5 (0.71)	80	4.2 (0.97)

*Activities specific to children with a disability

4.5 RESEARCH QUESTION 1 & 2: ACTIVITIES RELATING TO THE COMMUNITY

One survey item examined activities that prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers engaged in to enhance their relationships with the community and neighborhood as it related to transition to kindergarten.

4.5.1 Prekindergarten teachers

A little more than half of all prekindergarten teachers (56%) reported that they engaged in providing materials to community businesses to create wider knowledge of transition activities such as upcoming kindergarten information sessions, registration dates, and family fun nights. This community outreach activity was rated as being valuable to prekindergarten teachers (3.9; SD = 1.3). This rating is comparatively lower than most other prekindergarten ratings.

4.5.2 Kindergarten teachers

Only 34% of kindergarten teachers said that they provided materials to community businesses. The mean value rating was 3.7 (valuable) with a standard deviation of 1.9. This is a lower rating compared to most other kindergarten teacher activities.

4.6 RESEARCH QUESTION 3: COMPARING ENGAGEMENT AND VALUE RATINGS OF THE PREKINDERGARTEN AND KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS FOR MATCHED ACTIVITIES

4.6.1 Child-related activities

More prekindergarten teachers engaged in all child related activities than did kindergarten teachers. As indicated in Table 13, 100% of prekindergarten teachers reported that they gave pre-academic information to parents as opposed to only 71% of kindergarten teachers. As indicated in Table 13, this activity was determined to be statistically significant (Fisher's Exact Test, n=80, p=.0001). One of the most common activities for both sets of teachers in the child category was to talk to families about kindergarten readiness. This activity was not statistically significant. However, talking directly to a child about their transition to kindergarten was found to have a statistically significant difference (Fisher's Exact Test, n=80, p=0.002) with more prekindergarten teachers performing the activity. The least common activity for both sets of teachers was to utilize media to help children with the transition to kindergarten. This activity

was not statistically significant. Both prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers reported that it was not common to provide Early Intervention staff with information about transition to kindergarten to help prepare for children with disabilities; however, the reported difference in engagement (Prekindergarten 74% and K 36%) for this activity proved to be statistically significant (Fisher's Exact Test, n=80, p=.001).

Both sets of teachers ranked all activities as very valuable. The only activity to be determined by the t-test (t (78) =3.177, p=.002) to be statistically significant was for teachers to talk to families about their children's pre-academic performance (see Table 14) with prekindergarten teachers placing greater value on this activity.

Table 13. Percentage of Engagement and Fisher's Exact Test in Child-Focused Transition Activities of Prekindergarten and Kindergarten Teachers for Matched Survey Items

Survey Item	Prekindergarten Teachers N=35 %	Kindergarten Teachers N=45 %	Fisher's Exact Test
Provided families with literature about transition	89	73	.158
Talked to families about kindergarten readiness	97	89	.219
Talked directly to one or more children about their transition to kindergarten	97	76	.002**
Gave parents media to help their children with the transition to kindergarten	32	29	.807
Gave parents information about their children's pre-academic performance.	100	71	.0001**
Gave input into the development of transition materials for children to help them better understand the upcoming transition to kindergarten.	74	71	.800
*Provided EI staff with information about transition to kindergarten to help them prepare children with disabilities for kindergarten.	74	36	.001**
*Gave input into the development of special materials for children with disabilities in order to prepare them for kindergarten.	60	41	.109

*Activities specific for children with disabilities.
**$p<.05$

Table 14. Mean Value ratings and Independent t-test in Child-Focused Transition Activities of Prekindergarten and Kindergarten Teachers for Matched Survey Items

Survey Item	Prekindergarten Teachers N=35 Mean Value Rating (SD)	Kindergarten Teachers N=45 Mean Value Rating (SD)	t-value	p-value
Provided families with literature about transition	4.4 (0.81)	4.3 (0.97)	-.406	.686
Talked to families about kindergarten readiness	4.6 (0.74)	4.5 (0.89)	-.322	.748
Talked directly to one or more children about their transition to kindergarten	4.6 (0.61)	4.4 (1.0)	-1.028	.307
Gave parents media to help their children with the transition to kindergarten	3.6 (1.13)	3.9 (1.16)	1.028	.307
Gave parents information about their children's pre-academic performance.	4.7 (0.46)	4.2 (1.0)	-3.177	.002**
Gave input into the development of transition materials for children to help them better understand the upcoming transition to kindergarten.	4.3 (0.83)	4.2 (1.0)	-.635	.527
*Provided EI staff with information about transition to kindergarten to help them prepare children with disabilities for kindergarten.	4.3 (0.99)	4.3 (0.97)	.562	.576
*Gave input into the development of special materials for children with disabilities in order to prepare them for kindergarten.	4.1 (0.98)	4.2 (1.09)	.328	.744

*Activities specific for children with disabilities.
**P<.05

4.6.2 Family-related activities

Higher percentages of prekindergarten teachers engaged in family activities than did kindergarten teachers. As seen in Table 15, 100% of prekindergarten teachers listened to concerns of families of typically developing children regarding their upcoming transition to kindergarten. This is in contrast to only 84% of kindergarten teachers. Listening to concerns of families was determined to have a statistically significant difference (Fisher's Exact Test, n=80, p=0.018). Although 100% of prekindergarten teachers listened to families, only 79% reported that they problem solved issues with families. Problem solving was the least engaged in family

category for both prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers. This activity was not found to be statistically significant.

Both sets of teachers ranked all of the activities as very valuable. As illustrated in Table 16, none of the family-focused activities mean value ratings were found to be statistically significant.

Table 15. Percentage of Engagement and Fisher's Exact Test in Family-Focused Transition Activities of Prekindergarten and Kindergarten Teachers for Matched Survey Items

Survey Item	Prekindergarten Teacher N=35 %	Kindergarten Teachers N=45 %	Fisher's Exact Test
Provided general information to families about developmental milestones and kindergarten readiness	97	84	.128
*Listened to concerns of families of children with disabilities children about transition to kindergarten	94	80	.103
Problem solved issues about kindergarten transition with families of typically developing children.	79	67	.333
Listened to concerns of families of typically developing children about transition to kindergarten.	100	84	.018**

*Activities specific to children with disabilities
**p<.05

Table 16. Mean Value Ratings and Independent t-test in Family-Focused Transition Activities of Prekindergarten and Kindergarten Teachers for Matched Survey Items

Survey Item	Prekindergarten Teacher N=35 Mean Value Rating (SD)	Kindergarten Teacher N=45 Mean Value Rating (SD)	t-value	p-value
Provided general information to families about developmental milestones and kindergarten readiness	4.4 (0.65)	4.4 (0.86)	.000	1.000
*Listened to concerns of families of children with disabilities children about transition to kindergarten	4.5 (0.61)	4.6 (0.83)	.447	.656
Problem solved issues about kindergarten transition with families of typically developing children.	4.3 (0.86)	4.4 (1.0)	1.057	.294
Listened to concerns of families of typically developing children about transition to kindergarten.	4.4 (0.70)	4.5 (0.84)	.267	.790

*Activities specific to children with disabilities
**p<.05

4.6.3 Teacher-related activities

Table 17 illustrates that the counterpart teacher activities were less common among both groups of teachers than the child and family categories. In the survey, more kindergarten teachers reported that they attended kindergarten readiness and transition trainings than did prekindergarten teachers. However, this was a contradiction to the demographic data, which revealed that more prekindergarten than kindergarten teachers attended kindergarten transition trainings. Although few teachers in both sets reported contacting their counterpart teacher, more prekindergarten teachers did so. A statistically significant difference was reported (Fisher's Exact Test, n=80, p=0.002) as illustrated in Table 17. Similarly, more prekindergarten teachers phoned school districts to find out about transition events than did kindergarten teachers to inform prekindergarten centers about transition events; this was found to be another statistically significant difference (Fisher's Exact Test, n=80, p=.003).

Talking to the counterpart teacher was an uncommon teacher activity; however, the kindergarten teacher ranked it as valuable and the prekindergarten teacher ranked it as Very Valuable. This difference in the mean proved to be statistically significant (t (75) = 2.904, p=.005) as illustrated in Table 18. All other activities for both sets of teachers were ranked as being very valuable with no statistical significance was found.

Table 17. Percentage of Engagement and Fisher's Exact Test in Teacher-Focused Transition Activities of Prekindergarten and Kindergarten Teachers for Matched Items

Survey Item	Prekindergarten Teachers N=35 %	Kindergarten Teachers N=45 %	Fisher's Exact Test
*Was frequently in contact with EI support staff in order to discuss kindergarten options for children with disabilities	80	58	.054
Contacted at least one teacher by phone to gain information about the program that a child would be attending or was attending.	60	24	.002**
Contacted school districts to find out dates of special transition events or to provide dates of special transition events.	71	36	.003**
Discussed kindergarten readiness with more than one kindergarten/prekindergarten teacher.	75	64	.455
Attended trainings that focused on kindergarten readiness or transition to kindergarten.	58	71	.237
*Facilitated communication with parent permission between support personnel and kindergarten teachers so that they could plan for transitions for individual children with disabilities.	50	69	.104

*Activities specific to children with a disability

**p<.05

Table 18. Mean Value Ratings and Independent t-test in Teacher- Focused Transition Activities of Prekindergarten and Kindergarten Teachers for Matched Items

Survey Item	Prekindergarten Teachers N=35 Mean Value Rating (SD)	Kindergarten Teachers N=45 Mean Value Rating (SD)	t-value	p-value
*Was frequently in contact with EI support staff in order to discuss kindergarten options for children with disabilities	4.3 (0.87)	4.4 (0.95)	.370	.712
Contacted at least one teacher by phone to gain information about the program that a child would be attending or was attending.	4.2 (0.95)	3.5 (1.2)	-2.904	.005**
Contacted school districts to find out dates of special transition events or to provide dates of special transition events.	4.5 (0.80)	4.1 (1.1)	-1.728	.088
Discussed kindergarten readiness with more than one kindergarten/prekindergarten teacher.	4.4 (0.83)	4.2 (1.2)	-1.013	.314
Attended trainings that focused on kindergarten readiness or transition to kindergarten.	4.4 (0.86)	4.4 (0.92)	.246	.806
*Facilitated communication with parent permission between support personnel and kindergarten teachers so that they could plan for transitions for an individual child with disabilities.	4.0 (0.88)	4.5 (0.93)	1.772	.081

*Activities specific to children with a disability

**$p<.05$

4.6.4 Peer-related activities

As illustrated in Table 19, for both sets of teachers the most common activity in the peer category was to communicate to families about the importance of friendships. The two activities that were least common were to connect families together whose children would attend the same school and to pair a typical child with a child with disability for activities. All of the peer activities were found to have statistically significant differences between the two sets of teachers except for pairing a typical child with a child with a disability who would go to kindergarten together. For example, more prekindergarten teachers engaged in facilitating relationships of children who would be or did attend the same school; this was found to be statistically significant

(Fisher's Exact Test, n=80, p=.024). Another statistically significant finding was that more prekindergarten teachers attempted to connect families of children who would be or did attend the same school (Fisher's Exact Test, n=80, p=.038). Finally, more prekindergarten teachers communicated to at least one family about the importance of friendship and social emotional development (Fisher's Exact Test, n=80, p= .038).

All peer related activities were rated between valuable to very valuable by both sets of teachers regardless of the percentage of teachers that engaged in the activities. The independent t-test indicated that the only statistically significant mean value rating in the peer related activities was to facilitate relationships of children who would be or were in the same kindergarten together (t(73)=2.321, p=.023) as illustrated in Table 20.

Table 19. Percentage of Engagement and Fisher's Exact Test in Peer-Focused Transition Activities of Prekindergarten and Kindergarten Teachers

Survey Item	Prekindergarten Teachers N=35 %	Kindergarten Teachers N=45 %	Fisher's Exact Test
Facilitated relationships of children who would be attending the same school for kindergarten	86	62	.024**
Attempted to connect families to one another whose children would attend the same school	54	30	.038**
*Paired at least one child with a disability with a typically developing child who would attend the same kindergarten prior to transition	52	33	.155
Communicated to at least one family of a child in my classroom about the importance of friendship and social emotional development	97	80	.038**

*Activities specific to children with a disability

**p<.05

Table 20. Mean Value Ratings and Independent t-test of Prekindergarten and Kindergarten Teachers in Peer-Focused Transition Activities

	Prekindergarten Teachers N=35 Mean Value Rating (SD)	Kindergarten Teachers N=45 Mean Value Rating (SD)	t-value	p-value
Facilitated relationships of children who would be attending the same school for kindergarten	4.2 (0.99)	3.6 (1.2)	-2.321	.023**
Attempted to connect families to one another whose children would attend the same school	3.4 (1.3)	3.2 (1.1)	-.586	.560
*Paired at least one child with a disability with a typically developing child who would attend the same kindergarten prior to transition	3.9 (1.0)	3.8 (1.0)	-.155	.877
Communicated to at least one family of a child in my classroom about the importance of friendship and social emotional development	4.5 (0.71)	4.2 (0.97)	-1.735	.087

*Activities specific to children with disabilities

**p<.05

4.6.5 Community-related activity

Finally, prekindergarten teachers engaged in the community activity at a higher percentage than did kindergarten teachers. However, when compared to engagement in most other activities, the community activity was engaged in by smaller percentages of both groups. Both sets of teachers ranked this activity as valuable. There were no significant findings in the community-related activity.

4.7 RESEARCH QUESTION 4: COMPARING ENGAGEMENT AND VALUE RATINGS OF PREKINDERGARTEN AND KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS FOR MATCHED ITEMS DIRECTED TO CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES.

Transition is an especially stressful time for families of children with disabilities. Prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers reported that it was less common to participate in transition activities for children with disabilities as opposed to typically developing children for

the most part. It is important to note that each Table above marks activities that are specific to children with a disability by an asterisk. This section will examine the activities that teachers engaged in for children with disabilities that are matched.

4.7.1 Child-related activity (Disability)

As noted in Table 13, more prekindergarten teachers engaged in activities for children with disabilities at a higher percentage than did kindergarten teachers. More prekindergarten teachers provided EI staff with information about transition to help prepare children with disabilities for the transition to kindergarten than did kindergarten teachers. Providing EI staff with information about transition was found to be statistically significant (Fisher's Exact Test, n=80, p=.001). Both sets of teachers rated those activities as very valuable to transition. Table 14 indicated that there existed no significant differences for teacher-to-child activities in the Mean Value Ratings.

4.7.2 Family-related activities (Disability)

It was quite common for both sets of teachers to listen to family concerns regarding their children with disabilities upcoming transition to kindergarten. As illustrated in Table 15, it was more common for prekindergarten teachers to engage in listening activities than kindergarten teachers. As indicated in Table 16 both sets of teachers ranked this activity as very valuable in the family category for a transition activity. There was no statistical significance found in the teacher-to-family activities.

4.7.3 Counterpart teacher-related activities (Disability)

More prekindergarten teachers reported that they contacted EI support staff on behalf of a child with a disability than did kindergarten teachers (see Table 17), but it was not significant. It was less common for both sets of teachers to facilitate communication with support personnel in the receiving school. Kindergarten teachers as a group, however, were more likely to facilitate this

communication with the support personnel than prekindergarten teachers (Prekindergarten 50%, Kindergarten 69%). For all activities in the counterpart teacher category, both sets of teachers ranked the activities as very valuable; none of those ratings were found to be statistically significant as seen in Table 18.

4.7.4 Peer-related activities (Disability)

Pairing a child with a disability with a typical child for activities during the transition to kindergarten were uncommon activities for both groups of teachers as illustrated in Table 19. However, it was more common for prekindergarten teachers to pair a child with a disability with a typical child who would attend the same kindergarten than it was for kindergarten teachers to engage in the same activity once the children were in her classroom. Both sets of teachers rated this activity to be Valuable. There were no significant findings in the peer-related activities for children with disabilities.

4.8 RESEARCH QUESTION 5: COMPARING THE RELATIONSHIP LEVELS OF THE PREKINDERGARTEN AND KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS' RESPONSES

The Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000), which was used as the bases for the design of the surveys, suggests that the quality of the interactions and relationships at the child, parent, teacher, peer and community levels during transition to kindergarten can predict the success of the transition and the future connectedness between school, home, and community. When researchers utilized the Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition, they were able to recognize and investigate the child outcomes and effects as well as

the meaning of the changing relationships during the transition to kindergarten (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000).

In order to answer research question 5 and develop a conceptual comparison of the engagement levels and value ratings of the prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers in accordance with the Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition, the aggregate data for matched items within each of the 5 relationship levels were compared (See Tables 21, 22, and 23). There were a total of 24 matched questions across the 5 levels. The summary statistics were computed by determining the overall percentage of engagement and the mean value rating within each relationship level. In addition to those calculations a Fisher's Exact Test and independent t-tests were conducted.

Overall more prekindergarten teachers engaged in transition activities than kindergarten teachers as seen in Table 21. The child, family, counterpart teacher and the peer relationship level comparisons were found to be statistically significant. For example, more prekindergarten teachers engaged in overall transition activities at the child level than did kindergarten teachers (Fisher's Exact Test, n=80, p= .0001) as seen in Table 22. Further, a statistically significant difference was also found that more prekindergarten teachers engaged in transition activities at the family level (Fisher's Exact Test, n=80, p=0.001). The counterpart teacher relationship level was also found to be statistically significant; more prekindergarten teachers engaged in the counterpart teacher activities than kindergarten teachers (Fisher's Exact Test, n=80, p=.010). Finally more prekindergarten teachers engaged at the peer level than did kindergarten teachers and this was found to be statistically significant (Fisher's Exact Test, n=80, p=.0001).

The rank order of the levels by percentage of engagement from most to least for both sets of teachers was similar. For the prekindergarten teachers the order was: family, child, peer,

teacher and community. For the Kindergarten teachers the order was: family, child, teacher, peer and community. The only deviation in the rank order pertained to a reversal in the peer and teacher activities.

There was not much difference in the value ratings for both sets of teachers across the relationship levels in terms of absolute value and relative ranking as seen in Table 21. Table 23 reveals that there were no statistically significant differences. The activities at the child, family, and teacher relationship levels were all rated as very valuable. Activities that involved peers and community were ranked in the valuable range. Prekindergarten teachers ranked three of the five categories (i.e. teacher, peer and community) slightly above the kindergarten teachers. Kindergarten teachers ranked two of the five categories (i.e., child and family levels) slightly above the prekindergarten teachers.

Table 21. Percentage Engagement and Mean Value Ratings by Relationship Levels for Prekindergarten and Kindergarten Teachers

	Prekindergarten Teachers N=35		Kindergarten Teachers N=45	
Relationship Level	%	Mean Value Rating (SD)	%	Mean Value Rating (SD)
Child	78	4.00 (0.82)	60	4.22 (1.01)
Family	89	4.20 (0.88)	75	4.42 (0.94)
Teacher	66	4.30 (0.86)	54	4.16 (1.02)
Peers	72	3.99 (1.02)	51	3.70 (1.07)
Community	56	3.94 (1.13)	34	3.71 (1.19)

Table 22. Percentage Engagement and Fischer's Exact Test by Relationship Levels for Prekindergarten and Kindergarten Teachers

Relationship Level	Prekindergarten Teachers N=35 %	Kindergarten Teachers N=45 %	Fischer's Exact Test
Child	78	60	.0001**
Family	89	75	.001**
Teacher	66	54	.010**
Peers	72	51	.0001**
Community	56	34	.068

**p<.05

Table 23. Mean Value Ratings and Independent t-test test by Relationship Levels for Prekindergarten and Kindergarten Teachers

Relationship Level	Prekindergarten Teachers N=35 Mean Value Rating (SD)	Kindergarten Teachers N=45 Mean Value Rating (SD)	t-value	p-value
Child	4.00 (0.82)	4.22 (1.01)	.025	.980
Family	4.20 (0.88)	4.42 (0.94)	.478	.634
Teacher	4.30 (0.86)	4.16 (1.02)	-.505	.615
Peers	3.99 (1.02)	3.70 (1.07)	-1.541	.128
Community	3.94 (1.13)	3.71 (1.19)	-.844	.401

**p<.05

4.9 RESEARCH QUESTION 6: COMPARING THE RELATIONSHIP LEVELS OF THE PREKINDERGARTEN AND KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS' RESPONSES FOR ACTIVITIES DIRECTED TO CHILDREN WITH AND WITHOUT DISABILITIES

Both surveys contained items that were unique to children who were typically developing, children with disabilities, and all children. Most items that pertained to typically developing children were also relevant to children with disabilities. In order to answer research question 6, certain survey items were designed to address activities that were unique to children with disabilities. Those survey items have been analyzed in order to examine the relationship levels and value ratings of the prekindergarten and kindergarten teacher for children with and without disabilities (Tables 24 and 25). Four of the five relationship levels were examined, which included the child, the family, the teacher and the peers. The community question was not included because it did not include any items that distinguished between children with and without disabilities.

A further analysis using the Fisher's Exact Test was conducted to compare the activities for typical children between prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers (Table 26) and then activities for children with disabilities (Table 27). A t-test was conducted to compare the mean value ratings of both sets of teachers for typical children and then for children with disabilities (Table 28 and 29).

Across relationship levels and within both groups of teachers, the items that focused on children with disabilities had lower percentages of engagement than did all other items. As illustrated in Table 24, prekindergarten teachers reported that they engaged in activities for all children by relationship level in the following rank order from most to least: family, child, peers, and teacher. Rank ordering of their engagement in activities for children with disabilities differed somewhat: child, peers, teacher, and family. As illustrated in Table 25, kindergarten teachers engaged in activities for all children by relationship level in the following rank order from most to least: family, child, peer, and teacher. The rank order of the relationship levels for children with disabilities fell in a slightly different order: teacher, family, child, and peer.

Table 24. Percentage Engagement and Mean Value Ratings in Relationship Levels by Prekindergarten Teachers Comparing Children with and without Disabilities.

Relationship Level	Activities for Children who are Typically Developing N=35		Activities for Children with Disabilities N= 35	
	%	Mean Value Rating (SD)	%	Mean Value Rating (SD)
Child	82	4.0 (0.76)	67	4.11 (0.98)
Family	83	4.3 (0.84)	45	4.00 (0.91)
Teachers	71	4.4 (0.85)	47	4.15 (0.89)
Peers	79	4.0 (1.01)	52	3.93 (1.04)

Table 25. Percentage Engagement and Mean Value Ratings in Relationship Levels by Kindergarten Teachers Comparing Children with and without Disabilities.

Relationship Level	Activities for Children who are Typically Developing N=45		Activities for Children with Disabilities N=45	
	%	Mean Value Rating	%	Mean Value Rating
Child	68	4.25 (1.0)	39	4.25 (1.03)
Family	75	4.2 (0.94)	45	4.2 (0.84)
Teachers	49	4.0 (1.09)	54	4.4 (0.94)
Peers	57	3.7 (1.10)	33	3.8 (1.01)

At closer examination, more prekindergarten teachers engaged in activities at every level for typically developing children than did kindergarten teachers as illustrated in Table 26. More prekindergarten teachers engaged in child-related activities for typically developing children than did kindergarten teachers and this was found to be statistically significant (Fisher's Exact Test, n=80, p=.0001). More prekindergarten teachers engaged at the family level with children who are typically developing (Fisher's Exact Test, n=80, p=.012) and the counterpart teacher level (Fisher's Exact Test, n=80, p=.003). Finally, more prekindergarten teachers engaged at the peer level for typically developing children than did kindergarten teachers and it was also found to be statistically significant (Fisher's Exact Test, n=80, p=.0001) as indicated in Table 26.

Overall, more prekindergarten teachers engaged in activities for children with disabilities at every level except the counterpart teacher relationship level (see Table 27). The only statistically significant relationship level for children with disabilities was the child level (Fisher's Exact Test, n=80, p=.0001). More prekindergarten teachers (67%) engaged in activities that focused on children with disabilities than kindergarten teachers (39%). More kindergarten teachers (54%) engaged in counterpart teacher activities for children with

disabilities than did prekindergarten teachers (47%). Interestingly, both sets of teachers engaged in activities that focused on families of children with disabilities equally (45%). The family level fell last in rank order for the prekindergarten teachers as opposed to second for the kindergarten teachers.

There was not much difference in the value ratings for both sets of teachers across the relationship levels in terms of absolute value and relative ranking for either the activities related to typical children or children with disabilities as seen in Tables 28 and 29. The activities at the child, family, and teacher relationship levels were all rated as very valuable. Activities that involved peers were ranked in the valuable range with the exception of peer activities for prekindergarten teachers of typically developing children. The only p-value of significance was the typically developing comparison of the peer relationship level seen in table 28 ($t(73)=2.014$, $p=.048$).

Table 26. Percentage Engagement and Fisher's Exact Test of Prekindergarten and Kindergarten Teachers for Activities for Typically Developing Children

Relationship Level	Prekindergarten Teachers N=35 %	Kindergarten Teachers N=45 %	Fisher's Exact Test
Child	82	68	.0001**
Family	83	75	.012**
Teacher	71	49	.003**
Peers	79	57	.0001**

**p<.05

Table 27. Percentage Engagement and Fisher's Exact Test of Prekindergarten and Kindergarten Teachers for Activities for Children with Disabilities

Relationship Level	Prekindergarten Teachers N=35 %	Kindergarten Teachers N=45 %	Fisher's Exact Test
*Child	67	39	.0001*
*Family	45	45	.913
*Teacher	47	54	.866
*Peers	52	33	.150

*Activities specific to children with disabilities

**p<.05

Table 28. Mean Value Ratings and Independent t-test of Prekindergarten and Kindergarten Teachers for Activities for Typically Developing Children.

Relationship Level	Prekindergarten Teachers N=35 Mean Value Rating (SD)	Kindergarten Teachers N=45 Mean Value Rating (SD)	t-value	p-value
Child	4.0 (0.76)	4.25 (1.0)	-.761	.449
Family	4.3 (0.84)	4.2 (0.94)	.115	.908
Teacher	4.4 (0.85)	4.0 (1.09)	-1.84	.659
Peers	4.0 (1.01)	3.7 (1.10)	-2.014	.048**

**p<.05

Table 29. Mean Value Ratings and Independent t-test of Pre-kindergarten and Kindergarten Teachers for Activities for Children with Disabilities

Relationship Level	Prekindergarten Teachers N=35 Mean Value Rating (SD)	Kindergarten Teachers N=45 Mean Value Rating (SD)	t-value	p-value
*Child	4.11 (0.98)	4.25 (1.03)	.657	.513
*Family	4.00 (0.91)	4.2 (0.84)	.878	.383
*Teacher	4.15 (0.89)	4.4 (0.94)	1.377	.173
*Peers	3.93 (1.04)	3.8 (1.01)	-.155	.877

*Activities specific to children with disabilities

**p<.05

5.0 DISCUSSION

Transition to kindergarten has long been thought about and studied by educational researchers, practitioners and administrators alike. The transition from prekindergarten to kindergarten sets the stage for formal school. We know from research that the success of kindergarten transition is predicated upon the positive relationships among key players in the transition process (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000). These relationships are illustrated in the Ecological and Dynamic Model (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000).

The development of the study was based on the Ecological and Dynamic Model (EDM) of transition (Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta, 2000) in the hopes of gaining a better understanding of specific transition activities that prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers engage in with key players (i.e., child, family, teacher, peers and community) to improve the transition to kindergarten for all children. Furthermore the study examined how these two groups of teachers valued those transition activities. The following sections provide a discussion of the findings and future implications.

5.1 TEACHERS

The data collected in the survey of 35 prekindergarten teachers and 45 kindergarten teachers in southwestern Pennsylvania demonstrated that both prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers engaged in a variety of transition activities. The results also revealed that both sets of teachers valued the transition activities even if the teachers did not always engage in those activities.

5.1.1 Prekindergarten teachers

Prekindergarten teachers engaged in many different activities with key players during transition to kindergarten. Prekindergarten teachers also valued the many activities in which they engaged. These results imply that they have engaged in activities that have built relationships with all key players during the transition to kindergarten.

5.1.1.1 Prekindergarten teachers and transition activities

The findings from this study have some similarities and some differences to previous research. For example, Rous, McCormick, and Hallman (2007) reported that the most common transition to kindergarten practices used by prekindergarten teachers was sending parents information on kindergarten, arranging for the class to visit a kindergarten, and meeting with kindergarten teachers to discuss curriculum. Similarly, La Paro et al. (2003) found prekindergarten teachers reported attending a spring kindergarten orientation, provided records about the children in their classrooms with the elementary school, and arranged for and visited a kindergarten classroom. This is consistent with the current findings that prekindergarten teachers often gave general information about kindergarten readiness and developmental milestones related to transition to families. However, the data from this study found that only about half of prekindergarten teachers made kindergarten visits. Even fewer teachers reported arranging for or accompanying children with disabilities (31%) on such visits. Prekindergarten teachers did communicate with kindergarten teachers (75%) and found it to be very valuable. The Rous et al. (2007) study also indicated that somewhat less than half of prekindergarten teachers in their study reported having training related to transition to kindergarten whereas in the current study somewhat more than half reported attending trainings.

5.1.1.2 Prekindergarten teachers and family relationships

The data in this study revealed that prekindergarten teachers engaged in activities with families to a higher percentage than other relationship levels. This corroborates previous research that suggests that most prekindergarten programs function based on a family-focused model that values strong relationships between the caregiver/parent and the teacher (Kemp & Carter, 2000; Bohan-Baker & Little, 2004). Other research has indicated that families would like to partner with prekindergarten teachers during transition to kindergarten (Krieder, 2002; Pianta, Kraft-Sayre, Rimm-Kaufman, Gercke, & Higgins, 2001, 2001; Becker-Klein, 1999; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre,1999). Consequently, it would seem that both families and prekindergarten teachers value the relationships that they have with each other.

Data from this study revealed that prekindergarten teachers listened to family concerns and provided families with general and specific information about development and transition. Engagement in these types of activities could legitimize Kreider's suggestion in an article in 2002 that prekindergarten teachers could take on a role as liaison for parents during transition to kindergarten.

5.1.1.3 Prekindergarten teachers and other relationship levels

The data further demonstrated that after the family relationship level prekindergarten teachers engaged in transition activities in the following relative order: the child, peers, the counterpart teacher, and the community. Because prekindergarten teachers tend to value developmentally appropriate classrooms, it is not surprising that more prekindergarten teachers engaged in activities focused on the child (78%) than did kindergarten teachers (60%). Other specific activities that prekindergarten teachers engaged in were talking to families about kindergarten readiness (97%), talking directly to children about their transition to kindergarten (97%),

providing information to families about children's pre-academic success (100%) and providing families with literature about transition to kindergarten (89%).

It is clear that the prekindergarten teachers engaged in activities that involved consideration of and communication of specific kindergarten readiness skills. The kindergarten readiness literature, as stated previously, has debated whether to utilize the prekindergarten years as an opportunity to prepare/train children for kindergarten. For those that take the position that prekindergarten should prepare children for "real school", then prekindergarten inevitably becomes the transition year that kindergarten has been in the past (Kemp & Carter, 2000). This research study is consistent with the findings that prekindergarten teachers engage in activities that are assumed to prepare children for kindergarten.

Further findings indicated that prekindergarten teachers also engaged in activities at the peer relationship level (72%) at a higher percentage than kindergarten teachers (51%). Specific activities that prekindergarten teachers engaged in at the peer level included communicating to at least one family the importance of friendship and social emotional development (97%) and facilitating relationships of children who would be attending the same school for kindergarten (86%). As stated earlier in this paper, social emotional development is a central focus of the prekindergarten curriculum. Social competence, self-regulation, friendships and emotional development are held in high importance in prekindergarten. This also helps prepare children for the kindergarten setting (readiness). Young children who have higher social competence tend to participate more in school and are more socially accepted by peers and teachers alike (Raver & Knitzer, 2002). Furthermore, early social competence in children predicts how well they perform academically later in formal school (Raver & Knitzer, 2002). The data in this study

implies that prekindergarten teachers engaged in activities at the peer relationship level that support social emotional development and peer social competence.

5.1.1.4 Prekindergarten teachers' relationships with kindergarten teachers

It is not surprising that only about two-thirds of the prekindergarten teachers engaged in activities that brought them in direct contact with kindergarten teachers, although they still highly valued those activities. This finding was similar to a previous study that reported that very few prekindergarten teachers met with the individual teacher or a representative from an elementary school (La Paro et al., 2003). These results may suggest that there exist barriers such as time and opportunity for teachers to reach out to one another.

5.1.2 Kindergarten teachers

Kindergarten teachers, like the prekindergarten teachers, engaged in many activities with key players during transition to kindergarten. Overall, kindergarten teachers engaged in activities less often than did prekindergarten teachers, but placed a similar value on the transition activities as did prekindergarten teachers.

5.1.2.1 Kindergarten teacher and overall transition activities

In the La Paro, Kraft-Sayre & Pianta (2003) study, teachers and parents were interviewed regarding the use of activities such as kindergarten orientation, newsletters, and meeting the kindergarten teacher. Kindergarten teachers reported that they utilized school-wide activities as opposed to more individualized transition activities. More specifically, the research of La Paro and colleagues indicated that 83% of teachers reported that they sent a letter home to families after the start of school and 77% of teachers reported that an open house was offered to all families. This is consistent with the data in the current study that kindergarten teachers engaged in general activities such as sending home a letter (97%) and participating in a kindergarten

information night (89%). This study, however, also demonstrated that kindergarten teachers engaged in other activities as well. For example, 89% of teachers reported talking directly to a family about a child's kindergarten readiness. However, the activity (survey item) was not specific to where and when the kindergarten teacher spoke to a family and it could have been possible that such interactions took place at school-wide events. In general the findings support that kindergarten teachers engaged in group activities that appeared to be standard practices for the school that they taught in, while individual child or family activities appeared to be less common.

5.1.2.2 Kindergarten teacher and the family relationship

Like the prekindergarten teachers, the kindergarten teachers engaged in activities at the family level at a higher percentage than those at other relationship levels. However, overall kindergarten teachers (75%) engaged in family level activities less than did prekindergarten teachers (89%). This suggests that kindergarten teachers, like their prekindergarten counterparts, also have an interest in fulfilling the wishes of families as determined by previous research (Krieder, 2002; Pianta, Kraft-Sayre, Rimm-Kaufman, Gercke, & Higgins, 2001, 2001; Becker-Klein, 1999; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 1999). Such activities, as stated above, tended to be more school-wide than individualized, which is a contrast to the types of activities in which prekindergarten teachers tend to engage. The data expands our knowledge base by demonstrating that kindergarten teachers place a very valuable rating on all of the family activities.

5.1.2.3 The kindergarten teachers' relationships with the prekindergarten teacher

After the focus on family, kindergarten teachers engaged in transition activities in the following rank order: child, counterpart teacher, peer, and community. The findings related to activities at the counterpart teacher level were consistent with previous research that reported that it is not as

common for kindergarten teachers to initiate or coordinate strategies for transition with prekindergarten teachers (La Paro, et al., 2000; La Paro et al., 2003; Horowitz, et al., 2007). However, based on the EDM it would benefit children in transition if kindergarten teachers engaged in more activities to enhance the relationship level with the prekindergarten teacher.

The kindergarten teachers as a group rated all activities with the prekindergarten teachers as very valuable. The fact that many of them did not engage in such activities perhaps suggests that barriers must exist to engagement in these activities. This leads us to ponder how the kindergarten teacher's role and skills can be expanded in building the important connection with the prekindergarten teacher as the kindergarten has an important role to play as the expert on kindergarten expectations for children and families.

5.1.3 Prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers

Research questions five and six compare relationship levels between prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers. First, it is important to discuss overall relationship levels and comparisons between prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers.

5.1.3.1 Prekindergarten compared to Kindergarten Teachers: Relationship levels

Overall, more prekindergarten teachers engaged in activities at each relationship level than did kindergarten teachers. This was found to be statistically significant at every relationship level, except the community relationship level.

This is consistent to past research in that overall, families indicated that it is easier to partner/have a relationship with the prekindergarten teacher as opposed to the kindergarten teacher (Kreider, 2002; Pianta, et al., 2001). Similarly, parents reported that the prekindergarten staff served as a positive support system (Pianta et al., 2001).

5.1.3.2 Prekindergarten teachers: Comparing Children with and without disabilities

When comparing relationship levels for prekindergarten teachers and children with disabilities many difference existed. Research question six indicated that the prekindergarten teachers engaged in more transition activities at every relationship level for typically developing children than children with disabilities. The prekindergarten teachers valued both activities for children with and without disabilities.

5.1.3.3 Kindergarten teachers: Children with and without disabilities

The findings for kindergarten teachers (i.e. Research Question 6) were similar to prekindergarten teachers. Kindergarten teachers engaged in more transition activities for typically developing children than for children with disabilities except for the counterpart teacher relationship level. Kindergarten teachers valued those relationship level activities very similarly for both children with and without disabilities.

5.1.3.4 Prekindergarten teachers compared to Kindergarten Teachers: Children with and without disabilities

When comparing the aggregated data for relationship levels for children with disabilities and typically developing children, more prekindergarten teachers engaged in activities for typically developing children than did kindergarten teachers. This was found to be statistically significant for the child, family, counterpart teacher, and peer relationship levels. Although more prekindergarten teachers engaged in child and peer level activities for children with disabilities, more kindergarten teachers engaged in the counterpart teacher relationship level activities for children with disabilities. The same percentage of teachers in both sets engaged in the family level for children with disabilities. The child level of engagement for children with disabilities was the only level found to be statistically significant.

These findings provided a distinction between how the teachers in both prekindergarten and kindergarten engage in activities that may lead to positive relationships with families of children with and without disabilities. For example, past research indicated that families of children with disabilities need to play many of the same roles as families of typically developing children; however, there are often added and unique sets of responsibilities and concerns (Fenlon, 2005). In many instances families tend to be an untapped source of support in transition programming and want to be part of the transition planning (Rous, 2008; Nieves, 2005; Rous, Myers, & Stricklin, 2007; Hains, Fowler, & Chandler, 1988). Although the research indicated that families of children with disabilities reported that they needed extra information regarding related services, understanding legal rights under IDEA, and inclusive opportunities in school and at home in order to ease the transition to a new school (Hanline & Halvorsen, 1989, Hamblin-Wilson & Thurman, 1990; Rous & Myers, 2006; Rous, Myers, & Teeters, 2007), fewer teachers in both groups in the current study engaged in activities specific to meeting these needs when compared to the activities designed for all children.

A very high percentage of prekindergarten teachers engaged in family-focused activities for children with disabilities. Comparatively, however, about half of this percentage of kindergarten teachers engaged in these activities. It is a concern that so few kindergarten teachers engaged in activities focused on families of children with disabilities despite the fact that the literature reports that families of children with disabilities want stronger relationships with professionals.

Despite the fact that a higher percentage of prekindergarten teachers than kindergarten teachers engaged in all transition activities, both sets of teachers in the study related all of these transition activities as valuable to very valuable. One other study that supports the concept that

teachers value activities but cannot always engage in them is seen in Troup and Malone' s research (1999) in which 99% of teachers reported that they desired to conduct an observation prior to the start of kindergarten for children with disabilities, while only 2% actually engaged in the activity. As noted throughout this paper, it is promising that both sets of teachers place a similar value on the transition activities. This may suggest that with future training teachers are may be willing to move towards a relationship building model of transition to kindergarten that supports the child, family, counterpart teacher, peers and even the community.

5.2 LIMITATIONS

This study has several limitations. First, because survey completion was self-selected, the results may be biased. Teachers who valued and engaged in transition to kindergarten activities may have chosen to complete the survey while those teachers who did not value or engage in the activities may have chosen not to participate. This would result in higher levels of engagement and greater values placed on the activities than if the sample were more representative.

Second, the sample was small and the return rate was low. The target population had to be expanded to other geographic areas due to low return rates in the targeted area. Furthermore, because the population for the survey was anonymous, it was impossible to ascertain what school districts and prekindergarten programs the surveys were returned from. Consequently, the teachers who responded represented a variety of different schools/programs in variety of communities that probably received differential levels of supports and resources.

Third, this study examined specific transition activities that teachers engaged in and how those teachers valued each activity. The survey did not obtain information regarding barriers to

activity engagement. Consequently, although teachers valued the activities, it was not possible to discern why they did not engage in them.

Fourth, although all teachers responded to the survey anonymously, some teachers may have felt pressure to provide the expected, most desirable answers while other may not have taken time to fill out the survey with care. It is possible also that teachers were not accurate reporters, because the teachers filled out the survey in late spring and summer and had to think back to fall and early spring when responding.

5.3 CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The transition to kindergarten marks the beginning of formal school. It is reported as a stressful time for families, children and teachers alike. The literature stressed that families wanted to partner with teachers and that partnership was dependent on how comfortable the parent felt with the teacher (Fenlon, 2005; Krieder, 2002; Pianta, Kraft-Sayre, Rimm-Kaufman, Gercke, & Higgins, 2001, 2001; Becker-Klein, 1999; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre,1999). Parents also wanted to develop a trusting relationship with teachers (Kreider, 2002). Transition to kindergarten remains an important aspect of the lives of families and children with and without disabilities. With the a growing body of research that supports creating improved transition to kindergarten for all children, more attention has been given to connecting key players. This study supports and emphasizes the value teachers hold regarding transition activities with the child, family, counterpart teacher, peers and community. What is not clear from the research is whether the teachers themselves view and value these activities for building relationships.

5.3.1 Conclusion 1: Prekindergarten teacher

It can be concluded that the prekindergarten teachers played a crucial role in supporting the family, child, counterpart teacher, peers, and community during transition to kindergarten; they are the first to engage in transition activities with a child and family. This holds especially true for the family relationship level. The prekindergarten teacher promotes the beginning stages of "interconnectedness" and relationship building with the family. As prekindergarten teachers engage in the transition activities, it further connects them with the family, building relationship patterns from one setting to the next.

The prekindergarten teachers as the first "transition liaison" can provide strong connections in each relationship level, but it starts with the family level. The prekindergarten teacher then shifts the role of the liaison and "interconnectedness" relationship building with the family to the kindergarten teacher. This process has no set timeline and is fluid as both teachers engage in various activities at various times during the school year. The engagement in the activities creates connections that will hopefully be maintained and transferred "across contexts" and then throughout the elementary school years.

5.3.2 Conclusion 2: Kindergarten Teachers

It can be concluded that kindergarten teachers engaged in activities that were mostly standard for their school programs and can be considered low intensity activities. However, kindergarten teachers value all transition activities (both high and low intensity). There remains a disconnect between the high value placed on different activities at the different relationship levels and the actually participation in the activities. It becomes difficult to transfer connections "across contexts" if barriers exist that prevent kindergarten teachers from participating in both high and low intensity activities.

5.3.3 Implications for teachers

First, all school districts and prekindergarten programs must balance many important components that involve educating young children with and without disabilities. It is often difficult to provide training that supports both prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers in the improvement of transition practices. The data indicate that teachers engage in many activities to enhance the transition to kindergarten, though teachers may not be cognizant of how important the specific activities are to not only supporting children and families through transition process, but also building connections at the various relationship levels with key players. A training model based on the EDM could be developed to help broaden both prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers knowledge about transition to kindergarten.

By utilizing the EDM as a guide for teachers, the prekindergarten teacher becomes the first agent of change (transition liaison) to help create new patterns of relationship building among children, families, counterpart teacher, peers and communities during transition to kindergarten by engaging in various activities. As illustrated in Figure 1, the prekindergarten teacher is placed in the center of the model with a direct link to each key player. The child, the family, the peers and the community are continuously linked. As the transition activities are engaged in by the teachers, the connections are strengthened. The back and forth arrow indicates that the prekindergarten teacher and kindergarten teacher are connected for various activities at various times during transition. The prekindergarten teacher's role is to set the stage for building connections with key players through the various transition activities and transfer those connections to the kindergarten teachers. The teacher-in-the-center of the EDM model can provide a way to categorize relationship-building activities and provide more in depth

information to teachers about how to create stronger connections with the key players from one placement to the next.

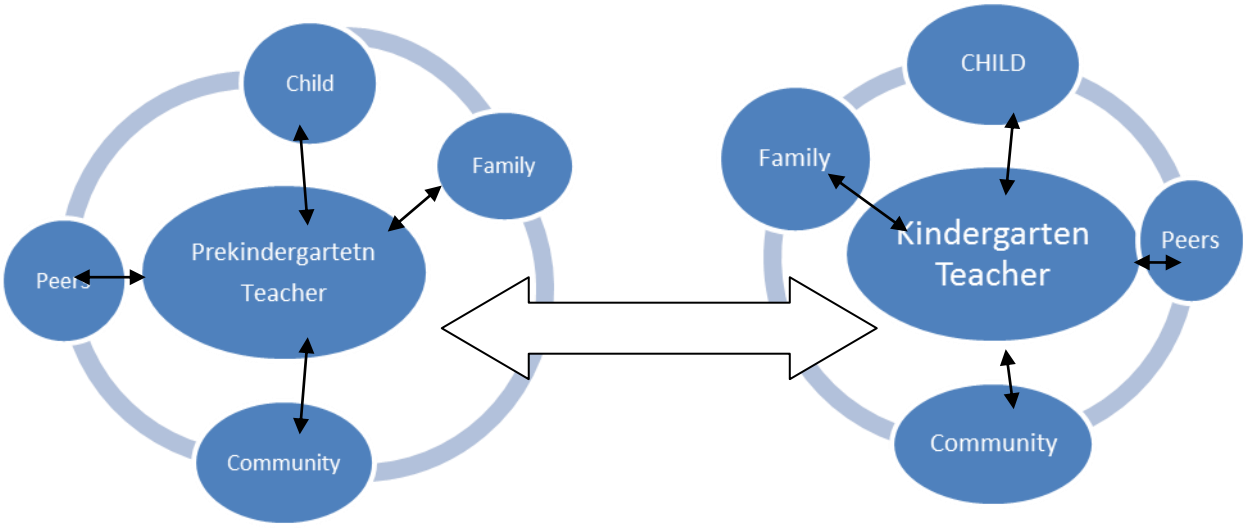


Figure 1. The Teacher at the Center of the Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition.

5.3.4 Conclusion 3: The family

It can be concluded from this research that teachers engaged families in many transition activities during transition to kindergarten; however there is a need for teachers to gain more knowledge about family-teacher partnerships for families of children with disabilities during transition to kindergarten. Despite the fact that teachers engaged in family level activities, considerably fewer teachers from both groups engaged in activities specifically for families of children with disabilities. This conclusion is cause for concern because families of children with disabilities reported that they need intense and on-going communication and support for a successful transition to kindergarten (Johnson et al., 1991; Hanline & Halorsen, 1989; Conn-Powers, Ross-Allen, & Holburn, 1990; Hanline, 1993; Rous, 2008; Nieves, 2005; Rous, Myers, & Stricklin, 2007).

We may also conclude from the data that the kindergarten teacher relied on the prekindergarten teacher to help transfer connections with families of children with disabilities from prekindergarten to kindergarten. More prekindergarten teachers in the study engaged in activities with children with disabilities, whereas more kindergarten teachers engaged in activities with the prekindergarten teachers (counterpart teacher) for children with disabilities. As the transition liaison, the prekindergarten teacher builds connections with families of children with and without disabilities though various transition activities. As the receiving transition liaison, the kindergarten teacher "reaches back" to the prekindergarten teacher to gather information and form stronger interconnections prior to the child transitioning to kindergarten.

5.3.5 Implications for future family-teacher partnerships

Lack of communication and collaboration between key players is a crucial problem that can cause disruptions to transition planning for families of children with disabilities (Nieves, 2005; Rous, 2007). Some specific concerns of families of children with disabilities included safety, IEPs, and the school bus (Hanline & Halvorsen, 1989; Rosenkoetter & Shotts, 1997). More research is needed to specifically define what barriers exist for teachers to engage in activities to enhance the relationship with families of children with disabilities. As Rimm-Kaufman and Pianata (200) pointed out, there is a need for a balance between quantitative and qualitative research to investigate such a complicated concept as relationship/connectedness. A study of barriers to transition activities that addressed the specific needs of children with disabilities and their families might compare the perceptions of teachers and families.

5.3.6 Conclusion 4: The community as a key player

As Rimm-Kaufmann and Pianta (2000) suggested, there are strong links between the key players, including indirect effects on the community/neighborhood and the child's transition to kindergarten. It can be concluded that building relationships and stronger connections with community appears to be the last priority for both sets of teachers in this study. Teacher and community/neighborhood interactions are an untapped resource for relationship building during transition to kindergarten. There may be many barriers for teachers to overcome, but the indirect positive effects on children and families may make it worth consideration.

5.3.7 Implications for future research that develops community relationships

Further investigation is needed to help link teachers to the practical needs of the communities in which children reside. If teachers can connect to a community/neighborhood then a trusting connection with families can ultimately improve transition to kindergarten.

Interviewing/surveying community members about the transition to kindergarten and the overall school relationship could be valuable in determining how to increase trust and shared connectedness between school and the community/neighborhood.

5.3.8 Conclusion 5: Peers and the transition to kindergarten

More prekindergarten teachers engaged in activities that supported the child-to-peer relationship during transition, with three of the four activities being statistically significant. If prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers can develop and share a stronger understanding of the importance of social emotional development during transition, the peer-to-child connection could be emphasized as an added tool during transition to kindergarten.

5.3.9 Implication for future research that utilizes the child- to -peer relationship as a support during transition to kindergarten

Further investigation is needed to connect the child to the peer before, during and after the transition to kindergarten. The process should be utilized as an added support to the child and family during the stressful time. The intention of emphasizing the connection is to continue to increase trust and shared connectedness with and between families and children.

5.3.10 Conclusion 6: Teacher at the center of the model

If prekindergarten and kindergarten teachers were placed at the center of Ecological and Dynamic Model development, they could be utilized as a transition liaisons during various times and contexts within a school year. This is not to suggest that the child at the center of the model as proposed by Rimm-Kaufmann & Pianta (2000) would be eliminated. It is rather to suggest that by placing each of the teachers at the center of their own domain that we can better define their roles in the building of relationships from the teachers' perspectives.

With that being said, it can be concluded that though there was some variation in the percentage that the various activities were engaged in, there was little difference in how teachers valued those activities. This may suggest that teachers understand and realize the impact that the activities have on the transition to kindergarten, but that they are limited in how and when they can engage in those activities.

The findings of this study might be useful as a basis for proposing a training model of transition with the teacher in the center. The first illustration of the model will indicate that the prekindergarten teacher is in the center. As stated in Conclusion 1, the teacher becomes the transition liaison as she makes the first connections with various key players. The activities represented in those connections are passed back and forth from prekindergarten teacher to kindergarten teacher. The kindergarten teacher then continues to form and develop on-going connections with the various key players. This process builds on the Kraft-Sayre and Pianta idea (2003) of shared responsibility for relationship building between and among key players, which occurs at various times within various contexts and develops on-going patterns of relationship building that support children throughout school.

5.3.11 Implications for future model and teacher training

We need to gain more understanding of the practical implications of the "relationship building" process as a model of transition that can guide teachers through the transition process. Further, we need to gain a deeper understanding of how we can teach teachers to "build relationships" directly with the child, family, peers and community, but also to connect the key players to one another. Such information should help us develop better training that will focus on relationships and interconnectedness.

The EDM lacks certain key players. For example, the model might benefit from the inclusion of administrators as well as special consideration for children with disabilities, their families, and early intervention/special education staff. Central to the EDM model is creating connectedness between placements; consequently, it is essential to include professionals who have expertise in leadership and serving children with disabilities.

Finally, it is clear that the relationships between the many people involved in transition to kindergarten develop and change over time. Some ideas for the further investigation of "shared connectedness" might include: the extent to which teachers understand the importance and perceive the idea of relationship building in transition to kindergarten; whether relationship-building has an impact on one's teaching; the activities that teachers, families and other important key players believe form strong connections between people. By providing teachers with insight about the importance of "shared connectedness" with key players, it might also be possible to improve the transition to kindergarten for both children with and without disabilities.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A

PREKINDERGARTEN SURVEY

Prekindergarten Teacher Survey: The transition from prekindergarten to kindergarten

Part 1: Demographic Information

How many children in your current classroom have an IEP? _____
What is your teacher -to -child ratio?_____
How many years of teaching experience do you have?_____
How many years have you been with your current agency?_____
What is your current level of education?_____
How many trainings or classes (i.e. professional development) do you attend a year?_____
Have you ever had a training that was affiliated with your agency that addressed the transition to kindergarten?_____
How many children do you have in your current class that will transition to kindergarten?_____
How many children with disabilities do you have in your current class that will transition to kindergarten?_____
Is your classroom housed within an elementary school?_____
Is your classroom housed within a center with several other Head Start classroom?_____
Is your classroom housed by itself within another building?_____
Do you work with a Family support person who helps you support families?_____
If so, does this person help your families with transition to kindergarten?_____

Part 2: The following activities might occur in preparing preschool children and families for the transition to kindergarten. When considering the transition to kindergarten think in terms of the year prior to kindergarten entry. Please indicate which activities you typically engage in to prepare children for the transition into kindergarten. Then provide your opinion about the value of these activities to a smooth kindergarten transition for children and their families, whether you implement them or not.

Rate how valuable you think the activity is to a smooth transition to kindergarten.	**Not at all valuable**	**Somewhat valuable**	**Valuable**	**Very valuable**	**Extremely valuable**
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

Please indicate what activities you engaged in to prepare your current class of children for the transition to kindergarten:	**Y**	**N**	Rate how valuable you think the activity is to a smooth transition for children and their families using the scale above (even if you did not engage in the activity).	1	2	3	4	5

1. I provided families in my classroom with children's literature about transition to kindergarten during the school year.								
2. I talked and/or provided information to families about how to discuss getting ready for kindergarten with their children prior to the start of kindergarten.								
3. I talked directly to one or more children about their transition to kindergarten prior to the start of kindergarten.								
4. I gave parents media such as DVD's, videos, internet links to help their children with the transition to kindergarten.								
5. I gave parents information about their children's pre-academic performance (i.e. letter recognition, counting, etc.)								
6. I created transition materials for children to help them understand their upcoming transition to kindergarten (i.e. K photo album, social story, book, etc.)								
7. *I provided support staff (OT, PT, Speech, etc.) with information about transition to kindergarten (i.e. kindergarten readiness, school information, etc.) to help them better prepare children with disabilities that they serve for kindergarten.								
8. *****I was frequently in contact with support staff (PT, OT, speech) in order to discuss kindergarten readiness (i.e. any skills need to be successful in K.) and/or kindergarten options for children with disabilities in my classroom**.**								
9. * I created special materials for children with disabilities in my classroom in order to better prepare them for kindergarten								
10. I provided general information to families about developmental milestones and kindergarten readiness.								

11. *I problem solved issues about kindergarten transition with families of children with disabilities.								
12. I listened to concerns of families of typically developing children about transition to kindergarten.								
13. I problem solved issues about kindergarten transition with families of typically developing children.								
14. I gave on-going encouragement to families during transition to kindergarten.								
15. I contacted at least one Kindergarten teacher by phone to gain information about a the program that a child/children in my center would attend.								
16. I provided kindergarten teachers with child information with parental permission.								
17. I contacted school districts about kindergarten events (i.e. orientations, registration, etc.) they were offering so I could give the information to families in my classroom.								
18. I discussed kindergarten readiness (i.e. skills needed for children to be successful in kindergarten) with one or more kindergarten teachers.								
19. I know the kindergarten transition policies in districts that children in my classroom attend.								
20. I have attended trainings that focus on kindergarten readiness (i.e. any skills needed for children to be successful in kindergarten) or transition to kindergarten.								
21. *I facilitated communication between support personnel and kindergarten teachers so that they could plan for transition for an individual child with disabilities with parent permission								
22. *I spoke to district support personnel with parental permission regarding a specific child's strengths and needs aside from the IEP meeting.								
23. I facilitated relationships of children who would be attending the same school for kindergarten.								
24. I attempted to connect families to one another whose children would attend the same school district for kindergarten.								
25. I gave on-going encouragement to families of children with disabilities during transition to kindergarten.								
26. *I paired at least one child with a disability with a typically developing child who would attend the same kindergarten during prekindergarten activities.								

27. I communicated to at least one family of a child in my classroom the importance of friendship and social emotional development.								
28. I provided materials (i.e. flyers, brochures, etc.) to community businesses to create a wider knowledge of transition activity opportunities such as upcoming kindergarten information sessions, registration deadlines, and/or family fun nights.								

APPENDIX B

KINDERGARTEN TEACHER SURVEY

Kindergarten Teacher Survey: The transition from prekindergarten to kindergarten

Part 1: Demographic Information

How many children in your current classroom have an IEP? _____

What is your teacher to child ratio?_____

How many years of teaching experience do you have?_____

How many years have you taught kindergarten?_____

How many years have you been with your current school district?_____

What is your current level of education?_____

How many professional development training sessions do you attend typically a year?_____

Have you ever had a training presented by your district that addressed the transition to kindergarten?_____

Are prekindergarten programs housed in your school?_____

Do you work with some at your school such as a social worker or school counselor who helps you support families?_____

If so, does this person help you with transition to kindergarten activities?_____

Part 2**:** The following activities might occur in preparing children and families for kindergarten. Please indicate which activities you typically engage in to help the children in your classroom adapt to kindergarten as they transition from prekindergarten. Then give us your opinion about the value of these activities to a smooth kindergarten transition for children and their families, whether you implemented them or not.

Rate how valuable you think the activity is to a smooth transition to kindergarten.	**Not at all valuable**	**Somewhat valuable**	**Valuable**	**Very valuable**	**Extremely valuable**
	1	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**

Please indicate what activities you engaged in to prepare your current class of children for the transition to kindergarten:	**Y**	**N**	Rate how valuable you think the activity is to a smooth transition for children and their families using the scale above (even if you did not engage in the activity).	1	2	3	4	5
1. I provided incoming families with children's literature about transition to kindergarten before the first day of school.								
2. I provided children's literature to families about transition to kindergarten after the children started kindergarten.								
3. I talked to and/or provided incoming families with information about kindergarten readiness (i.e. any skills need to be successful in kindergarten) prior to the start of kindergarten.								
4. I talked directly to one or more children about their transition to kindergarten prior to the start of kindergarten.								
5. I gave parents media such as DVD's, videos, internet links to help their children with the transition to kindergarten prior to the start of kindergarten.								
6. I gave parents information about their children's pre-academic performance (i.e. letter recognition, counting, etc.).								
7. I helped or gave input into the development of transition materials for children to help them understand their upcoming transition to kindergarten (i.e. K photo album, social story, book, etc.).								
8. I provided general information to families about developmental milestones and kindergarten readiness (i.e., skills needed to								

be successful in kindergarten).								
9. *I listened to concerns of families of children with disabilities about transition to kindergarten.								
10. I listened to concerns of families of typically developing children about transition to kindergarten.								
11. *I problem solved issues about kindergarten transition with families of children with disabilities.								
12. I problem solved issues about kindergarten transition with families of typically developing children.								
13. I participated in kindergarten information night, kindergarten orientation, or other events that families attended prior to the start of kindergarten.								
14. I provided prekindergarten teachers with information about specific kindergarten readiness skills (any skills needed for children to be successful in kindergarten) to help children prepare for kindergarten.								
15. I contacted prekindergarten centers with dates of kindergarten events (i.e. orientations, early registration) leading up to the start of kindergarten								
16. I organized or helped to organize events that brought children and families to the new school prior to the start of kindergarten (i.e. orientation day, preregistration, family fun nights).								
17. I participated in events that brought incoming kindergarten families and in some cases their children to the elementary school after the first day of kindergarten (i.e. open house, get to know your teacher, family fun).								
18. *I provided early intervention staff or special education staff with information about transition to kindergarten (i.e. kindergarten readiness, school information, etc.) to help								

them better prepare for children with disabilities for kindergarten.								
19. *****I was frequently in contact with support staff (PT, OT, speech) in order to discuss kindergarten options for children with disabilities in my classroom or children who will be coming to kindergarten in the fall.								
20. *I helped or gave input into the development special materials for children with disabilities in order to prepare them for kindergarten prior to coming to kindergarten.								
21. I contacted the families of children who would attend my class in the fall prior to the first day of kindergarten by mail, email or phone.								
22. I talked face- to- face with incoming families about kindergarten before the first day of school.								
23. *I invited families of children with disabilities to meet with me to learn more about my classroom								
24. *I contacted at least one family of a child with an IEP by phone to discuss kindergarten prior to the start of school.								
25. I met with individual families prior to the first day of school.								
26. *I met with individual families of children with disabilities prior to school starting								
27. I invited families to come to my classroom to learn more about my kindergarten classroom after the first day of school.								
28. I sent a welcome letter in September to all families of children in my classroom.								
29. *I sent an individualized welcome letter in September to families of children with disabilities of children in my classroom.								

30. I linked families with the PTO/PTA								
31. I contacted at least one prekindergarten teacher by phone to gain information about the program that a child/ children in my classroom had attended.								
32. I have attended trainings that focus on kindergarten readiness (i.e. any skills needed for children to be successful in kindergarten) or transition to kindergarten.								
33. I discussed kindergarten readiness (i.e. skills needed for children to be successful in kindergarten) with one or more prekindergarten teachers.								
34. I contacted at least one prekindergarten teacher about individual children who were transitioning or have already transitioned into my classroom								
35. I attended at least one IEP meeting for a child coming into my classroom prior to the start of kindergarten.								
36. I talked with support personnel about a child who will be or is attending my classroom.								
37. *I contacted at least one support person (i.e. PT, OT, and Speech) about a child with								
38. I facilitated relationships of children who know one another from prekindergarten for activities at the beginning of the school year.								
39. I attempted to connect families of children with disabilities form my school with a family of a child with a disability from the prekindergarten								
40. I communicated to at least one family of a child in my classroom about the importance of friendships and social emotional development.								

41. *I paired a child with a disability with a child who she knew from prekindergarten during activities in my kindergarten classroom.								
42. I attempted to connect families to one another whose children attended the same prekindergarten.								
43. I provided materials (i.e. flyers, brochure, etc.) to community businesses to create wider knowledge of transition activity opportunities such as upcoming kindergarten information sessions, registration deadlines, and/or family fun nights								

APPENDIX C

SURVEY CODES

Table 1. Codes for Research Question 1, 2, 3 and 5

Interactional Relationship	Prekindergarten Teacher Research Question 1	Kindergarten Teacher Research Question 2	Interactional relationship Question 3 and 5
Child	P1: How does the prekindergarten teacher support a child's transition by enhancing the relationship between the child and her family?	K1: How does the K. Teacher support a child's transition to K. by enhancing relationship between the child and the family?	P1 Items compared to K1 (Matched Items)
Family	P2: How does the PK teacher support/enhance the child/family to teacher relationship?	P2 How does the K teacher support the child/family to teacher relationship?	P2 compared to K2 (matched items)
Counterpart Teacher	P3: How does the PK teacher support/enhance the K-PK teacher relationship?	P3: How does the PK teacher support/enhance the PK-K teacher relationship?	P3 compared to K 3 (matched items)
Peers	P4: How does the PK teacher support/enhance the relationship to the child to his/her peers?	K4: How does the K teacher support/enhance the relationship to the child to her peers?	P4 compared to K4 (matched items)
Community	P5: How does the PK teacher support the child's relationship with the community/neighborhood?	K5: How does the K teacher support/enhance the child's relationship to the community/neighborhood?	P5 compared to K5 (matched items)

Table 2. Codes for Research Question 4 and 6

Interactional Relationship	Prekindergarten Teacher Research Question 1	Kindergarten Teacher Research Question 2	Interactional Relationship Questions 4, 6
*Child	*P1: How does the prekindergarten teacher support a child's transition by enhancing the relationship between the child and her family?	*K1: How does the K. Teacher support a child's transition to K. by enhancing relationship between the child and the family?	*P1 Items compared to K1 (matched Items)
*Family	*P2: How does the PK teacher support/enhance the child/family to teacher relationship?	*P2 How does the K teacher support the child/family to teacher relationship?	*P2 compared to K2 (matched items)
*Counterpart Teacher	*P3: How does the PK teacher support/enhance the K-PK teacher relationship?	*P3: How does the PK teacher support/enhance the PK-K teacher relationship?	*P3 compared to K 3 (matched items)
*Peers	*P4: How does the PK teacher support/enhance the relationship to the child to his/her peers?	*K4: How does the K teacher support/enhance the relationship to the child to her peers?	*P4 compared to K4 (matched items)
*Community	*P5: How does the PK teacher support the child's relationship with the community/neighborhood?	*K5: How does the K teacher support/enhance the child's relationship to the community/neighborhood?	*P5 compared to K5 (matched items)

*Activities for children with disabilities

APPENDIX D

COMPARISION OF MATCHED SURVEY ITEMS

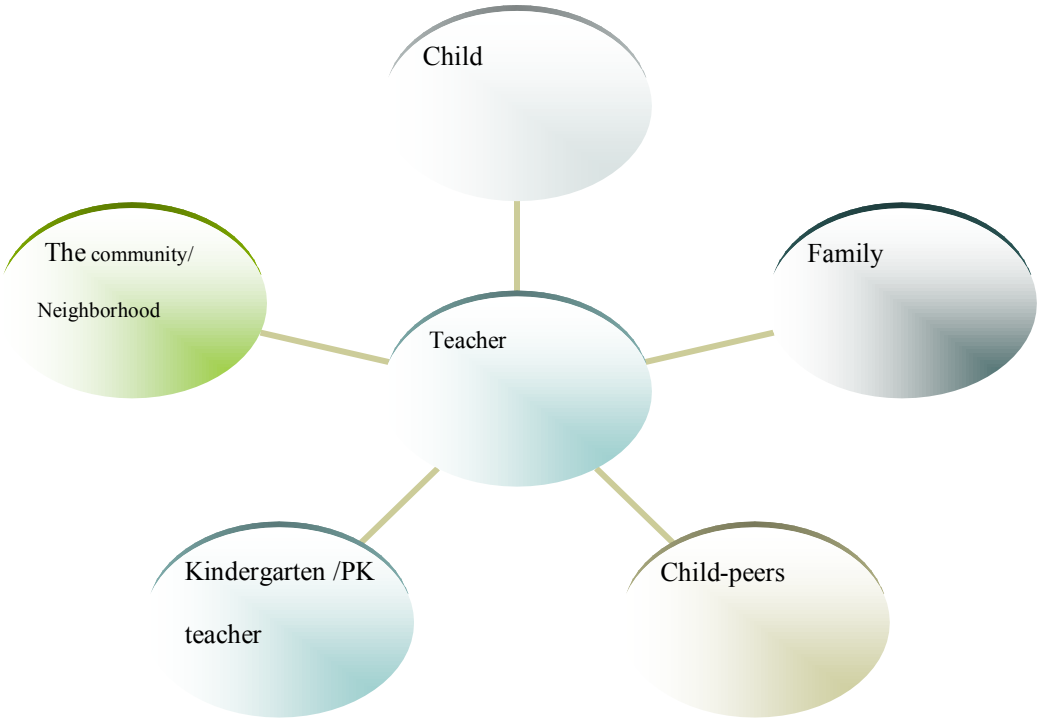
Table 3. Prekindergarten Teacher Survey items compared to Kindergarten Teacher Survey items (matched versus non-matched survey items by survey number)

	Prekindergarten Survey Items Matching Items	Prekindergarten survey Items non-matching	Kindergarten Survey Items	Kindergarten non-matching Survey Items
Child Category	1		1	
	2		3	
	3		4	
	4		5	
	5		6	
	6		7	
	7*		18*	
	9*		20*	
Family Category	10		8	
	18*		9*	
	19*		11*	
	20		10	
	21		12	
		11		23
		12		16
		13*		17
		14*		21
		15		22
		16		23*
		17*		24*

				25
				26*
				27
				28
				29*
				30
Teacher Category	8*		19*	
	23		31	
	25		15	
	26		33	
	28		32	
	29*		36*	
		24		14
		27		34
		30*		35*
				37*
Peer Category	31		38	
	32		42	
	34*		41*	
	35		40	
Community Category	36		43	

APPENDIX E

VISUAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN KEY PLAYERS IN THE EDM



APPENDIX F
TALKING POINTS

Talking Points for phone conversations

- Introduction
- Explanation of study
- Ask if interested in participation
- Benefits:
    a. Gain valuable information from your teachers in order to improve the transition process
    b. Allows teacher to provide input into research that can disseminate valuable information from their point of view.
    c. Incentive gift card
- There are no negative aspects to this study because it is completely confidential, anonymous and optional.
- Thanks for your time and consideration.
- Ask for emails or ways to obtain the email addresses.
- Write a thank you note

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