EXPERIENCES OF LOW-INCOME FAMILIES FROM A PARENTS AS TEACHERS PROGRAM AS THEIR CHILDREN TRANSITION TO KINDERGARTEN: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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by

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a candidate for the degree of doctor of philosophy, and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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Dedicated to all the parents who share their children with the school system.

This dissertation is also dedicated to my children, Rachel and Katie, and to my mother, Virginia Mee. They have been my greatest supporters in this endeavor.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There have been so many people who have worked to make this research and this dissertation possible. I would first like to thank the families who gave of their time to allow me to interview them. They gave their time out of a desire to be helpful and to honor the life and experiences of their child and their family. I will always be grateful to them.

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Experiences of Low-Income Families from a Parents as Teachers Program as their Children Transition to Kindergarten: A phenomenological study

by
Jessica Kirchhofer

Drs. Nancy Knipping and Candace Kuby, Dissertation Co-Chairs

Abstract

This phenomenological study examined the nature of parents’ experiences while their children transitioned to kindergarten. Literature has shown that schools struggle with how to effectively create relationships with parents. Participants, 20 families, were low-income parents in the Parents as Teachers program in a medium-sized Midwestern community. Parents were interviewed four times, the first time before school began and the last time after parent-teacher conferences in the fall semester. Data was analyzed using Hycner’s phenomenological guidelines and the study found that parents progressed through three phases. Parents began in The Emotional Phase as they questioned what this experience would bring for their child and their family. Parents progressed into The Adjustment Phase as families adjusted to new schedules and coping with their children’s exhaustion. This was followed by a time of good feeling, The Honeymoon Phase. The implications are that the Emotional Phase is when parents might be the most open to new information about their children’s education and how to support it. The Adjustment Phase is a time when educators should give families time to adjust to new routines and to limit additional expectations and homework. It might also be prudent to decrease the length of the school day to allow children to gradually adjust to the schedule. The Honeymoon Phase is the time to encourage parental involvement. Future research with varying populations would increase educators’ understandings about different families’ experiences as children transition to kindergarten.
Chapter One

Introduction

During a home visit with a family I was seeing in my position as a parent educator for the local school district, the mother answered a phone call from her son’s school. Her face changed from laughing as she played a game with her two other children to scowling as she listened to the person on the phone. She soon said something like, “And what am I supposed to do about it? He behaves for me here. I think it is you that has the problem.” As she hung up, she said, “Uuuurrrgg” in an angry, frustrated way and looked ready to cry. I asked if she was okay. She said that the school has been calling every day telling her that Cameron (a pseudonym) was misbehaving in kindergarten. She said that she listened and tried to talk to Cameron about his behavior the first days that the teacher called, but now she just feels angry and the teacher continues to call almost every day. She asked me, “What am I supposed to do about it from here at my house? He behaves for me, so I think they need to work on getting kids to listen and do what they say. It is their problem, not mine.”

I remember this clearly as an influential moment in my career as a parent educator. Part of my job as parent educator is to act as a liaison between families and schools, an advocate who escorts families through the procedures necessary to access services from the school district and helps them to understand school policies and procedures. It is also part of my job to help teachers and parents communicate well once the child is attending school. I was a classroom teacher when I began my career and taught first grade, kindergarten, and preschool for 12 years before transitioning to my current position as a parent educator, which I have held for the last 13 years. On the day described above, I
felt the strain of this situation in a painful way; I felt torn between my experiences of being a former classroom teacher and my experiences as a parent educator who had been working with this family for the previous two years. From my experiences as a former teacher, I knew how hard teachers work to love and care for each child. I had also worked with parents for many years, and I saw how Cameron’s mother, despite having limited resources, worked with him. When I visited him, he was a bright-eyed, compliant little guy who knew how to write his name, identify letters and numbers, and dress himself even though he was still in preschool. His mother had worked with him on academic skills and responsibility. He had a delightful personality, and I believed that he would make the transition to kindergarten smoothly. What had happened that his transition did not go well and Cameron was not succeeding in school? His mother and I wondered if it was because he had fallen in with the wrong group of friends, or maybe his teacher used a different style of discipline than his mother, or his personality altered at the school doors. Was it because his father had been absent more often lately (although he seemed fine about this when he was at home)? She and I tried to think of all the reasons that this might be happening, but none of them seemed quite right.

We may not have understood all of the factors contributing to that situation, but what I did understand was that his mother was beginning to have a hard time wanting to support the schools and say supportive things to Cameron about going to school and listening to his teacher. Her frustration had led to a mistrust of the school. I wondered how this would affect the two younger children. I also wondered if Cameron and his mother would get past this to a productive school career or if it would affect him negatively during his schooling years. Parent support and involvement is considered
influential in the success of a child in school (Bernard, 2004; Epstein, 2010; Fan & Chen, 2001, Weiss et al., 2010). Knowing that the parents’ first impressions about schools are often established during the transition into kindergarten, I became interested in parents’ thoughts about the experience their family has as their child transition into kindergarten. Cameron’s story is one of many that influenced my growing interest in the relationship between schools and parents. In my years of teaching school, most of my experience was in a low-income school that had a large percentage of children on free and reduced price lunches. I wondered if stories like Cameron’s were more common in low-income families.

In order to situate my interests in the relationship between schools and parents, I did a cursory investigation of the historical background of tension between schools and parents. Three pieces were of particular interest to me. First, the laws that created public schools were founded partially on the vilification of parents. Historically, politicians and government documents said there was a need to provide public schooling because parents were not doing the job of educating their children well (Fraser, 2010; Spring, 2011). Second, many laws were written to take rights away from parents and give them to the schools, including the laws that make schooling mandatory (Roper, 1977). Third, tension has occurred between home and school from the time of the spread of the common school in the mid-1800s to the present. This was documented meticulously in Parents and Schools: The 150-year Struggle for Control in American Education, in which Cutler (2000) chronicled how professionalization and bureaucratization created increasing control for schools over the lives of children. These three pieces helped me to understand the historical nature of the tensions between parents and schools.
I surmised that currently parents know and understand that, at some level, once they send their child to school, they have little power or recourse over what happens during that school experience. Parents must wait in long lines for registration, follow a list of requirements to register (e.g., bring in the correct documents, have all the appropriate immunizations, give contact information and personal information regarding insurance, reveal details of their family composition and their child’s health), buy a specific list of supplies, and usually are assigned to a school, class, and teacher with no opportunity for input. Parents understand that some of the information and documentation they provide is necessary to keep their child safe, but they also realize that some of their privacy and control over their child has been compromised. They are relegating control to a public agency to care for their child approximately thirty-five hours a week. Prior to mandatory school entrance, parents can choose to send their children to a care facility or keep them at home, a choice often based on financial status, which for many families is not truly a choice. Many would argue that parents also choose whether or not to send their children to public school because they could go to a private school or choose to home school. However, these choices are often available only to financially advantaged members of society. Sending your child to public school seems like the only viable option for most families.

I wondered if, at some level, most parents felt hesitation of some kind about sending their children to kindergarten. Many parents have expressed to me that their children are their highest priority and that many of their hopes and dreams for their own lives relate to being a good parent and having healthy, successful children. And yet, they are relinquishing some control over the influences on their child for a major portion of
each week as they send him or her to an institutional setting. The institution implicitly asks parents to trust that this influence will be in their child’s best interest. Schools seem to expect that parents will be grateful and compliant, just glad to have professionals to care for their child and provide education. That is not always true, though, from my experiences and as indicated by Cameron’s mom. I thought that an investigation of experiences of parents during this transition might influence and support more effective communication and understanding between schools and parents. If there were greater communication and understanding between schools and parents, they might be more effective in working together cooperatively to support children’s success in school.

**Research Area**

The purpose of this study was to explore parental experiences regarding the entrance of a child into kindergarten. More specifically, I used a phenomenological approach to examine how low-income parents who have been in the Parents as Teachers program feel about their child’s transition to kindergarten. A phenomenological approach is often used when the researcher wants to analyze the feelings and lived experience of a participant, knowing that the interpretation that a participant has of an experience will often affect his or her future behavior. Phenomenology relies on in-depth interviews as the primary method of data collection. The study area is important because parents’ feelings about the experience and about their child’s school and teachers will influence how much support and contact they are likely to make during their child’s future schooling (Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997).

**Prior Experiences: Positioning Myself in the Research**

When a child begins formal schooling, typically the hope of schools and parents is
that the first year will set a positive trajectory for the child’s schooling experience. School personnel want children and their families to have a strong start on their educational journey with positive feelings about the teacher and an excitement for learning. Most teachers and school administrators envision this transition year happening in a fairly seamless manner (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003). However, from my experiences as a parent educator, a former teacher, and a parent, there are times when the process does not go smoothly.

As stated above, my curiosity about the topic stems from working for many years as a teacher in preschool and kindergarten classrooms and then transitioning into my current position as a parent educator with Parents as Teachers (PAT) working in homes with families in the years before children begin formal schooling. I now see these first months of formal schooling as a transition step between the home experiences and the schooling years. Many times the parents I work with have reported that this time is filled with excitement and that they see it as a great time of change for the child and the family. Children often jump out of bed each morning excited to go to school and have leaps in their academic skills. New confidence and new friendships build as the child begins to have experiences that are separate from his or her home life. The parents I work with have also reported some other benefits that they experience. They often report more time away from their childrearing responsibilities so they can work, decreased childcare costs, or more time to work on their own personal interests and goals.

Overall, it seems like a good and welcomed transition for most families; however, some families seem stressed by the process. The transportation and schedule changes can be difficult or the transition may be stressful because children seem more interested
in school life and less interested in home life. When I was a kindergarten teacher, one immigrant mother pointed at her child when I was at their home and sadly said, “She your baby now.” When I asked more about that, the mother told me that her daughter currently thought her teachers were great and talked about them all the time. However, she did not seem to listen to her parents or respect them anymore, and she had been refusing to speak in their home language. There have been other difficulties for families during my teaching years, and sometimes I could only guess at the origin of the conflict from the family’s point of view. I have even seen parents in PAT who seemed upset with the teacher for calling with concerns and questions during the kindergarten year. Some parents with whom I have worked also reported seeing their child struggle socially, academically, or with behavior as he or she started school. My prior experiences are at the back of my mind as I speak to families about how wonderful it is when their child begins formal schooling because I know that for some it will not be stress free.

Another experience that is relevant to this research topic is my personal experience with transition to school for each of my two daughters. The process went well for my older daughter, but was a little bit more difficult for my younger daughter. This experience allowed me to see variation within one family. My older child had a more outgoing personality, whereas, my younger child had a more introverted personality. My younger child took a little longer to begin to like going to school. This experience led me to think about the influence of the personality of the child and I wondered if there were other factors that I had not considered that were influential in the transition process.
As I began looking at this as a research topic, I found Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot’s book (2003), *The Essential Conversation*, in which she explains the angst with which many parents send children to school each day. Lawrence-Lightfoot (2003) says, “There is no more complex and tender geography than the borderlands between families and schools” (p. xii). She explains that parents have concerns that often remain unspoken and unaddressed. “Parents tend to be secretive and furtive with their worries. They were reluctant to admit to their preoccupation and anguish that somehow seemed inappropriate, and hesitant to reveal any information that might reduce their child’s competitive edge” (p. xv). Lawrence-Lightfoot goes on to say that this is often a difficult area for teachers, who have their own vulnerabilities and concerns. Teachers are not given enough guidance and support in parent relations to feel comfortable. She says that, “everyone believes that parents and teachers should be allies and partners. After all, they are both engaged in the most important and precious work of raising, guiding, and teaching our children” (p. xxi). Partnership, however, is far from what she says really exists between teachers and parents. “Parents and teachers feel estranged from and suspicious of each other. Their relationship tends to be competitive and adversarial rather than peaceful and productive” (p. xxi). Lawrence-Lightfoot writes about relationships between teachers and parents during the elementary and secondary years of schooling. I wondered if this were true even when children start kindergarten. I wanted to understand whether parents and teachers worked cooperatively in the beginning of a child’s school experience to create a supportive environment for the transition into kindergarten. This transition is a sensitive period for the child and family, and making it
a more positive experience seems to be in the best interest of children, families, and schools.

In summary, this research study has its origins in my past experiences with children and families both in my role as a parent educator and as a classroom teacher. The research was influenced by my own experiences of my two children entering school and the mixture of emotions that it produced. It was influenced by my investigation of the history of parent relationships with the schools and the many texts that I have read on the subject of families and schools. It also arose out of my own conjecture regarding how parents may feel when their young child is sent to school in such a big building with so many other people. The writings of Sarah Lightfoot Lawrence (2003) and others (Delpit, 2006; Lareau, 2003) were influential in my growing understandings of the relationship between parents and schools. All of these factors influenced me to design a study that focused on the feelings of parents as their children transition into public schooling.

**Purpose of the Study**

While I was investigating this topic, I found many resources relating to the school’s stance regarding children’s transition to kindergarten. Most of information was for parents to follow to prepare the child for kindergarten. I found little information from the parents’ perspective and experiences. In addition, most of what I found was based on survey data and included few words from parents. My own experiences and the readings guided my understanding that lower socio-economic parents often feel the least comfortable and welcomed in the school setting. Therefore, I designed this study to elucidate the feelings and experiences of low-income parents as their child enters
kindergarten and how they adjusted to the changes that it brings for the family. I wanted to hear the actual words parents said so that others could understand more fully their experiences and feelings that create their perceptions of this transition.

The participants of this study were selected from the parents who are enrolled in the Parents as Teacher program in our mid-western university community of about 100,000 people. Participants who were chosen were identified as low income in the PAT database. This led to the development of the research question: **What is the lived experience of low-income parents from a Parents as Teachers program as their children transitioned to kindergarten?**

For this study, I conducted interviews with 20 families prior to the start of the school year to understand the feelings and expectations that were in place before the first days of kindergarten. I continued to interview each family periodically until the parents had the opportunity to attend parent conferences and reported that the child seemed well situated within the new routines of kindergarten. These interviews provided more information about parents’ experiences and understandings during this transition period. From the phenomenological analysis of the interviews, I gained insights that I hope will help schools be more effective in their efforts to include and involve parents in their child’s education.

In this first chapter, I introduce the topic of the research, describe my position as a researcher, explain the reasoning behind the design of the study and present the research question and the goals of the research. In chapter 2, I synthesize research relating to parent involvement in general, parent involvement in the transition to kindergarten, the influence of socio-economic and cultural status on parent involvement, and the types of
concerns that parents report. Chapter 3 includes the conceptual framework and the perspective from which this study was designed. I explicate the research and analysis procedures used in this phenomenological study, including the potential problems that were considered and how they were addressed by the design of the study. In Chapter 4, results of the study are presented with a focus on answering the research question. Clusters of meaning and themes emerged from responses parents gave during the in-depth interviews as comments were grouped and analyzed. The fundamental structure of the phenomenon became apparent through the comments that were common for most parents. In this study, the fundamental structure that emerged was that transition to kindergarten happened in phases for these parents. Chapter 5 focuses on the implications, recommendations, and areas for further research based on the findings of this study. The appendices include relevant information related to permissions to complete the study, participant choice and demographic characteristics, as well as examples of data collection and analysis procedures. The appendices give additional details regarding how the design of this study was implemented.

It is my hope that this study will help readers better understand the experiences of low-income parents as their children transition into kindergarten and that these understandings will lead to decisions that smooth transitions into schools for children and parent involvement in children’s schooling.
Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

The questions that guided this qualitative research related to the influence of parents on their children’s education and the nature of families’ experience as their children begin kindergarten. The review of related research focuses on four areas: an overview of parent involvement, socio-economic and cultural influences on parent involvement, parent involvement during the transition to kindergarten, and parental concerns in the transition to kindergarten. The first area, parent involvement, begins with a glance into the recent history of parent education, and then examines involvement of parents in their children’s education and its influence on students. The current state of relationships between parents and the schools and teachers is considered, however, a search for literature that would connect relationships between parents and teachers and future levels of parent involvement was not found. The second area, socio-economic and cultural influences on parent involvement, examines the influences of family support in low-income and racially diverse populations and the nature of the relationship of parents and schools. Understanding this will inform educators about reaching out to parents in more effective ways to encourage involvement. The third area, parent involvement during the transition to kindergarten, examines how parents and children are affected by this transition and whether parents of new kindergarteners have any special needs. Understanding this will help educators to be more effective in their efforts to include parents of incoming kindergarteners and to provide them with needed information. The final area, parental concerns in the transition to kindergarten, examines what parents
worry about when their children begin kindergarten and whether they know how to access information to have their questions and concerns addressed.

Stemming from the four areas described above, the following questions guided this research review:

1. How important is parent involvement in the overall schooling experience for children? Is it beneficial enough to the child to warrant the time invested to create better relationships between schools and parents?

2. How does socio-economic and cultural status of families influence parent involvement?

3. What are the research findings related to parent involvement during the transition to kindergarten?

4. What kinds of concerns, if any, have studies found that parents have about their child starting kindergarten?

Parent Involvement

Taking a historical perspective on parent involvement, Lareau and Munoz (2012) explained that research interest in parent involvement has waned in the last few years; however, the topic generated much research from the mid-1980s until about 2005. This flurry of interest in researching parent involvement began with A Nation at Risk, a report that came out in 1983, which said that our schools were in trouble. One of the most popular solutions given was to use home/school partnerships more effectively. This solution, Lareau and Munoz (2012) reported, then became encoded in educational policy through No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation that passed in 2002. NCLB legislation required school districts to have a written policy on parent involvement (some
guidelines are given) and to reserve 1% of funding for parent involvement. This generated interest in finding the most effective ways to get parents involved and to use the allocated funding. Following this time period, interest decreased in parent involvement as a research topic.

**Effects of Parent Involvement**

Much current research has found positive effects of parent involvement for most children, although definitional differences in the concept of parent involvement make studies difficult to compare. A public policy statement created by The Harvard Family Research Project written by Weiss, Lopez, and Rosenberg (2010) reported that their meta-analysis found that students are more likely to graduate from high school if they had parents who were engaged in their schooling during childhood and adolescence. The authors also reported that students had more positive attitudes and behaviors, more positive sense of self, and better attendance when parents were involved in schooling. They also reported an increase in academic achievement and an increase in the highest levels of schooling completed. Their results indicated that parent involvement is beneficial. An older meta-analysis (Fan & Chen, 2001) also found that the effects of parent involvement on student achievement were statistically significant and positive. However, Fan and Chen noted that the term parent involvement did not have a standardized meaning from study to study. Because some of the studies measured parent involvement in the home and others measured parent involvement in the schools, Fan and Chen expressed some concerns over their own results and wondered if the positive results they found would fade over time. They also wondered if the positive benefits found might simply be attributable to parental expectations and desire for their
child’s success that became a form of self-fulfilling prophecy. Despite the concerns expressed by Fan and Chen (2001) in their foundational study, the meta-analysis by Weiss et al. (2010) almost a decade later, made no mention of attempting to define parent involvement or of a concern that the studies in their analysis might not have been comparable.

In direct response to the concerns raised in the meta-analysis by Fan and Chen (2001), Bernard (2004) designed a study to evaluate more precisely any long-term benefits in a way that more effectively controlled for confounding variables. The author used data from the Chicago Longitudinal Study, which followed children from preschool entry to adulthood to determine whether greater parent involvement in the earliest years of schooling was associated with indicators of school success over time. The scores used in the study were derived from rating scales given to teachers who rated the parent involvement of each child’s family in many aspects. After controlling for background characteristics and risk factors, the author still found that early parent involvement was significantly associated with increased levels of high school completion, lower rates of high school dropout, and increases in the highest levels of schooling completed. Bernard’s study concluded that parent involvement in early schooling is an important component of early childhood programs that promotes the long-term benefits. Bernard gave details that allowed educators to understand that the large sample size (n=1123), the longitudinal design, and the ability to control for confounding results made the results robust. The author emphasized the significant results of this study due to the careful control of so many factors that may have biased results; she made clear that the association between parent involvement and long-term outcomes for students is strong.
Although Bernard did not include a description of the demographics of the research population, on-line information (http://www.waisman.wisc.edu/cls/NEWSLETN.PDF) indicates that the participants of the Chicago Longitudinal Study were from high-poverty neighborhoods with 93% African American and 6% Latino children. This participant sample raises the question: Are the strongest effects of parent involvement found in research done with low-income populations? This topic will be considered further in a following section on socio-economic and cultural status of families and its influence on parent involvement.

**Problematic Issues in Parent Involvement**

Based on her extensive work in the field of parent involvement, Epstein (2010) introduced the concept of rhetoric rut, meaning that research has well supported the need for parent involvement due to its many benefits, however, for many schools actually knowing how to be effective in involving parents has been problematic. Many studies combined information on benefits as well as problematic issues in the same research. Problematic issues cited were: attitudes of teachers and principals (DeCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho, 2005; Ferrara, 2009; Weiss et al., 2010), attitudes and beliefs of parents (Ferrara, 2009; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler, 1997), and work hours and scheduling for parents (Epstein, 2010; Ferrara, 2009; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003). The inclusion of benefits of parent education as well as problematic issues within the same research articles demonstrates the complexity that emerged in relation to implementation and assessment of parent involvement efforts in schools.

While research generally points to the important role that parents play in their children’s education, several studies reported that many parents do not feel as if they are
valued and welcomed in the schooling process. Weiss, et al. (2010) found in their meta-analysis for the Harvard Family Research Project that many educators tended to treat parents as peripheral to the educational process and often overlooked them and their potential to strengthen and transform public education. Ferrara (2009) designed a study to assess attitudes of parents, administrators, teachers, and pre-service teachers regarding their perceptions and experiences related to parent involvement and found different answers given from each group. In Ferrara’s analysis of 16,288 parent surveys, she found that parents were often unsure of their role in the school and did not always understand expected protocol. Parents reported that they often did not feel welcomed by the other parents either. Parents also said that they did not believe that the school wanted their input or ideas for improvement. This left many parents saying they did not feel welcomed in their child’s school.

In the same study, Ferrara (2009) analyzed the responses of 46 administrators and concluded that administrators often did not see parents as essential resources. The only goal given by some administrators regarding parent involvement was for parents to attend school events. Several other administrators expressed no need for change in parent involvement, and when asked to elaborate, commented that they might be willing to do more to include parents in their schools if it did not additionally burden their teachers, who were already overworked. The author reported that the administrators’ responses showed that they usually viewed parents from a deficit model, focusing more on what they were not doing rather than on what they were doing to be involved. In contrast, the teachers Ferrara surveyed believed that parent involvement was important in creating long-term success academically and socially for children, but often felt as if they did not
have enough experience and training to be effective in involving parents. Ferrara also found that pre-service teachers had concerns that parents would not want to be involved in their classrooms. After exploring the different perceptions of parents, principals, teachers, and pre-service teachers toward parent involvement, Ferrara looked more closely from the parental point of view. She noted that when parents walked into a school, they sensed whether or not they were welcomed there. Indications that parents did not find welcoming included: signs that warned those who entered to go straight to the office, classrooms with their windows covered so that parents could not see inside, and parents standing in line at the office counter waiting to be acknowledged and helped.

With most research saying that parent involvement is important to the success of school children, Ferrara wondered why parents were not feeling welcomed at schools and that school personnel had concerns that parents did not want to be involved or professed to not know how to get them involved?

Ferrara (2009) pointed to the National Parent Teacher Association (PTA) standards for family-school partnerships:

- Communication between home and school is regular, two-way, and meaningful.
- Responsible parenting is promoted and supported.
- Parents play an integral role in assisting student learning.
- Parents are welcomed as volunteers in the school.
- Parents are full partners in the decisions that affect their children/families (p. 126).

These standards were guidelines from a national organization regarding how parents should be included and welcomed in their child’s school. However, Ferrara (2009) and several other researchers (Epstein, 2010; Weiss, et al., 2010) found that this was often not what happens in schools, hence the rhetoric rut. Epstein (2010), explained that schools professed to want to involve families, but many did not know how to implement positive
and productive strategies and were, consequently, fearful about attempting to do so. This created the rhetoric rut in which support is expressed for parent involvement, but little was done to produce it. The conflicting responses found by Ferrara (2009) among the parents, administrators, teachers and pre-service teachers studied prompted her to ask, “Is parent involvement stuck in multiple perceptions and lack of interest?” (p. 137). Weiss, et al. (2010), writing for the National Policy Forum for Family, School, and Community Engagement, published an article, titled Beyond Random Acts. This title was their description of the uncoordinated efforts made to engage and involve parents. Both articles contended that the current state of efforts to involve parents in their child’s education needed to evolve into something more systemic, sustained, and supported.

Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) began to look at the ways that schools tried to reach out to parents with different types of activities and began to think about parental motives for becoming involved in their child’s schooling. Taking a psychological perspective regarding why parents chose to become involved in their child’s education, they found three constructs that influence parents’ thinking and decision-making about being involved in their children’s education:

1. Parental role construction influences parents’ beliefs about their role in their children’s education.

2. Parental sense of efficacy affects parents’ beliefs about whether they can help their children succeed in school.

3. Parental perceptions influence parents’ beliefs about whether the child and school genuinely want him or her to be involved (Hoover Dempsey & Sandler, 1997, p. 4).
The authors indicated that parent beliefs about their role, sense of self, and perceptions about whether schools want them involved influenced whether parents actually did become involved in their child’s education. The significance of this current study is that it identifies why families may or may not choose to become involved so that attempts to involve families focus on educating families about their role in the child’s education and their importance in their child’s success at school.

**Summary of Parent Involvement Literature**

Current research studies have indicated generally positive results for children when their parents were involved in their schooling. Each study had a slightly different methodology and showed a variety of positive results when children had parental support for their schooling. The literature review indicated that parent involvement in a child’s education is beneficial and worth the attention of school personnel to create relationships with parents. It is possibly even more beneficial in low-income communities. This literature review also emphasized the difficulty schools have in creating truly effective relationships with parents and in engendering their support in the educational process. It also revealed conflicting information and viewpoints on how parents felt about being involved in schools and how teachers and school personnel try to involve parents.

My attempts to find literature that would link parents’ feelings about the teacher and the school with their later support and involvement did not produce any relevant research. However, it seems logical that how parents feel about their child’s teacher and school when the child transitions into kindergarten would influence levels of parent involvement in the child’s future schooling. However, with no research to rely upon, it is definitely an area that is ripe for more research to elicit the exact nature of the
relationship between parents’ feelings about the teacher and the school and their later levels of support and involvement.

My study aims to understand how the parents felt during their child’s transition to kindergarten in hopes of finding parents’ feelings about the teacher and school just as the schooling journey was beginning. My study will not continue past the transition to kindergarten to evaluate later levels of parent involvement. However, a need for future research in this area, perhaps a follow-up or longitudinal study to evaluate later levels of parent involvement is mentioned in Chapter 5.

**Socio-Economic and Cultural Influences on Parent Involvement**

As noted above, current research has suggested that parent involvement might be more important to children’s learning and schooling outcomes when the family has lower socio-economic status. Low-income families of all races and ethnicities seemed to benefit especially when more effective communication between schools and homes existed and greater involvement of parents occurred. A search for research that specifically involved low-income or culturally diverse families found a variety of studies, each with a slightly different focus. However, each added some nuanced information regarding parent involvement with families from lower socio-economic and/or minority homes and each shed light on the feelings of parents and schools toward one another that contribute to the rhetoric rut between the benefits of parent involvement and the inherent struggles involved. The literature on socio-economic and cultural influences showed some overlap due to there being a higher percentage of minority children represented in low-income population than is found in the population as a whole. The literature review was divided
into studies that seemed more focused on low-income status and studies that seemed more focused on cultural differences.

**Low-income Influences on Parent Involvement**

Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen, and Sekino (2004) completed a study using the teachers in seven large urban school districts who gave questionnaires to 307 low-income, ethnic minority five to seven-year-old children and their caregivers. The parents completed questionnaires about their home environment, home activities, and their children’s play skills. The teachers completed rating scales about the parents’ level of involvement at school, the child’s academic skills, and the child’s peer play skills. The authors found that having a supportive home environment resulted in higher levels of social skills in school and students who were more motivated in reading and math. A supportive home environment was defined as one in which parents talked with children about the importance of school and helped them with their learning. Hampton et al. found the greatest influence of parent involvement was on the social skills of cooperation and self-control. The authors also found that decreased direct contact and involvement of families was related to an increase in children’s behavior problems like physical or verbal aggression (externalizing problems) or anxious and sad behavior (internalizing problems). The families who had decreased school contact also reported more barriers to involvement such as familial stress and work responsibilities. Parent involvement was identified as a *key protective factor* (Hampton et al., 2004) for children living in urban poverty, and the authors theorized that it may serve as a buffer against future negative school outcomes. The results of this study indicated that the greatest benefit of parent
involvement for lower socio-economic young children was found in social skills and behavior and less impact was found on academic achievement.

Hilado, Kallenmeyn, Leow, Lundy, and Israel (2011) completed a mixed-methods study that incorporated data from the Illinois Birth to Five Evaluation (n=843) and interviews with administrators of low-income preschools. They examined the levels at which preschool staff and administrators worked to find social resources in the community for families, such as parent education, job employment support, and connection of families with social service agencies. The authors wanted to know whether connection with social services had an effect on parent involvement. They found that the number of social services resources identified for a family by the preschool employees correlated positively with higher levels of parent involvement in the school. The children of the families with greater involvement at the schools had stronger pre-literacy skills, greater interest in learning, more confidence, increased academic efforts, and greater attention. These authors found that parent involvement was related to both higher achievement and better behavior skills. The authors did not determine whether it was the parent involvement or the access to more social services that produced these results.

Drummond and Stipek (2004) interviewed 234 low-income African American, Caucasian, and Latino families about their feelings regarding their role in their child’s education. They found that low-income families strongly believed that they should be involved with their child’s education. There were no differences in this finding based on the family’s racial category. The researchers concluded that, regardless of race, families
still wanted to be included in their child’s education even though it was difficult at times and tension existed.

A foundational research study by Lareau (1987) explained the concept of cultural capital and its role in parent involvement with low-income families. Her ideas are based on Bourdieu’s original ideas regarding cultural capital. Lareau studied two schools that were both predominately Caucasian (to decrease the role of culture differences). One school was middle-class (Prescott) and the other was working class (Colton). When explaining the differences in parent involvement between the two schools she studied, Lareau says:

Level of parent involvement is linked to the class position of the parents and to the social and cultural resources that social class yields in American society. By definition, the educational status and material resources of parents increase with social class. These resources were observed to influence parental participation in the schooling in the Prescott and Colton communities. The working-class parents had poor educational skills, relatively lower occupational prestige than teacher, and limited time and disposable income to supplement and intervene in their children’s schooling. The middle-class parents, on the other hand, had educational skills and the occupation prestige that matched or surpassed that of teachers; they also had the necessary economic resources to manage the child care, transportation, and time required to meet with teachers, to hire tutors, and to become intensely involved in their children’s schooling (p. 81).

Lareau explained that there are fundamental differences in the way middle-class and working class parents can manage to be involved in their child’s education. The parents who are lower socio-economic struggled more to be involved due to differences in their resources for transportation, ability to reorganize schedules, and the educational skills that create confidence in their ability to help their child academically.

The review of literature on socio-economic differences in parent involvement helped create the understanding that low-income families need greater support to build
relationships with teachers and the school that support better academic and/or behavioral outcomes.

**Cultural Influences on Parent Involvement**

There were a variety of racial and ethnic backgrounds that needed further review of literature to determine how they influenced parent involvement. This literature review focused on three cultural groups: African American, Latino, and Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD families).

Regarding African-American parents, Lareau and Horvath (1999) wrote a thought-provoking article about a case study of parent involvement of third-grade children. It included the following conclusion: “Many black parents, given the historical legacy of racial discrimination in schools, cannot presume or trust that their children will be treated fairly in school” (p. 42). They reported that many parents were deeply concerned about this historical legacy of discrimination against Black children in schooling and were often more critical of the schools as a result. This was discovered through in-depth interviews with a sample of 12 White and 12 Black families in a small Midwestern town. Through comparing the groups by race and socio-economic class, they found several interesting differences based on race that were rooted in historic levels of discrimination in schools. Interestingly, the teachers in the study reported that they felt as if they encouraged parent involvement appropriately and that they offered invitations to become involved that appealed to a broad population of parents. However, Black families felt as if there was only a narrow range of acceptable behaviors and that parents were expected to be positive and supportive. Being compliant and accepting assessments of their child by the teachers seemed to be key to creating a good relationship with the teacher and provided a benefit
to the child (Lareau & Munoz, 2012). This research suggested that many African American parents felt as if they should not ask questions about the teachers, experiences, and environment of the school. Without the ability to find the answers to the questions they may have about the school experience, many Black parents reported that they felt more concerned about sending their child to school daily than White parents reported.

Lopez (2001) and Valdes (1996) studied families of Mexican decent and found that parent involvement looked somewhat different in those communities. Both researchers found that teachers often think of these marginalized parents as disinterested in their children’s schooling. Valdes pointed out that Mexican American families often fear and distrust school officials and that American teachers often have little understanding of how Mexican American families see their role in their children’s education. Valdes shared that Mexican American Families feel that their job is to prepare the child to work hard and be respectful at school and it is the teacher’s job to teach the subject matter. Lopez also said that parents were less likely to attend school functions and involve themselves in the typical scripted ways that teachers suggest. Instead marginalized parents see their role as teaching their children the importance of hard work and persistence. The parents will take their children with them to work to let them see how hard their parent has to work, to encourage a good work ethic, and to remind them stay in school in order to avoid a life of hard manual labor. The way that parent involvement is viewed is somewhat differently in the Mexican American community, however, Lopez encouraged us to remember that it is still parent involvement, just not in the way that is typical for most White American families.
Schools have often claimed that they want to have partnership with parents (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2004; Epstein, 2010; Ferrara, 2009). However research (DeCastro-Ambrosetti & Cho, 2005; Hilado et al., 2011) has also revealed a rift between some parents and schools. DeCastro-Ambrosetti and Cho (2005) examined the attitudes of 160 pre-service teachers of culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) students and found that they often blamed the home environment and the parents’ lack of value toward education for the low academic achievement of CLD students. Through interviews with principals, Hilado, et al. (2011) found that some principals were positive about family involvement, but that others were frustrated and reported finding parents negative and apathetic. These studies indicated a rift in the relationships of teachers and families with both lower socio-economic and minority status due to attitudes of blame expressed by some pre-service teachers and other school personnel.

**Summary of Socio-economic and Cultural Influences on Parent Involvement**

The literature on socio-economic and cultural influences on parent involvement reflects the theme that parent involvement is influential for low-income and minority populations. The studies reviewed in this section give a variety of ways that parent involvement might be influential academically, behaviorally, and socially. Hampton et al. (2004) postulated that parent involvement might be the key protective factor from future negative outcome for children living in poverty who are entering kindergarten. Often times though, teachers need to broaden their view of what constituted parent involvement due to cultural differences in the ways that some marginalized populations see their role in their child’s education. Problems with developing effective parent involvement programs were seen more often in low-income and minority populations and were
compounded by teacher and administrator attitudes that blame parents. Despite these difficulties, families of minority children were found to want to be more involved in their child’s schooling than they are currently (Drummond & Stipek, 2004). My research project is designed to help fill the gap of understanding about the experiences and feelings of low-income families, many of which may also be of minority status. This may be helpful in creating better relationships with families and garnering more parent involvement throughout their child’s schooling. According to the literature reviewed, this may help to improve behaviors and/or academic outcomes for children.

**Parent Involvement in the Transition to Kindergarten**

This study is focused on parental understandings and experiences during a certain time period, the transition to kindergarten. However, as with the concept of *parent involvement*, the definition of *transition* lacks clarity. Bohan-Baker and Little (2004), in a policy statement from the Harvard Family Research Project, explained that there are numerous interpretations of a transition. Some scholars refer to transition as a set of activities undertaken at the end of one year (in this case, preschool) in preparation for the following year. It can also mean the ongoing effort to support the family in their transition to the new environment of school, or it can mean the continuity between two programs (preschool or home and kindergarten). Griebel and Niesel (2002) reported only that the transition period begins “some time before entry to kindergarten and adaptation lasts longer than parents and teachers usually expect” (p. 67). Pianta and Kraft-Sayre (2003) stated that it is a process that begins in preschool and continues into the early months of the kindergarten year. Both sets of researchers agreed that, regardless of how it is defined, this transition is a process that all the partners (school,
family, child, community, teacher, peer) experience rather than an event that happens only to the child.

Several articles that focused specifically on parent involvement during the transition to kindergarten acknowledged that this period is a sensitive time for children, and therefore, parent involvement in this transition phase is especially important. Griebel and Niesel (2002) studied more than 100 parents and children in Germany and reported that even older children remember their transition into kindergarten as a time of much emotional upheaval. Parents confirmed that it was also a time of change for the entire family with strong emotions present until the transition was completed and new emotional equilibrium was attained. Parents reported feelings of pride and joy, but also of sadness and loss. Some parents felt concerned about being separated from their children and had some fear related to the child’s health and safety. The authors concluded that preparation is needed not only for the child, but also for the parents.

Pianta and Kraft-Sayre (2003) have researched this area extensively and written a book on the transition to kindergarten, which described the transition to kindergarten as a sensitive period that brings about a variety of new experiences and feelings and sets the tone for the child’s schooling career. They found that elementary school brings a significant shift in culture and expectation. There are more academic demands, the social environment is more complex, and there is little support available for families because teachers have larger class sizes and frequent transitions. These discontinuities and the strong feelings that arise for children and families can be stressful; therefore, Pianta and Kraft-Sayre concluded that this time period warrants greater attention by schools and communities.
All of the authors in the research reviewed not only assumed that parent involvement is important in the transition to kindergarten, but also acknowledged that the process of this transition to kindergarten affects parents and children in fairly dramatic ways. Pianta and Kraft-Sayre (2003) stated that this time of change affects children, families, and schools and requires new competencies, creation of new relationships, and a difference in expectations. They suspected that there are long-term consequences on the child’s educational attainment and social adjustment based on the positive and negative events that occur during this time period (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003).

Pianta and Kraft-Sayre (2003) and Griebel and Niesel (2002) focused less on whether families needed support in the transition (they assumed that they did) but more on how to best go about providing support. Both sets of researchers listed practices that schools can use to provide the best support for families during this transition. Pianta and Kraft-Sayre noted how this process affects all the partners in the experience. Griebel and Niesel went further and described how the experiences of parents and children are often intertwined. Based on their survey of more than 100 teachers, parents, and children, which were followed with more targeted interviews, they concluded that for children and their parents, the transition is a co-constructed experience. The hopes and fears of the parents were influential for their children, and the authors found that the messages the children received about school from their parents came from both verbal and non-verbal communication. Although the authors of these research studies reviewed have differing definitions of the transition phase and its length, they all agreed that support is needed for families and should be provided by schools and communities.
Realizing that this period of time is full of uncertainty for many children and their families, most schools offer kindergarten transition activities. McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGennaro, and Wildenger (2007) administered surveys to 132 families in the second week of school about what types of activities were offered prior to the start of school, which of the activities they had attended, and what other information would have been helpful. They found that many parents indicated that they still did not fully understand the expectations of the school. Many wanted the school to be more proactive in offering classes for parents on academic skills, social skills, and behavior. A fairly large percentage of parents indicated that they would have liked to be more involved in the planning for transition activities. Schools and parents in these studies (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2004; Griebel & Niesel, 2002; McIntyre et al., 2007; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003) all seemed to acknowledge that this time of transition is a sensitive time for children and their families. “Collaboration, partnering, and relationships make more sense during the transition to kindergarten than they do in almost any other time of educating young children” (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003, p. 85). However, many of the transition practices considered common by McIntyre et al. were brochures and flyers, which announced enrollment dates or open houses, or were notes or calls to parents after school began. Pianta and Kraft-Sayre suggested that these types of transition practices are too generic (not personal) and occur too late in the transition process to be truly helpful.

Pianta and Kraft-Sayre (2003), Epstein (2010), and Bohan-Baker and Little (2004) all encouraged educators to think about how the whole community may be affected and may be able to support the transition of children into schooling. They encouraged preschools to communicate with the kindergartens to create more supportive
transitions. They also suggested that schools could collaborate with employers so that parents can be released from their work shifts to be able to attend school events without fear of lost income or job loss. In addition, they mentioned how community agencies such as public libraries may be able to support families by providing classes and information on transitioning to kindergarten over the summer. The authors proposed building a community transition team with representation from schools, community agencies, preschools, families, and community members. Each of these researchers emphasized the magnitude of the effect of the transition to kindergarten on families and how transition should be supported in a more coordinated effort.

Summary of Parent Involvement in the Transition to Kindergarten

The literature in this review revealed a need to learn more about how parents feel about their involvement in the transition of their child to kindergarten and in what ways they want to be more involved and supported. This review also indicated that this transition can affect the whole community, and communities would benefit from creating transition teams. My phenomenological research focuses more on the feelings that arise during the transition and less on the types of transition practices that the families access or programs that they attend. However, it is important to understand what transition activities are being offered by the schools because those can affect the feelings families have about the transition experience.

Parent Concerns About Beginning Kindergarten

Finally, my study includes concerns expressed by parents based on their lived experience of the transition of their child to kindergarten. The literature review indicated that parents have many strong feelings during the transition to kindergarten, including
some specific concerns. Wildenger and McIntyre (2011) explored some of those concerns through the use of surveys completed with the parental caregivers of 86 students in the Northeastern United States. The authors found that parents were primarily concerned about their child getting used to the new school, following directions, separating from parents, and having behavior problems. When parents were asked about what needs or concerns they still had in the transition process, many families expressed that they felt as if the school did not provide enough information about academic expectations prior to the school year. As the school year progressed, families felt as if they did not have enough information about whether their child’s skill level was appropriate for the class. Parents expressed varied concern when the school year began, and those often changed as the school year progressed.

In a grounded theory study from Australia, Dockett and Perry (2004), explored the concerns of parents, teachers, and children going to kindergarten. From this they devised an extensive questionnaire, which was given to 300 parents, 300 teachers, and 300 children. They then compared the concerns that each of the groups reported. Because my study focuses on the transition from the parental viewpoint, only the concerns expressed by parents in the finding of the Dockett and Perry study are reviewed. Parents’ concerns for their children fell into eight categories:

1. Will my child do well with the social adjustment?
2. Will my child have the best educational environment?
3. Will my child have the appropriate dispositions necessary for success?
4. Will my child be able to meet the physical aspects (naps, etc.)?
5. How will this affect the family?
6. Will my child have the specific skills necessary?

7. Will my child be able to follow the rules?

8. Will my child have the appropriate knowledge?

This study highlighted the similarity across national contexts of parental concerns for their children as they begin school. The primary concern for parents related to the social adjustment of their child. The most common question that parents asked was, “Will the teacher like my child?” (p. 22). Parents also wondered if their child would fit into the class and if anyone would notice that their child was special in his or her own ways.

Pianta and Kraft-Sayre (2003) pointed out that parents are often afraid to ask questions when they have concerns because they feel a limited sense of power in relation to teachers. Parents understand that kindergarten teachers are busier and less accessible to them than preschool teachers may have been. Thus, when parents had concerns, they felt less able to get their questions answered or their concerns calmed.

**Summary of Parent Concerns About Beginning Kindergarten Literature**

Wildenger and McIntyre (2011) reported that the transition to kindergarten is an understudied area with only a few empirical studies done in the last decade. The literature review noted that parents had concerns about their child attending kindergarten. Their questions often went unanswered, and parents did not feel as if they had the ability or knowledge necessary about how schools worked to get their questions answered. The studies by Wildenger and McIntyre (2011) and Dockett and Perry (2004) were completed using survey data and did not include the actual words and concerns of parents. Additionally, the study by Dockett and Perry (2004) was about the concerns of parents in Australia.
In conclusion, there is a need for more research done in the United States in which parents can express in their own words the range of emotions and questions they have regarding sending their child to kindergarten. School personnel can use these findings to more effectively prepare parents and their children for the upcoming transition to kindergarten. My study fills a gap in the literature.
Chapter Three

Methodology

My research question arose from years of teaching school, working with parents, having my own children enter school, and reading a variety of articles and books. Having a child enter kindergarten seemed to be a momentous transition time for my family and has also been so for many of the families I have known personally and professionally. Families must deal with changes to their daily schedule, changing their view of their child and his or her capabilities, and creating a relationship with the new daily caregiver for their child (both the classroom teacher and the school). I wanted to further investigate the experiences and emotions that parents have during this transition to kindergarten, understand the experience more fully, and, as a result, suggest ideas for creating a smoother transition for children, parents, and teachers. The literature review showed that, especially for low-income parents, creating a stronger relationship with the school may help to create more actively involved parents who are more supportive of their child’s education. This led to the development of the research question: What is the lived experience of low-income parents from a Parents as Teachers program as their children transitioned to kindergarten? Understanding the experiences and feelings during this transition period may help educators create more involved parents with children who are more successful in school.

Research Design

My research focus is well suited for a study that is qualitative in nature. Hatch (2002) gave nine characteristics of a study that would be well suited to qualitative
research. This study incorporated all nine of these components. A qualitative study should:

1. Focus on the lived experiences of people in their natural settings.
2. Seek to understand the perspectives of the participants.
3. Acknowledge the influence of the researcher.
4. Take place over an extended time period.
5. Focus on meanings rather than facts.
6. Explore the phenomena as a whole rather than the component parts.
7. Focus on the inner states of mind of the participants with an understanding of the subjective judgments of the researcher that attempt to bring the inner states of mind to light.
8. Allow the design of the study to change as new information emerges.
9. Focus on patterns of relationships.

My stance regarding the role of researchers is that they are part of the research process with their values and biases becoming part of the research product. The epistemological tradition I drew from is constructivist. Crotty (1998) defined a constructivist stance as a belief that: “There is no objective truth waiting for us to discover it. Truth, or meaning, comes into existence in and out of our engagement with the realities in our world. There is no meaning without a mind” (p.8). This constructivist epistemology assumes “that reality is socially constructed, that is, there is no single, observable reality. Rather, there are multiple realities, or multiple interpretations of a single event” (Hatch, 2002, p. 15). This occurs because the realities are constructed by individuals who are each influenced by their own experiences and, therefore, have
different viewpoints. Crotty (1998) stated that within the constructivist epistemology, interpretivism is the theoretical perspective, which includes the understanding that “social reality is regarded as the product of processes by which social actors together negotiate the meanings for actions and situations” (p.11). The type of interpretive research that fits well with my question is phenomenology, which strives “to determine what an experience means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13). This fits my research question because I interpreted the experiences parents described as their child began kindergarten.

Phenomenology has a long history with Edmund Husserl as the acknowledged founder, who did most of his writing on this topic from the late 1880s to the 1930s. He defined it as "the reflective study of the essence of consciousness as experienced from the first-person point of view" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13). Kant, a philosopher in the 1700s, and Brentano, a philosopher from the mid-1800s, influenced Husserl. Kant was considered the father of modern philosophy and he determined that certain fundamental concepts structure our human experience. He thought that concepts such as time, space, and cause/effect structure the ways we think. Brentano was known for his work on intentionality, the idea that the mind directs consciousness toward something (Moustakas, 1994).

Husserl broke from the positivist tradition and developed a philosophic system that was “rooted in subjective openness” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 25). Phenomenology was derived from the Greek word phaenesthai, which means, “to flare up, to show itself, light, to place in brightness” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26). It asks for a separation of the noema, the content of our thoughts, from the noesis the process of cognition (thinking
and understanding). This type of research focuses on the essence or underlying structure of a phenomenon. Husserl, as noted in Crotty (1998), contended that scientists from the positivist tradition explain that the real world is well-organized and systematic in structure. However, the world we know first hand is often “uncertain, ambiguous, idiosyncratic, changeful” (Crotty, 1998, p. 28). Husserl’s understanding was that “we cannot be described apart from our world, just as our world—always a human world—cannot be described apart from us.” Crotty goes on to say that Husserl believed that:

The mélange of cultures and sub-cultures into which we are born provides us with meanings. These meanings we are taught and we learn in a complex and subtle process of enculturation. They establish a tight grip upon us and, by and large, shape our thinking and behavior throughout our lives (p. 79).

Phenomenology attempts to understand the truth of the experience from the perspective of the consciousness of the individual experiencing it. Thus, researchers attempt to investigate the perceptions and effects of an experience through the narrative given by the individuals who have experienced it. In this study, phenomenological methods are used to attempt to understand the experiences of parents as their child transitions into kindergarten.

**Participants**

This study took place in a medium-sized university community in the Midwest. The demographics of the school population listed on the school district website were: 62% White, 20% African American, 6% Hispanic, 6% Multi-Racial and 5% Asian. The participants in this study were parents of students who were beginning kindergarten in the fall of 2013 who had participated in the Parents as Teachers (PAT) program and were listed in their records as low-income. The PAT program is a part of the public school
system that works with families from the time the mother becomes pregnant until the
time the child enters kindergarten. Parent educators visit the family regularly to support
parents in their role as their child’s first teacher and to give them guidance on parenting
topics including: sleep, nutrition, setting boundaries, pre-reading and pre-academic skills,
motor skill development, and self-help skills. Parents must qualify for support to receive
the home visiting component and being low-income is one of the descriptors given by the
State Department of Elementary and Secondary Education as a qualification for needing
support. To qualify as a low-income family in PAT, families must be eligible for the
Women, Infants, and Children’s (WIC) supplemental nutrition program, which is
provided for families who are below 185% of the poverty level.

The outcomes given for the PAT program (Parents as Teachers National Center,
2011) include:

1. Improved child health and development;
2. Prevention of child abuse and neglect;
3. Increased school readiness; and
4. Increased parent involvement in children’s care and education.

Two of the PAT outcomes are related to my area of study: increased school readiness and
parent involvement. This may have made this population of low-income children and
their parents more likely to have a good transition into kindergarten. However, in
choosing these participants, it was not my intention to evaluate the efficacy of the PAT
program, but merely to study them as a convenient sample. As previously stated, I did
have insider knowledge and experiences working for 13 years as a parent educator in the
PAT program. I had the knowledge that the program would have a database with a large
number of families identified who are heading into kindergarten. I also knew that the
database would identify families with low-income status.

According to my literature review, low-income families are also more likely to
struggle with feeling welcomed and needed in their child’s education (Drummond, 2004;
Epstein, 2010; Hampton et al., 2004; Hilado et al., 2011; Hoover-Dempsey & Sandler,
1997). Choosing low-income families narrowed the population studied and perhaps
would give greater applicability to findings. Low-income families seemed to need
greater support during this transition, making any information gleaned more helpful to
creating smoother transitions in the future. Low-income families, according to my
literature review, are also more likely to feel as if they do not have the right to address the
school with their concerns (Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Lareau & Munoz, 2012; and Pianta
& Kraft-Sayre, 2003). Hearing the voices of a growing population that is usually
silenced seemed like a good fit for the purposes of the study as well. Perhaps the study
results will allow their voices to be heard by teachers and administrators as the findings
of the study are shared.

The school district approved my application to work with the PAT program,
including support from the coordinator, who helped me to gain access to families whose
children were ready to transition into kindergarten. The approval of the school district
was followed by approval from the University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB).

The families in the PAT program represent a cross-section of families with
diverse socio-economic status, racial and cultural background, and family structure.
However, due to some changes in eligibility that took place several years ago, lower
socio-economic families are over-represented in this population. The PAT coordinator
was helpful and allowed me to talk with the other parent educators, my colleagues, during a staff meeting about the research study. The parent educators discussed who would be the best families to interview and we, along with my dissertation committee members, all felt that the families that would share openly regarding what they were feeling would be the best for this study. I went through the enrollment data for the program and chose families who seemed to be active and had completed a recent visit with a parent educator. I generated a list of families that seemed most likely for me to be able to fully understand, those with whom I shared a common first language. Thus, I eliminated most families as potential candidates that were listed as immigrant, refugee, or English as Second Language (ESL) families. I also eliminated the parents of children who had significant delays or disabilities, knowing that their concerns might be different than the families of typically developing children. The potential candidates were grouped by parent educator and email was sent to each parent educator involved. I asked them to recommend the families who might be comfortable sharing information with me and likely to complete scheduled interviews. I took their recommendations and chose participants, attempting to have nearly equal representation of families of boys and families of girls and a blend of racial backgrounds. Then I asked parent educators to contact the families to ask if they were willing to participate in the study. The parent educator was encouraged to tell families that a fellow parent educator who was a friend of theirs was doing the study so that it might encourage them to feel as comfortable sharing information with me as they do with their current parent educator. They also made sure to tell families that it involved at least four interviews from July to December as their child transitioned into kindergarten. After the parent educator received a positive response, the parent educator
gave me the okay to make contact with the family.

When I contacted the families, I gave basic information about the study. I asked if I could come by in the next few days so that they could meet me, give them more information, and they could decide whether they wanted to participate in the study. From those initial calls and visits, I gained informed consent from 20 families prior to the beginning of the school year. I scheduled an appointment for our first interview within the next few days, however, there were some families with whom I gained the informed consent and first interview on the same visit, if it seemed best for their family schedule or if it was too close to the first day of school. Three of the families in the study were families that I had been visiting in PAT for the last several years and with whom I had already formed a strong relationship. These families were also chosen as part of a pilot study I conducted in April of 2013. My committee agreed that information from those early pilot study interviews could be included in the dissertation. My committee also recommended that I begin with 20 families so that I would make sure to have full data on at least 12 families in case participants dropped out or did not complete all interviews. I started with 20 families and finished the first interview with all 20 of those families. When it came time for the second interviews, one mother asked to be dropped from the study. She was pregnant and had a baby that was several weeks premature, and she felt as if she needed to focus on the new baby. I honored her request and did not include any of the information from her first interview due to not being able to perform a member check to verify information. I then chose another family to include to make sure that I still had 20 families. The first interview with that family was twice as long, combining all the questions from the first and second interviews, to gain all the needed information.
(see Appendix A for interview questions).

I interviewed one parent in 12 of the families and two parents in eight of the families. During the first interview, I collected information relating to each family’s race, ethnicity, family composition, gender and age of family members, and past history and experiences related to schooling. The information is summarized in Table 1 (also Appendix B) and a description is given of each family that participated in the study (Appendix C). I also gained information relating to the family’s current schedule, the personality of the child, any delays or problems known to exist, and child’s background related to prior group, preschool, or summer school experiences.
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*Grandmother
Boy/Girl = Gender of Child
Caucasian/African American/Latino/ Multi-Racial = Race of Child
Mother/Father/Both = Which Parent(s) Interviewed
Title 1 Pre/Private Pre or Head Start (HS)/NO Pre = Preschool Experience
Public SS, Private SS or Head Start (HS)/NO SS = Summer School Experience
Data Collection and Time Frame

The collection of data for this phenomenological study included a series of four interviews with each family, notes taken in a field journal, and researcher’s notes. The interviews were audio recorded and usually took place in the participants’ homes. Two families chose to meet in an alternate location: one at my office and another close to the university’s campus.

A modified form of the Seidman (2006) interview series was used. The Seidman series is commonly used in phenomenological studies because questions are open-ended and loosely structured. For the interviewer, the major task is to build upon and explore their participants’ responses to those questions. The goal is to have the participant reconstruct his or her experience with the topic under study. The three interviews had different functions. The first was to get a focused life history and an understanding of what life had been like for the family. The second was to find out more about what current daily life was like and the third interview was for the participants to reflect and explain meaning that they were constructing from their current experiences. I modeled my interview questions on Seidman’s series, but was much more fluid in the blending of the three purposes for the interviews into each interview. Because Seidman’s series focuses on understanding a certain phenomenon and mine was focused on understanding a phenomenon that was time dependent and evolving, I needed more than three interviews and a more flexible structure so that I could understand change over time.

From my experience as a parent and professional who works with children and families, I defined the word transition to mean the month before kindergarten began (July, 2013) through the time of the first parent-teacher conferences (toward the end of November,
The questions for the first interview were focused on learning about the family, gaining an understanding of the participants’ current family life and recent life history, and finding their initial feelings regarding their child going to kindergarten. The first interviews took place from July 31 to August 21, 2013, with school beginning on August 22. The recorded length of the first interviews varied from 23 minutes to 97 minutes.

The purpose of the second interview was to see how the first week or two of school had gone. Did the child separate easily on the first day? Had the parents been to the school yet and for what reason? What was the child saying about going to school? How was the new family schedule working? What were the parents’ first impressions of the experience? The second interviews took place from August 30 to September 9, 2013. One family had several missed appointments, and I was not able to complete their second visit until September 24. These interviews lasted from 28 to 43 minutes.

The purpose of the third interview was to find out if families were settled into the routines of having a child in kindergarten. These interviews focused on what the child was saying about school and how he or she was adjusting to the daily routine of going to school. I also wanted to understand what experiences the parents were having and what meaning they were creating around these new experiences and routines. The third interviews took place from October 2 to October 22, 2013. These interviews lasted from 22 to 53 minutes.

The purpose of the fourth interview was to find out whether parents attended the parent/teacher conference and to hear about what happened during the conference if they did attend. I also wanted to find out if the parents felt as if they and their child had fully
transitioned into kindergarten and whether parents felt as if the transition was successful. I asked about their overall impressions of the teacher and the school and whether they had any lingering concerns about the process or their child’s adjustment to school. The fourth interviews were completed after the schools had their parent-teacher conferences. Due to different schools having their parent-teacher conferences on different dates and the busy schedules of families around the holidays, these conferences took place over more than a month from November 15 to December 19, 2013. The length of these interviews was from 28 to 71 minutes.

In addition to the interview data, I kept a field journal. It was a document that I kept on my computer and added to after each interview. I often gave a description of the environment, or an event that happened during the visit that might not be understandable from the audio, or any follow-up questions needed during the next interview. I also noted if a parent cancelled a visit and the reason or any other contact made by the parent between scheduled interviews. I also kept researcher’s notes in which I wrote my thoughts, questions, theories, and themes to watch for, as well as methodological notes.

As I completed interviews I generally gisted the interview. Gisting is when the researcher listens to the recording of the interview and types the main ideas of what the person said with frequent time stamps in order to be able to find the relevant quotes that need word-by-word transcription. Because the first and second interviews were so close together for some families, there were times when I could not gist the first interview before the second interview took place. In these cases, I listened to the audio and wrote questions for follow-up in the subsequent interview. At one point it became clear that I needed help to finish transcribing all of the interviews, and I spoke with my advisors and
with IRB to receive permission to have someone help me to gist the interviews. I chose a woman who does medical transcription work who was trained and certified in maintaining patient confidentiality. After my transcriptionist gisted interviews, I went back through each one to listen and transcribe exact quotes.

My final meetings with each family were held from May 19 to July 11, 2014. This provided an opportunity to do a member check and create closure by sharing my understandings and allowing families to alter or adjust any quotes to more accurately represent their experiences and feelings. I also read the family description (in Appendix C) to each family to make sure that I described their family accurately. I gave each family a small token of appreciation with profuse thanks. Of the twenty families, there was only one family with which I was not able to complete a member check when the data analysis was completed despite numerous attempts.

**Data Analysis Method**

In a phenomenological study, data analysis begins concurrently with data collection. At the time of my dissertation proposal, I chose the Colaizzi process for data analysis (Colaizzi, 1978) described below:

1. The researcher reviews the collected data and becomes familiar with it. Through this process, a feeling for the participant’s **inherent meanings** is gained.

2. The researcher returns to the data and focuses on those aspects that are seen as most important to the phenomena being studied. From this data the researcher extracts **significant statements**.
3. The researcher takes each significant statement and **formulates meaning** in the context of the participant’s own terms. It is important to do this for each participant individually.

4. The meanings from a number of interviews are grouped or organized in a **cluster of themes**, which reveals common patterns or trends in the data.

5. A detailed, analytic **exhaustive description** is compiled of the participant’s feelings and ideas on each theme.

6. The researcher identifies the **fundamental structure** for each exhaustive description.

7. The findings are taken back to the participants in a **member check** to see if the researcher has omitted anything.

While I basically followed this format, there were some parts of my data analysis that did not quite seem to fit this method. Because the phenomenon that I was looking at took place over time, I felt as if my stages were not as discrete as the ones given above. My process seemed more recursive. I reviewed the data after each interview and braided new conclusions and ideas into my current thoughts and ideas (see Appendix D for an example). I also reorganized my thoughts after all of the second interviews were completed, and then the third, and so forth.

Reviewing data analysis procedures once again and rereading Moustakas’ (1994) ideas on the four intertwining processes of data analysis, I found it important to include:

1) the **epoche**,

2) phenomenological reduction,

3) imaginative variation, and

4) synthesis/essence.
In the first step, the *epoche*, a Greek word meaning to avoid, the researcher must set aside biases, prejudgments, and suppositions so that one’s biases are excluded and the researcher can view the information through eyes that clearly see the new information without our prior experiences and ideas from one’s cultural background influencing one’s perceptions of the participants’ understandings. Although this is part of Moustakas’ understandings of Husserl’s original meanings, it is more commonly understood now that this process of bracketing one’s own experiences and understandings can never happen completely. We are all a product of our own experiences and as such, it affects how we think and feel about things and what we find interesting and relevant. Finlay (2013) encourages us to think of the process more as *bridling*, which means that we attempt to restrain our pre-understandings that would compromise our openness to truly understanding the perceptions of the participant. This simply acknowledges that we can never be truly value-free as researchers, but that we must do our best to acknowledge the potential influences that we bring and work to see the research information with fresh eyes. My procedure to bridle my understandings is explained in the following section, titled Data Analysis.

The second step, *phenomenological reduction*, requires transcribing and giving each statement equal value (horizontalizing), then allowing the repetitive or overlapping parts to drop away, leaving only the basic constituents of the phenomena (horizons), which are grouped into themes that are said to arise when the information is allowed to wash back and forth in the mind until the essential layers of the theme emerge (Moustakas, 1994; Zeeck, 2012).

The third step, *imaginative variation*, is the step in which the themes are looked at
from an alternative or opposite perspectives so that other possible theories regarding the origins of the theme or how it came about are explored. This allows a more nuanced viewing that encourages a viewing of the essential, more universal, structures to emerge (Moustakas, 1994).

The fourth step, synthesis of meaning and essences, allows an emergence of the fundamental underlying structure of the phenomena. This synthesis or essence of the experience that emerges is understood as one that exists in a particular time and place from the viewpoint of a particular researcher after exhaustive reflective study of the phenomena (Moustakas, 1994).

As I continued my readings, I reread Hycner (1985) and thought that he explained data analysis in a way that combined the ideas of Colaizzi (1978) and Moustakas (1994) and more closely fit my thoughts and procedures as I analyzed data. Hycner (1985) said, “No method (including this one) can be arbitrarily imposed on a phenomenon since that would do great injustice to the integrity of that phenomenon” (p.280). Hycner (1985) quoted another phenomenologist, Keen, stating: “….unlike other methodologies, phenomenology cannot be reduced to a ‘cookbook’ set of instructions. It is more an approach, an attitude, an investigative posture with a certain set of goals (p. 279).” Hycner (1985) noted that the guidelines he developed did not need to be completed in a particular order. I think his stance captures the more fluid and recursive way that I completed data analysis. Below, I describe Hycner’s guidelines and then explain how I completed my data analysis to show that my study included these elements.

Hycner’s (1985) guidelines suggest that most of the following elements need to be present in phenomenological analysis:
1. **Transcribe:** Real words of participants should be used.

2. **Bracket:** Suspend your own understandings as much as possible so that you can be open to the unique viewpoint of the individual interviewed.

3. **Listen to the interview for a sense of the whole:** Understand the meaning in the context of the whole interview.

4. **Delineate units of meaning:** Crystallize and condense what the participant said while still using his or her words.

5. **Delineate units of meaning relevant to the research question:** Eliminate units of meaning that do not contribute to the answering of the research question.

6. **Verify the units of relevant meaning:** Share findings with another professional in your field for a second opinion on your interpretation.

7. **Eliminate redundancies:** Discard overlapping comments.

8. **Determine themes from clusters of meaning:** Combine related areas into themes.

9. **Do member checks:** Return to the participants with the summaries and themes.

10. **Modify themes and summaries based on member checks.**

11. **Identify general and unique themes for each interview:** Make sure to include examples that fit the themes and counter examples.

12. **Put the themes back into context to determine implications.**

13. **Summarize:** Capture the essence of the phenomenon, making sure to note significant individual differences.

As noted above, Hycner (1985) captures most of the ideas of Colaizzi (1978) and Moustakas (1994) and allows for the more fluid and recursive analysis necessary for an evolving qualitative phenomenological research design.
Data Analysis

In the following description of the process used to analyze the data from this study, I have included the corresponding number of the element from Hycner’s guidelines in parenthesis to show how his guidelines were incorporated. My research began with an examination of my own bias and beliefs regarding what I anticipated finding in this study. I needed to examine some of the experiences from my children’s transition to school and the experiences that some of the families that I knew and worked with professionally had experienced. Bracketing or bridling (Finlay, 2013) these experiences would allow me to set aside prior understanding to be able to truly hear the participants’ explanations of their experience of the phenomena. I did this by writing about some experiences from my past history and making a list of anticipated finding in the study (2).

As I reflexively looked at my past experiences, I discovered some incidences from my children’s school experience (e.g., my daughter’s first grade teacher telling me I was not allowed to come observe in her classroom), some incidences from my teaching (e.g., an angry parent who told me she thought I was racist and too strict with her child) and some experiences from my work as a parent educator (e.g., my opening vignette of Cameron) that influenced beliefs that needed bridling. I wrote a list of all my expected outcomes and realized that I expected to have some parents who felt as if the school was not a good environment for their child (e.g., that the teacher was not treating their child well or treating the child or parent unfairly based on racial stereotypes). At some level, I wanted to do this research to unveil some of the negative or concerning situations that parents experienced more than I wanted to highlight the positive things that were going
well as children transition into school. I went back and tried to write my questions in a more open-ended, non-leading manner. Then, before each interview, I reminded myself to listen to what the participant wanted me to know about his or her experience and to set aside my preconceived ideas. Mid-way through the first interviews, when parents had given me the basic framework of information needed to proceed in the study, I used my set of open-ended questions when the parent needed a prompt. Otherwise, I tried to follow the natural progression of the conversation, allowing my questions to flow from their comments so that the things they found most important were the greater influence on our conversations. I continued bridling as data analysis progressed to make sure that I was discovering the story of my participants and capturing the essence of their experience of the phenomenon of their child beginning kindergarten.

Data analysis began after the first interview when I wrote in my field journal and my researcher’s notes. I put details about the interviews and thoughts for follow-up in those documents. After the first interviews, I began to gist the interviews and re-listen for the parent’s overall meaning (3). Then, when the gisted transcripts were complete, I went back through each one looking for the significant statements that encapsulated the parents’ feelings regarding a certain topic (4). I made sure that these statements were transcribed with the exact words that the parent used (1). I eliminated comments that were represented in multiple ways (7) and looked for statements that seemed to capture the feelings of parents most effectively (4). Then I began to categorize the data into the topics that were talked about most often by parents (4). I made a Word document for each of the topics. I initially made ten documents, one for each of the areas about which many parents made significant comments (4). (see Appendix E for meaning cluster titles).
Each of these documents began with the name of a parent, followed by the significant vignette, then a line to separate vignettes and the next family’s comment that was related to the topic. Then I went through the interview transcripts a second time and this time, I found more statements that appeared significant that didn’t seem to fit into my initial ten areas (11). By the time I finished this process, I had found 16 additional smaller clusters of meaning for which I created separate Word documents as well. Next, I examined these two groups of large and small clusters and saw that some were connected to others and that some, although interesting, were less related to answering my research question (5). When I reworked the clustering in a way that made more sense for answering the research questions, I had eight larger clusters and after allowing them to wash back and forth in my mind and allowing connections to emerge, they began to become distilled into three themes of the experience (8) which is the fundamental structure of the phenomenon (13). As I looked back through the documents of each of the clusters, I came to an understanding of how the variety of responses that parents gave fit together in different ways to form a complete understanding of each topic (12). When all of the understandings for each theme were compiled, I took on a reductionist attitude. My goal was to capture the basic essence of this phenomenon with all of the detailed information stripped away so that the fundamental structure stood by itself (13). When I understood the phenomena, I returned to the participants for a member check (9). I told each participant the main ideas that I had gained from each interview, the main findings of the study, and the specific quotes I planned to use in the dissertation. I gave them a small token of my gratitude and heartfelt thanks (11). After completing the member checks, I found that none of the main information from the study was changed, however, minor
details were corrected (10). We also determined pseudonyms at that time to protect the anonymity of their family. Throughout this process, I contacted my dissertation advisors to share some of my growing understandings (6).

By the end of this process, through the use of a phenomenological method, I was able to take the diverse stories of 20 different families and distill their experiences into a description of a common experience that had three sequential phases. The fundamental structure means that each of the families had some elements in common that together seemed to describe the experience of the parents in the group. In this case, the fundamental structure that was exposed was that the process of transitioning into kindergarten came in three phases for parents:

- **Phase One: The Emotional Phase**
  Parents are full of emotions from excitement to concerned before the school year begins.

- **Phase Two: The Adjustment Phase**
  For the first few weeks, children are so tired that they share little of what happened during the day. Parents more often see their children exhausted, irritable, or asleep. During this time, parents are often in the midst of adjustment themselves and are not able to come to many conclusions about the family’s adjustment to kindergarten.

- **Phase Three: The Honeymoon Phase**
  After the first few weeks, parents begin to like and trust the teacher. As their children become less tired, they tell parents more about what happens at school and become more adjusted to routines. Concerns of parents decrease and satisfaction increases; parents become pleased with the transition for their child, for themselves, and for the family. The word *Honeymoon* was chosen for this phase to reflect the new and fragile excitement that
was seen in parents during this time period and does not imply that after this phase families experienced a negative turn in the relationship with teachers and the school.

This structure and the meanings I discovered are explicated in the next chapter, including the words of parents as they explained their transition experience. The commonalities of experience are explored as clusters of meaning and themes of the interviews are considered.

**Evaluating the Quality of a Phenomenological Study**

Quantitative research is evaluated by looking at validity and reliability. However, these criterion do not work well for evaluation of a qualitative study. Hycner (1985) reminds us to address issues that are common criticisms and aspects of evaluating a phenomenological methodology and qualitative research in general in order to establish trustworthiness in the study findings:

1. **Randomness:** In phenomenology the sample is not random. Participants are chosen based on finding a certain type of person for the study; usually a person who has experienced the phenomena to be explored, has strong emotions on the topic, and is comfortable in sharing his or her thought processes. This type of study attempts to illuminate characteristics of the human experience and therefore, the findings do not need to generalize through random selection. In this study, participants were chosen from the population for which I had access (PAT participants) and then chosen on the basis of willingness to talk about their experience, their availability, and their reliability.

2. **Limited number of participants:** The number of participants may be small due to the vast amount of data that emerges from even one interview, and this type of study
stresses quality rather than quantity. Phenomenology relies heavily on the trust relationship built with the family and the level at which participants are willing to share their feelings and experiences. For this study, twenty participants provided enough data so that I felt comfortable that a broad variety of experiences were captured.

3. Generalizability: Generalizability is not the aim of a study of this kind. The results of this study will only apply strictly to the participants in the study. The experiences of this set of parents chosen for the study are limited in their scope and in the ability of their experiences to be generalized to other income brackets, other cities, or other areas of the United States. In particular, my study has only families who participated in the PAT program who were not showing significant developmental delays or with immigrant or ESL status. However, the experience of each of these participants and the experience of this group of participants still has value to inform us about the nature of human beings in general, specifically the experiences of low-income families.

4. Accuracy of participant viewpoints: Participants may not accurately give descriptions of their experiences and feelings while speaking about past events. However, any description is always filtered through the medium of language, which is not the experience itself. There are also advantages to speaking retrospectively because the participant has had more time to think about and reflect on the experience. In this study, I attempted to increase the confidence that I had captured the participants’ viewpoints by returning with a member check and asking if I had captured the essence of their experience.
5. Influence of the researcher: The influence of the researcher is never denied in phenomenology. The participant and researcher co-construct understandings. However, phenomenological data analysis encourages researchers to bracket or bridle their understandings so that they can be more open to expressing participant understandings. The methodology also encourages attempts to view themes from a variety of perspectives so that other possible theories regarding the origins of the theme or how it came about are explored. In this study, I gave examples of the experiences and ideas that I bridled so I would arrive more open to the story and essence of the phenomenon from the participant perspective. However, my perspective in deciding which information was most relevant to my research question and grouping of responses was integral to the findings of this research.

6. Validity: The question of whether research data is “valid” and actually captures the phenomenon being studied is an important one. In a phenomenological study, “validity” is determined by the confirmation of conclusions by participants and other researchers. Due to an interview having only the interviewer and participants present, incorporating a member check becomes crucial in phenomenology to verify the experience of participants. It also becomes important to share results with a research committee or colleagues to evaluate whether the findings “ring true” (Hycner, 1985, p. 298). In my study, I completed a member check with almost all participants and discussed findings with my advisors.

7. Replicability: Phenomenological studies are not typically replicable in the sense that a positivist researcher would use the term. Being able to reproduce the results of the study is difficult due to variances in populations, researchers, and human nature.
Efforts to make the study more standardized and objective often end up sacrificing much in terms of meaningfulness of the finding. Hycner (1985) states that it is possible that two similar studies done with phenomenological methods would find somewhat different findings, however, the findings would never be completely different. A reader, adopting the researchers’ viewpoint, would be able to see what the researcher saw, whether or not he or she agrees with it. In my study the agreement of the members of my dissertation committee that the methods used and the conclusions drawn do ring true are a key criterion of quality for this study.

Summary

In this chapter, I have described my approach to the study, the study design, and the specific methods of data collection and analysis. I have also attempted to make a case for the quality of the study within the terms of phenomenology and the processes used to bolster its credibility.
Chapter Four

Findings

This chapter presents the findings of 80 interviews completed with 20 families whose children transitioned into kindergarten. Every family had its own experiences and its own words to share about the experience of their child starting school and how it affected them. Although all of the families had low-income status, their stories and experiences were diverse. They had a variety of educational backgrounds, races, ethnicities, prior experiences, and family structures. I asked open-ended questions during interviews, and it became apparent that, while many of the questions brought interesting answers for me as a researcher, some questions yielded information more relevant to answering my research question than others. During data analysis I began to zero in on responses that seemed to answer the research question: What is the lived experience of low-income parents from a Parents as Teachers program as their children transition to kindergarten? From the time data analysis began, I noticed how responses clustered together in my mind as common or related. As the interviewing progressed, I looked at each individual interview for the essence and meaning that parents relayed. In addition, I considered the entire set of four interviews that told each family’s story of their transition. Then, in addition to looking at individuals and families, I looked at all the first interviews together, the second interviews, and so forth to see which factors were most important. Looking at the data in a variety of ways allowed me to see commonalities among parent responses. I grouped together comments that addressed similar topics; these are referred to as clusters of meaning. When I saw connections between the clusters of meaning, I regrouped those into three main themes of the phenomenon. The
twenty families all discussed some common elements, which I will refer to as the fundamental structure of this phenomenon. The overarching finding from this data analysis is that the process of transitioning to kindergarten happened in phases for families.

This chapter is organized into an overview of the research findings, followed by sections of thematic findings. The overview gives a general explanation of the clusters of meaning, themes, and the fundamental structure of the phenomenon. The thematic findings allow for more thorough examination of the clusters and themes, which allows the essence of the experience to be more fully understood.

**Overview of Research Findings**

**Clusters of Meaning**

The clusters of related parent comments that were most relevant to my research question were:

1. An Emotional Time: Before kindergarten started, parents had a variety of emotions ranging from expectant hopes to concerns for themselves and their child.

2. Content of Concerns: Parents had specific concerns for their child about which they worried.

3. Experience Tempers Concerns: Concerns were tempered when parents had some familiarity with the environment.


5. Exhaustion: Parents saw their children exhausted for several weeks after school started. Parents themselves were also becoming adjusted to new schedules.
6. Growing Trust and Respect for Teachers: Most parents liked their child’s teacher after the first weeks and felt as if she or he was doing a good job.

7. Communication Contributes to Trust: Parents’ trust of teachers was influenced by how well they felt the teacher communicated with them and whether they felt as if they could contact the teacher easily with concerns or questions.

8. Lingering Concerns: After the child had transitioned into kindergarten, several parents expressed some lingering concerns, and several expressed that things were currently going well, but that they would continue to be watchful.

I distilled the commonalities or connections among these eight clusters of meaning into three broad themes or phases of parental adjustment. Each phase was composed of two or more clusters of meaning.

Themes

**Theme I: The emotional phase.**

Beginning kindergarten is an emotional time for parents. Within this theme are the clustered responses related to the emotions parents were feeling before school began, the types of concerns they had, and the relative comfort of parents whose children had prior school experiences or who had older children who had transitioned to kindergarten. This theme of emotional responses to beginning kindergarten includes the meaning clusters numbered one through three above.

**Theme II: The adjustment phase.**

Families are in an adjustment period after the Emotional Phase. This theme includes responses related to busing problems in the first days and the exhaustion felt by
the child and family for the first six to eight weeks of school. It comprises the meaning clusters numbered four and five above.

**Theme III: The honeymoon phase.**

This theme includes the clustered responses related to parents reporting that feelings of greater trust developed and concerns decreased. Parents were pleased with the transition for their child and themselves at this point in the transition. Some parents, however, reported that they still had lingering concerns after the first parent-teacher conferences. This theme contains the meaning clusters numbered six through eight above.

As stated above, I examine these themes and clusters of meaning more closely in the next sections with statements and vignettes from parents to give a greater feel for the essence of the phenomenon of having a child transition into kindergarten.

**Fundamental Structure of the Phenomenon**

By the time the final interviews were finished in December, I observed that all of the 20 families had commonalities in their experience. The eight clusters of meaning and three themes came together to tell a common story for all twenty families; the fundamental structure. The fundamental structure of this phenomenon was that the transition happened in phases for parents. The story began with families full of emotion for the upcoming experience of their child attending school. They expressed a variety of concerns as they wondered about and prepared for this new experience. During the first weeks, most parents felt as if their children were so tired that they were unable to make judgments about the success of the transition; thus a settling-in period occurred. After six to eight weeks, a growing sense of trust developed as they noticed their children beginning to talk more about school, wanting to go to school in the mornings, and
coming home saying they liked their teachers. The parents communicated with teachers on matters that arose and began to know that the teacher was reasonable, appropriately caring for their child, available, and willing to work with them. By the time of the first parent-teacher conferences, all parents expressed that they liked the teacher and generally trusted that their children were learning and well cared for during their hours at school. Despite the variety of experiences that occurred, the overall pattern was the same; emotional phase followed by adjustment phase, then a honeymoon phase.

I came to this study knowing that I needed to bridle my feelings that some parents, especially low-income parents, were not feeling welcomed by the schools; however, the fundamental structure of the phenomenon in this study tells of a positive experience for parents and gives children, parents, and schools a firm foundation to build upon as the school year progresses and for the upcoming years of schooling.

Theme I: The Emotional Phase

Beginning kindergarten is an emotional time for parents that seemed to signal to families that their child was growing up. Their child was entering a much bigger world with many more students, more hours away from the family, and different influences. Even if the child had been to preschool, many parents still worried about what the change to this new bigger school would bring. Some of the parents had unsettled emotions about what the transition would bring for them as parents, in addition to what it would mean for their child. On one hand, they seemed to be excited for the positive things that this transition might mean for the child and family members, and on the other hand, they still had concerns for the unknown and how this upcoming event would transpire. Parents often referred back to their own experiences or the experiences of older children for
reference. Several commented on concerns they had probably heard from recent media, particularly bullying and school violence. While some African American families were concerned about their child receiving fair treatment due to our country’s history of discrimination, others had nostalgic thoughts about the milestone that the transition to school would represent in the overall growth of the child and family.

Many of the families expressed mixed or conflicting emotions. This first cluster of meaning in Theme I includes comments about the depth of parental emotions as well as how parents thought their children felt about going to school.

The second cluster in Theme I relates to the types of concerns that parents expressed. Some only mentioned one concern and some expressed many. This cluster explores the nature of these parental concerns and the ways parents expressed them.

Another influence on parental feelings about the transition was the parents’ remembrances of their own positive and negative experiences of schooling. Although most parents expressed some concerns, these seemed to be tempered or decreased by any experiences that increased the parents’ familiarity with the environment to which they were sending their child. Many parents were more comfortable if an older child had made the transition successfully in the same school and they already knew some of the school personnel. They were also more comfortable if the child had experienced success in Title I preschool or summer school. About five of parents knew the teacher their child would have in kindergarten because the child would have the same teacher that they had in summer school. These parents, in general, felt much more comfortable about the transition. The third cluster explores what parents had to say about their past experiences
with the school or teacher that allowed them to feel more comfortable with the current transition.

Together these clusters represent the wealth of emotions that parents mentioned when thinking about their child attending kindergarten. Their own words and stories will give a flavor for the emotional impact on families.

**Cluster One: An Emotional Time**

During the first interview, I asked parents questions about how they were feeling about having their child go to kindergarten. Nine of the parents felt as if their child were ready to go to school, and each of these parents felt mostly positive and/or excited about the transition. Four of the parents focused more on the nostalgic feelings of the milestone that this transition represented in their child’s life and for their own lives. Other parents mentioned that they had conflicted feelings, and two families reported having more feelings of worry than positive feelings. Several of the parents reported that their own feelings and their child’s were identical, and they did not report any additional feelings that were different from their child’s about the upcoming experience.

**Excitement.**

Rogelio Martinez expressed that his primary feeling was excitement and that he felt that his son felt just the same way:

*J: When you think about him going to kindergarten, how do you feel about that?*

*F: I’m pretty excited. He is my first kid, and I see lots of kids who come back from school, and I think about that a long time ago before I get married or even when I had a girlfriend before, but that never happened. So right now I am happy.*

*J: Mostly you are happy and excited for him to start school.*
F: Yes, and he is too (referring to his son being happy as well).¹

This father has looked forward to having his child go to school since before he had a child. Starting kindergarten was almost like a dream coming to fruition for him, and it was an anticipated milestone in both of their lives.

**Nostalgia.**

A single mother of four children expressed this same feeling that kindergarten was a milestone, along with an almost nostalgic sense of the end her children’s early childhood years. Janay Shavers was sending her only daughter, who was also the youngest of her four children, to kindergarten:

**J:** What will it be like for you to have your littlest one go off to kindergarten?

**M:** I have mixed feelings.

**J:** Tell me all about your mixed feelings.

**M:** In one sense I’m happy because I’m thinking, the second day of school, I can let the babysitter or bus take them, and I can call in sick and stay home and have the whole day to myself (Mother’s emphasis) with no kids, no nothing. And on the other end, it is my baby, the baby of the family, and she is already in kindergarten. It doesn’t seem like that long ago that she was just born.

¹ I use J for Jessica (the researcher), F for Father, M for Mother, and GM for Grandmother to denote who is speaking in transcripts. M&F is used when parents completed each other’s sentences. I decided to use the terms *Mother* and *Father* because often the comments I chose crystallized a thought expressed by a larger number of parents. All proper names used are pseudonyms.
Janay expressed a wistful sense of nostalgia mixed with an overwhelming excitement. I have known this particular mother for about seven years, and we have talked for quite some time about how her life will be easier when she has all of her children in school full time. She looked forward to it for a long time, yet she also recognized that it was a milestone occurring in her life and a signal that she did not have any more babies at home. Another mother, Ms. Reynolds, expressed similar sentimental feelings, saying:

  M: I don’t have any real concerns or worries, but I’m just sad that she is growing up. I’m not ready for her to be grown-up. (Mother tears up as she says this.)

Her nostalgic feelings were mixed more with sadness than with excitement, denoting this transition to kindergarten was also a good-bye to childhood for some parents.

**Conflicted feelings.**

Nine families expressed a mixture of positive feelings and worry about the school year. Three of the families were “nervous” or really “hoping that it would go well”, denoting that they had no real reason to be concerned, but they seemed to understand the possibility that things-could happen that would create stress or problems: a nebulous level of discomfort. Several others, while generally expressing positive feelings, told me some specific reasons that they were worrying about the upcoming school year. Those specific concerns seemed to have four origins: their child’s past experiences, their child’s personality, the media, and the parent’s own experiences with schooling. These specific concerns are addressed in the next cluster of meaning (Content of Concerns). Families with mixed or conflicted feelings usually felt a level of happiness or excitement mixed
with certain concerns. The nature of these concerns was a little bit different for each family.

**More worried.**

Two of the families expressed more negative emotions of fear and worry about things that might happen than positive emotions. One mother, Trixie Baker, responded with more feelings of worry than anything else:

*J:* How do you feel about her going to kindergarten?

*M:* Anxious, a little scared.

*J:* What scares or worries you about it?

*M:* She has always been home. I think it might be difficult to adjust.

*J:* What kind of adjustments do you think it will take? What worries you?

*M:* What worries me is that she may get hurt or picked on a lot.

And later when I asked a follow up question she added:

*J:* What else do you want to tell me about this upcoming experience?

*M:* I think instead of resting while she is at school, I will be pacing the floor.

*J:* For the first day or the whole year?

*M:* For the whole year.

This mother’s child had not attended preschool, and her daughter had few experiences of being with other children in a group. Trixie felt trepidation about what it would be like to have such a significant change in her day-to-day life. Another couple, Kendall and Craig Brockman, mentioned that their primary emotion was fear. Kendall’s particular fear was
related to getting the school year started on the right foot with her child’s teachers liking him:

*M:* My biggest fear was that they would peg him wrong, because he has sometimes had some trouble (in summer school), and I don’t know how much trouble he really has. I can only go by what they tell me, and what I know of him. But I don’t want them to peg him wrong and dislike him. He is so good. So I was nervous, I was like oooohhhh, I guess I just wanted to start the year off right, I really hope we don’t have the same stuff.

*J:* Will you describe for me that fear. Are you worried for your child’s safety, are you worried for your reputation as a parent...?

*F:* I think it is a lot of things. It is kind of like he is our project and we are letting him out for everyone to see. It is like an art gallery piece.

*M:* It is a reflection on us.

*F:* It is like making the most of the opportunity. This is like his first chance to go out into the world and learn and be in a structured environment that is not ours, and seeing how he adapts to that. It is just like a reflection of how he can learn and react...

*M:* In my mind, this is like setting the tone for school. Number one, I want him to love it and, number two I don’t want him to be in trouble.

The Brockmans name the emotion they are feeling as *fear*, but it is related to concern that the school year would not get off to the right start, and that people would not like their child, and concern about his ability to adjust to the school environment and be successful. These parents seemed to be really tuned in to the way that this transition to kindergarten
could have long-term impact on the trajectory of their child’s school career, and they were desperately worried that it would not be successful.

**Intensities of emotions.**

As seen above, all parents were able to describe some feelings and emotions they felt about their child’s transition to kindergarten. Parents noted varying intensities of these emotions or feelings. For example, Samantha Cook casually said:

*M: Of course I worry about things like she could be hurt or sick at school and I wouldn’t be there for her. And there are the things we all worry about like school shootings and bullying.*

The way she relayed the concerns was matter-of-fact and normalized the worries most parents have. Another mother expressed her concern for her daughter in a way that bespoke the depth of the emotion she was feeling. Carolyn Banks, who was telling me that she thought it would be a great transition for her daughter and that she would love it, suddenly burst into tears when talking about one of her worries for her daughter. The mother said:

*M: I think my biggest thing is that I worry about…. her brother goes to EEE (the program for gifted and talented children) and I know Chloe wants to but I worry that she will not get in and then she will feel badly about herself.*

Carolyn talked for several minutes about the differences between gifted and bright children, and she wiped tears the whole time saying that it was all right with her if her daughter was just considered bright and not gifted because being bright could be better in the long run than being gifted. In the other interviews, this mother’s manner of speaking
was relaxed. This concern that her daughter would not be recognized by the EEE program, and that it might make Chloe feel that she was not as competent as her brother, was the only worry this mother expressed. She seemed to feel so positive at first when thinking about this transition and then seemed to be overwhelmed with emotion. Her concern seemed to come from a deeply emotional place, an understanding that what happened at school might affect her daughter’s future self-esteem.

**Emotions of children.**

In addition to the emotions they were feeling about their child going to school, many parents also talked about the way they thought their child would feel about kindergarten. One mother, Whitney Champion, whose second child of four, a daughter, was entering kindergarten said:

*J:* When you think about her transitioning to full day kindergarten. How do you think it will be for her?

*M:* I think she will love it.

Many parents, especially those who had a child who liked preschool or summer school, expressed the sentiment that it would be a smooth transition based on their child’s prior experience. However, Trixie Baker, the parent whose child had never been in a group setting before, said that her daughter was scared to go to school:

*M:* She says she is scared to go to school.

*J:* What is she scared about?

*M:* She said that she is scared that she is gonna miss her mom.

In addition to demonstrating that some parents felt that their child was worried about going to school, this statement also reflects Griebel and Niesel’s (2002) finding that
transition to kindergarten is a co-constructed experience; parents influence children’s feelings and vice versa. In this research, I found it difficult to separate parents’ reports of their child’s emotions from their own feelings on the matter because in each case parent emotions and the parent’s report of their child’s emotions seemed to match (i.e. if parent was excited, parent reported the child was excited; if the parent felt fearful, parent reported the child felt fearful). Mr. Martinez fits this pattern in the comments he made in the previous section on excitement when he reported that he was excited and happy and so was his son.

**Summary of cluster one: An emotional time.**

The variety of emotions expressed by parents included excitement, happiness, relief, fear, anxiety, nervousness, and a mix of these emotions. Some parents felt more positive feelings, some felt conflicted with both positive feelings of excitement and negative feelings of concern, and some felt more negative emotions. Some parents mentioned a wistful feeling, almost nostalgic, of this milestone of their child’s development passing. Some of the emotions were expressed more flippantly as common concerns of parents (e.g., Samantha Cook’s way of saying “of course we all worry about bullying and school shootings”), and some seemed more deeply held (e.g., a parent crying while she shared concerns). The feelings of parents and children were seemingly intertwined because parents expressed that the child felt the same way she or he did. Parents’ worries seemed to be influenced by their past experiences, the media, and the parents’ own memories of going to school; the content of those concerns will be addressed in the next cluster of meaning. All parents were able to describe some emotions related to their child’s upcoming entrance into kindergarten.
Cluster Two: Content of Concerns

When parents talked about their child’s upcoming entrance into kindergarten, I asked if they had any concerns about their child beginning school. Parents expressed a variety of concerns; some listed only one or two concerns while others had an extensive list of concerns. Many parents mentioned bullying and difficulty behaving, and some parents had concerns that were influenced by their own history of schooling. Two families were deeply concerned about potential racial discrimination. Most of the concerns expressed by parents were from the first interview before school began and were more theoretical concerns of parents pondering what might happen in the upcoming school year. There were also concerns that developed after the start of kindergarten and were based on actual incidents that parents experienced (See Appendix F for list of concerns)

Range in the number of concerns.

Whitney Champion had few concerns as the year began. Her older daughter started kindergarten the previous year and did well, and her second daughter, Jamiya, had experienced a successful previous year in Title I preschool. Jamiya loved to play school with her sisters, and her preschool and summer school teachers had said nice things to Whitney about her daughter’s personality. Whitney showed a small amount of concern because she saw how exhausted her daughter became during summer school.

*J: Do you worry about her transition into full day kindergarten?*

*M: No, I think she will be tired towards the afternoon because she usually came home after Title 1 preschool and went to sleep. She went to summer school so she kind of transitioned there.*
J: How did she do in summer school with the full days?

M: She liked it. She was just tired. She has never had a bad report or any concerns. If she isn't feeling good, she won't talk, and that is the only concern for me.

Trina Johnson, in contrast, was an example of a parent who had many concerns. She was sending her second child, Jonathan, to kindergarten. Her first child had special needs and was two years older. When Mrs. Johnson arrived at kindergarten on enrollment day, she was told that at their elementary children wouldn’t have a set teacher at first. She expressed multiple concerns below:

M: One of the things I was nervous about at kindergarten enrollment was that a teacher tells me at this elementary that my child will not have a set teacher. That made me very nervous. I was like “what do you mean?” She said that they all work together right at first. After a few weeks they will get everything sorted out and he will have a set teacher and a set class. That made me NER-ER-VOUS! You know me, I wanna go in; I wanna meet you. Who is your teacher? I want to know if you are nice and kind. I want you to know all the ways that I can help. I was on edge because I wanted a point person for concerns.

J: Do you think he will like kindergarten? Do you think it will be a good transition?

M: I think it will be because (her emphasis) of summer school. If he didn’t do the summer school experience, I would be a lot more nervous because he knows some kids now. I think he is more understanding, especially
because they went the whole day and that was one of the things that I was nervous about...he is used to going to preschool for a couple of hours then coming home, you know. That whole day, the long duration, I was like nervous.

J: You were worried about the long days. What else did you worry about?

M: If he would make friends and how well he would adjust within the classroom. His teacher, of course, who is it going to be...how is she...is she nice...what kind of expectations would she have of kids... the list is really long when it comes to teachers because I feel like they have so much influence on how much they love school and how much they don’t love school. Since the summer enrichment program, he has been fortunate to have teachers who nurtured that loving of school and learning new things and “wow isn’t this fascinating”...those kind of things, and with Jonathan wanting to be a helper and allowing him that space to do that and with kindergarten I was nervous, especially in summer school. Is his teacher gonna pick up on that? Of course, I still worry about normal things like bullying and will kids be nice to him because he is a nice kid...he is like one of those really sweet kids and is somebody going to be mean to him and will he be able to handle that?

J: It sounds like summer school helped you get past some of the worries about his adjustment to the day, but which worries do you still have with him heading into “real kindergarten”?
M: (She sighs loudly) The real kindergarten worries are the size of the class, the number of kids. Summer school is not the same student/teacher ratio because he maybe had 15 or less—maybe 12 kids and a teacher, so you know regular school year may go up to 21-22 kids in his class and then that many kids times first grade and second grade, then third grade, times fourth grade, that many in the entire school and how will he maneuver through playground time? How will he maneuver through lunchtime? And how will he adjust to ...being within the classroom and having to be respectful and all these things to get a good education out of it?

J: Do you still have those concerns about the teacher?

M: Because I don't know who that person is, absolutely!

Additionally, as noted in a future section, this mother was also concerned about whether race would be an issue for her African American son and whether his teacher would treat him fairly. Mrs. Johnson had many concerns swirling in her mind when she thought about her son going to school including: concerns about who his teacher would be, how he would adapt to the behavioral and social expectations of kindergarten, and how he would adjust to being in a larger group of children. Her comments raise the question of whether other parents had this many worries, but only shared a small portion of them when interviewed.

**Most common concerns: Bullying and behavior.**

The concern that was most commonly mentioned by parents was bullying. Some parents used the actual word *bullying* and some mentioned a concern that their child
would be picked on or mistreated by other children in some way. Eleven of the twenty parents mentioned that they had a concern about their child being bullied. This concern was expressed by Teresa James who simply said:

\[ M: \text{ I worry about other kids picking on him or bullying him, and I worry about how he will make new friends.} \]

Some parents, like Trixie Baker, didn’t use the term *bullied*, but expressed nearly the same concern.

\[ M: \text{What worries me is that she may get hurt or picked on a lot.} \]

Much current media attention has focused on bullying. Greater mention of this concern by parents may be partially a result of the greater media attention it has received or simply that the term *bullying* has become more common, but the concern for children getting hurt when parents are not there to protect them is probably not a new concern.

Another common concern, expressed by seven of the parents, was that their child would have difficulty behaving or would get in trouble often. Here is the Brockmans’ conversation when they mentioned their concerns:

\[ J: \text{Tell me about your child’s personality.} \]

\[ M&F: \text{He is busy, outgoing, creative, and loves animals. He has an obsession with animals. He’s not really interested in watching movies or playing anything if it doesn’t have animals. It is like tunnel vision and he is all boy, just busy.} \]

\[ J: \text{Sounds like he has a lot of strengths.} \]

\[ M&F: \text{For sure.} \]

\[ J: \text{Anything you are worried about?} \]
M&F: Same things! He is energetic, gets in others’ personal space, he is very touchy, everyone is his friend even when they don’t want to be, and he tends to make friends with girls more than boys.

It is clear that the Brockmans wonder how their active boy will fit in with the expectations of kindergarten. Trixie Baker, expressing her concerns about her daughter’s ability to be attentive in class, said simply:

M: I think she might like school, but it might take her a while to learn to sit down and be quiet.

Another comment relating to behavior was that some parents, like the Brockmans, were concerned about the influence of the other children in the class.

M: I worry about what he will learn from other kids because he does seem to be impressionable. I’m worried about what he will learn and bring home from other kids, but I feel like I am raising him right. That is my biggest fear: him getting in with wrong kids.

Parents had concerns that their child would have difficulty meeting the social and behavioral demands of kindergarten mentioning that they hoped their children would not get into trouble; wondered whether it would be difficult for their child to sit still; or worried about whether their child would make poor friend choices and come home with more difficult behaviors.

The most common concerns expressed by parents were bullying and behavior concerns. These social/emotional concerns superseded parents’ concerns for their child’s academic success and their concerns about whether their child would enjoy school.

Concerns from parental history.
Interestingly, many parents told me about their concerns for their child, and then, when asked about their own experiences in school, expressed that they had an experience in their schooling background that was the basis for their concern for their child. For example, Hyram Dixon said that his biggest concern for his child was that he would not get a good teacher:

_J: Tell me about any concerns you have for Levi?_

_F: I hope he never has a teacher like my 2nd grade school teacher. My second grade school teacher was going through a bitter divorce, and I happened to look just like the son they were in a custody battle about. I was left handed and she did not like left-handed people, so one of the things she would do was make me a public example by making me write on the board while critiquing my handwriting in front of the class saying “This is how a left-handed person does it wrong.” I wasn’t the only one that…needless to say, she wasn’t teaching there the next year._

Teresa James said something similar when she gave her concerns for her son:

_M: I just hope that he learns and that he is taught better than I was. I just hope that they don’t ignore him like I was ignored in school. The teachers always pay more attention to the students that act out or the smart ones; the ones in between don’t get attention. Like I was one of the kids that was in between and I never got attention when I needed help. They just figured I would get it eventually and I just hope that he doesn’t get a teacher like that._
Cassie Peters gave a slightly different version. When she gave her concerns for her son, she expressed the belief that she was afraid Tyler would be bored and that the school wouldn’t challenge him enough. Later, when I asked her about her past she said:

\textit{J: You told me earlier that your dad was involved in your schooling. Do you remember how your parents were involved?}

\textit{M: It was just easier for my dad to come to the school because my mom worked days and my dad worked nights. He didn’t have to urge me in homework because I did it all myself. He would come to the school when I had meetings and he would tell my caseworker, “She wants a challenge...she needs a challenge. Why don’t you give it to her?” They would answer, “Because she doesn’t have this, this and this or my grade wasn’t high enough to get in the English class,” but it was only because I was bored with the work. It was frustrating. That was all I got until I went to Davidson (the alternative high school in our community).}

As I went back through her transcript, I found that she used the word \textit{challenge} a total of 10 times in the first interview. When I shared what I noticed with Cassie at the member check, she was surprised at how closely her concerns for her child matched her own issues from her school years. Teresa James was also surprised when I pointed out the connection she made between her concerns for her son and her own experiences. This led me to believe that parental concerns were often drawn from their own history, particularly the concerns about whether their child would have a good teacher. I found connections in 12 families’ explanations of their own pasts and their concerns for their child’s transition. This connection is logical because past experiences influence our
present state of mind and the things we think and worry about. Each of the parents probably had some memorable, positive experiences with certain teachers, and some teachers with whom they had negative experiences during their schooling career, leading them to understand the role the teacher plays in whether or not a child wants to go to school and learn each day. However, it was interesting to note that when I asked parents about concerns, they never mentioned a concern about having a bad teacher; it came up through other discussions of their past experiences. When asked, though, all parents were able to tell me what type of teacher they wanted for their child. This was clearly something parents had given consideration.

**Concerns about race.**

In this study, seven families were Caucasian, one was Latino, five were multi-racial (four African American/Caucasian and one Latino/Caucasian) and seven were African American. Of the African American families, three had girl children and four had boy children. Only two of the families mentioned that our country’s history of racial discrimination made them concerned that their children would not be treated fairly when they started kindergarten. Both of the families had African American boys. None of the other families that were African American or bi-racial shared that they had specific concerns in this area before school began. Trina Johnson shared:

*J: Do you ever worry about historical levels of racism and discrimination for Jonathan?*

*M: Absolutely! I do think about the stigma and think about the struggles that African-American children have to this day coming up through education. He is a young, beautiful, intelligent little boy, but when it*
comes down to it, they will look at him and say he is a Black boy. I hope there will be people who will not have those filters in their head and can see who he is. I grew up in the 90s when you think most of those things wouldn’t be prominent, but most of my school years I was not the predominant race in my class. I want teachers to look at him with the same expectations. I know that some of my teachers looked at me and did not have the same expectations. Some were a little better at hiding it and some of them weren’t. That is where I struggle a lot because I don’t want him to have that preconceived notion, because honestly my son goes into the classroom with his feelings first, no color or anything. That is just who he is. He makes friends with anybody, disability, non-disability…for him, honestly, to be able to be really good friends with someone in a wheelchair and to also consider how difficult it is for my daughter because she has double or triple discrimination…she is a girl, she has a disability, and because she is culturally different…so I really have a heightened sense of awareness of that…it is actually off the chart. For my son, I do think about the rate of reading for a …and unfortunately because I am in school, I know these things. I see the disparity between the African-American males in performance in reading, math, science and even graduating high school or making it with honors---I know how significant they are. That is why I want to be involved. If I am involved and you can see my little brown face come walking in saying that I am supportive and I want to help you in any way I can...you know some people just don’t know
how to relate for whatever reason. I understand that. Maybe they have had experiences with a different kind of person so they expect my son to be that way too. Some teachers have been teachers for so many years, they feel like, “Here comes…Jonathan…he is probably going to be a handful.

I don’t want that type of treatment based off of just how he looks.

I don’t!

Shayla King also brought up her concerns when I asked her about her own experiences in school:

J: How much did your mom come to school or how involved was she?

M: Every time I told my mother something, she was there. That is why if there is a problem, I'm there. I feel like I have to do that for all my kids. If people feel like kids from a different race don't have anybody to stand behind them, they treat them different. I feel like the more involved I am, it lets them know that my children are not just going to slide through the cracks. I work with my children. They know right from wrong. You have to let teachers know that. Teachers think that most kids have somebody to back them up, but for some reason they feel like Black kids don't have someone to back them up. I have to show them I am involved and you are not going to treat them just any way. (Mother's emphasis)

Later in the interview, I asked her:

J: Do you think parents of African-American boys worry about them more when starting school?
M: Actually, in the beginning, I didn’t. It was just this last two years that 
....it only came to my perspective because my oldest son brought it to me. 
Because he felt like that was how they were treating him. It was just with 
certain teachers when he got in fourth or fifth grade. Both of my children 
are very opinionated; they question and if they feel like something is 
wrong they are going to question it. He felt like the school would let 
certain children do something and then when he did the same thing, all 
hell would break loose. They wanted to call and put him in detention and 
label him as this aggressive child. There are only four kids in his grade 
level of his race and all of them have that ADHD or they are aggressive. 
They fight, they cuss, they run around the halls, and he is not that child.

Mrs. King went on to tell me about a time when her son received detention because he 
questioned something about how they presented Martin Luther King, Jr. Day at school. 
His mother went to school to talk to teachers about the way they treated her son. 
Apparently, it became quite heated and Shayla said that she felt like everyone was 
watching her thereafter when she came to school, as though they were afraid she was 
going to yell again. She told me she did not mind, though, because at least she knew that 
teachers would be more likely to give her son fair treatment if they knew that she was 
willing to come to school to back him up, just like her mother backed her up.

These concerns seem highly significant for these two parents. Mrs. Johnson 
further commented that, based on her own experiences in high school, sometimes African 
American children have been treated unfairly at school and that there should be a system 
of accountability:
They may say, well they just needed to discipline them. So easy for them to say because they don’t have anybody they have to be accountable to. If you don’t have any kind of accountability built into your teaching, you may say or behave in a certain way in the classroom and just be unaware of your own behavior. I think some teachers only have other Caucasian, White teachers that they have to be accountable to; they need to have an African American presence in there...you can be doing it unconsciously and never notice that maybe I treat this person a little bit differently.

Both of these African American parents had much to say about their concerns for their children related to racial discrimination that was based on both their previous and more recent experiences and on media exposure as their sons begin kindergarten. This concern was critical for these parents whose children had not even begun their formal education.

Cluster Three: Experience Tempers Concerns

Within the local school district, a strong Title I preschool program serves many of the three- and four-year-old children who show a need for support in preparation for kindergarten. Eleven of the children in the study had been in Title I preschool and four had been in Head Start or another preschool (see Appendix B). The school district also has a free, full-day, five-week summer school program of which many families took advantage. Sixteen of the 20 families enrolled their child in summer school and two of the families kept their child in Head Start for continuity of their schedule over the summer. As parents told me about their expectations of what the school year was going to be like, they often said that they were feeling less stress or had fewer concerns about
the upcoming school year because their child had been in preschool or summer school and had a successful experience. Levi Dixon went to Title I preschool and summer school. His mom, Jennifer, said:

*M: I think he’ll do pretty well because he’s been in a preschool (Title I) before and he got to do summer school too. He seems to be excited about it and can’t wait for school to start. I think that it should go pretty well.*

When I asked Trina Johnson a similar question, she more directly credited summer school for easing the transition:

*J: Do you think he will like kindergarten? Do you think it will be a good transition?*

*M: I think it will be because (her emphasis) of summer school. If he didn’t do the summer school experience, I would be a lot more nervous because he knows some kids now. I think he is more understanding, especially because they went the whole day and that was one of the things that I was nervous about. He is used to going to preschool for a couple of hours then coming home, you know. That whole day, the long duration, I was like nervous about that.*

One family reported that their child went to summer school in the same building and that knowing the layout of the school would help ease the transition.

*J: You said she liked summer school. What do you think it is going to be like for her to begin kindergarten this fall?*

*F: A walk in the park.*

*J: Will she have the same teacher?*
F: No, just the same room.

J: Do you think that will make it easier for her to transition?

M: Yes, I really think so. She was already used to where to go. She knows the short cut to the room and how to get to the room from outside on the playground.

Five of the parents in the study knew that their child’s teacher in kindergarten would be the same teacher that the child had for summer school because the school made a decision to do this when possible. The parents of these children said that it helped to decrease their level of concern about the upcoming school year. Carolyn Banks felt as if it would be an advantage for Chloe:

M: Because she already knows her teacher and her classmates, I think she is going to come in ahead of the game.

The Brockman family felt that going to summer school and having the same teacher for kindergarten relieved stress for their child too:

J: Did he get to go to summer school?

M&F: He did do that as well. That was awesome. I think that has helped the transition. He knows what to expect. He has the same teacher he will have in kindergarten. He doesn't have much fear of going to school. He is ready to go, no fear, no anxiety.

**Summary of cluster three: Experience tempers concerns.**

Parents whose child attended preschool or summer school reported fewer concerns. They knew how their child had handled himself or herself in the past in a situation that was similar, and it predicted something about future performance for them.
Parents who had an older child who made a successful transition to kindergarten also felt fewer concerns. While experience tempered concerns for parents, it is important to note that every parent still mentioned some level of concern about his or her child’s transition to kindergarten.

**Summary of Theme I: The Emotional Phase**

Theme I focuses on the emotions and concerns that parents felt as their child prepared to enter kindergarten. Parents expressed a range of emotions, from excited to worried, and in varying intensities. Parents also explained a variety of concerns about what might not go well in the transition for their child. Issues about whether their child would behave, whether teachers would racially discriminate, and whether bullying would occur were important to parents as well as many other concerns. Parents whose children had been in Title I preschool, summer school, or had already had that teacher were more positive and felt fewer concerns about their child’s entrance into kindergarten.

**Theme II: The Adjustment Phase**

During the first set of interviews, families shared the things that they were excited and worried about, and I was excited to find out what parents would say about their child’s experiences after the first week or two had passed. I scheduled the second visits soon after the start of the school year in hopes of capturing the emotions of families who may not have had a good experience and the excitement of the ones who were pleased with the experience. I wanted it to be fresh in their minds if their child had cried a lot on the first day, or had difficulty separating from the parent, and I wanted to capture any other strong emotions that were present. This is not quite what happened. Instead, I found families who were not quite sure about the experience yet. The interviews took
place when children had been in school for one week to three weeks. Parents reported
that they were just adjusting to the bus routes, their own new schedules, and new family
sleep schedules. Several parents had dealt with problems with the bus routes that were
stressful. Most parents reported that their children were not telling them much about
their school day and that the child was sleeping a lot or was irritable. Most parents
tentatively reported that they thought that kindergarten was all right, but they seemed to
be a bit unsure. I thought that I had poorly planned the timing of the interviews because I
obtained so little information from parents, however, as I began to analyze the data, I
realized that this adjustment phase was very much a part of the essence of the experience
of transition into kindergarten. Teresa James captured it succinctly at the end of the
second interview after the first week and a half of school by saying:

   J: Anything else you want to share?

   M: I think it is really too early to know much yet.

This same thought was expressed by most of the other parents. The overall impression
was that parents were generally feeling all right about the experience; they just did not
have enough concrete information or experience to make an informed statement at this
point.

**Cluster Four: Busing Problems**

Many families had experience with the bus company from summer school. Only
three parents expressed any concerns about the bus prior to the school year beginning.
One mother, Teresa James, was concerned that she would not be home by the time the
bus arrived some days because it is difficult to know exactly when she would be able to
leave work each day. Hannah Lawrence had mentioned that her daughter, Cheyenne,
was excited about riding the bus for summer school, but that she soon became less eager to ride the bus:

_M: She got to ride the bus and at first she was excited but then she wanted to do parent pickup. She said she didn’t like to ride the bus. So we’d ask why she didn’t like the bus and she’d say the bus driver would yell. The bus driver didn’t yell at her but at everyone. There were two instances where I was not happy with the bus. One, we were standing out there and the driver just passed us right up. They pick her up right here at the house because of her age. And then the second time, they skipped her drop off place and just went back to the bus place I guess with her on the bus. I just don’t know if this bus thing is going to work out this year, especially with our work schedules.

Shayla King also had an experience in which her son fell asleep on the bus during summer school that was stressful.

_M: I’m just worried about him getting off the bus.

_J: Tell me about that.

_M: The driver left him on the bus one day. She parked the bus and checked out and everything.

_J: How did you find him?

_M: I called the school after all the other kids came home. She didn’t check the bus. I called the office and they caught her and she rechecked the bus and found him and brought him home. He slept through it and was not traumatized. I felt like she should have been fired. She kept her eye on him
the rest of summer though. Now she calls his name at the bus stop to make sure he gets off the bus.

These three parents had concerns before the school year started, but none of the rest of the parents, even those who had older children who took the bus, expressed concerns about the bus for the kindergarten year. However, in the first days of school, it became a much bigger issue for several of the parents. It is important to note that this was a school year in which the school district changed the start times at the schools so that buses could use a three-tiered schedule, meaning that each bus would run three routes. The early schools were mostly elementary. The middle tier schools, which included some elementary and some middle schools, began a bit later. The third, and latest, tier of routes was for the high schools. Kindergarten students started school two days later than the elementary students, which gave schools and the bus company time to work out some of the kinks with the new routes before kindergarteners were riding as well. The changes in the school district’s busing raised the question of whether bus problems would usually be this common. However, busing problems arose for some of the children during summer school, which took place before any of the big bus changes were in place. The problems that emerged were problems with bus route locations and with incorrect addresses for drop-offs. Although some families reported negative experiences with busing, four other parents in the study had good experiences and never mentioned any problems with busing.

**Bus stop locations.**

There were four families who told me during the second interviews that they were concerned about the bus stop location for their child. Three of the parents (Caroline
Banks, Whitney Champion, and Brad Bailey) were concerned because they had younger children and the bus stop had been moved to a place where the parents could not see their children from the doorstep of their homes. Parents called the bus company and in all three instances were able to get the bus stop moved to a location closer to home. Mr. Bailey was upset, though, because he tried to talk to the bus driver first about moving the bus stop instead of calling the bus company. The bus driver yelled at him, said she didn’t have time to talk to him, and shut the door in his face. The other family, the Carters, was concerned because they lived in a subsidized housing area that had many children living within the area. The bus stop had been on a playground that had a fence with a gate adjacent to the street. The bus stop was moved to the front yard of a business that had no fence and was about a block away. The parents were concerned about this, not because of the safety of their son because they were always with him, but for the safety of the other children without parents present because the children would run too close to the street. These parents were in contact with the bus company several times about their concerns, but they never were able to get the bus stop moved.

**Lost en route.**

At some point on the first day of kindergarten, the parents of three students in my study did not know where their child was. Cassie Peters had told the school that she would pick her son up on the first day. She was waiting outside the school and began to panic when all the children came out and she did not see her son. She ran to the classroom and found that the teacher had accidently put him on the bus. Cassie hurried home as fast as she could and was able to be at home when his bus arrived. She was a
little concerned about this, but not overly so because it worked out well. After that experience, Cassie let him ride to and from school each day and it worked well.

For another family, the Ortegas, the bus experience impacted the rest of the school year. Marta and Reynaldo Ortega were recommended for this study as a Latino family that was bilingual and non-immigrant. The parent educator who served them assured me that their English was pretty good and explained that they moved to the Midwest from the San Antonio area. When I arrived to interview them, grandmother was there to interpret. My transcripts were difficult to read and understand for this family because it was a mixture of English and Spanish. The Ortegas took their daughter, Destiny, to school on the first day. When the bus came by that afternoon, Destiny did not get off the bus. Martha knocked on the door of the bus and asked the bus driver in Spanish if they had her daughter. The bus driver didn’t understand, but let her climb on and look. When Marta didn’t see her daughter, she got off the bus panicking and crying. She called her husband at work and the grandmother at her work. Both jumped in their cars, calling the bus company at the same time. The phones were busy at the bus company so they did not get a response. They both soon arrived at the school and, after some phone calls to the bus company by the school secretary, discovered Destiny was put on the wrong bus and that they were now taking her to the correct house. When they arrived home, Destiny had arrived and was fine. However, the parents were overwhelmed with concern and never let her ride on the bus again. They dropped her off and picked her up every day for the rest of the year. These parents began to like it because they developed a better relationship with the teacher as a result. However, the family considered the incident a terrifying experience and still shuddered when I
mentioned it at the fourth interview. It was expensive for this low-income family to drive across town twice a day to drop their daughter off and pick her up each day, but they considered it worthwhile for the peace of mind it brought.

The third family, the Dixons, had an experience somewhat like the Ortegas. Levi was to be dropped off at his childcare provider’s home, and instead the bus driver tried to drop him off at the family’s home. When no one was there, the bus driver had him stay on the bus and planned to go back by at the end of the route to see if anyone was home. In the meantime, the childcare provider called the family to let them know that Levi had not arrived yet, and the father started calling the bus company. He did not get an answer initially, but when someone finally answered, that person was rude to him. This family was panicked as well.

J: So he seemed okay once he got there. How about you guys? Did this affect your trust?
F: I was pissed as hell. I wasn’t mad at the schools, I was mad at the bus company.
M: I was mad too.
M&F: I was frantic, mad, wanting to cry. Grandma was going to be the one getting him off the bus and grandma was upset as well. We weren’t mad at the school district but at the bus company.
J: So parents can separate the bus system and the school district; for example if you are mad at the bus company, do you keep that separate from being mad at the schools?
M&F: Jennifer made sure she had all the facts before blaming anyone.

Levi was not the only child this happened to. It originated with the bus company not getting critical information to the school. We were both calling the bus company, the school board, and the school. We were hung up on; there were a lot of problems. At least they did have the common sense not to just drop him off at our house by himself.

The reason I included this shortened version of their story in addition to the Ortega’s story (see Appendix D for full version of this story), was that I asked the father this question at the fourth interview in November:

J: Has there been anything that didn’t go well this school year?

F: The biggest thing was the school bus.

M: That was the bus company and being so rude on the phone to us.

F: And being hard to deal with.

Thus, it seems that for some families, problems created by the bus company taint their experience of beginning kindergarten. Although parents said that they could keep the issues with the bus company separate from the issues of the actual school, they actually were swirled together and one affected the other. The family stated that the bus incident was the most difficult thing that happened even though they experienced significant behavior concerns and medical incidents during the first month of school.

I included each of these three bus incidents of parents not knowing where their children were in detail as a means to crystallize the experience and to indicate how much interview time was devoted to bus issues. These events were immensely significant for the families involved.
Cluster Five: Exhaustion

Another component of this adjustment phase that surprised many of the parents was their child’s exhaustion. During the second interviews, all but one or two families told me that their child was falling asleep after school, sleeping on the bus, or falling asleep for the night by 7:00 p.m. By the third interview, every parent had spoken of exhaustion. Most claimed that the exhaustion lifted around the six to eight week mark while others complained that it was still in effect in November, leaving their children irritable and less likely to give parents information about their day in the hours they did have together.

Additionally, some parents were putting their own new routines into place now that their child was in school all day. Some had new jobs, worked more hours at their job, started college classes, or took on new exercise routines. This new schedule left parents feeling a little off-balance. Some schools began expecting the children to do homework right away. Most schools gave a packet to be completed over the weekend, but some schools asked for homework to be done in the evenings on school nights, and that was a struggle for two of the families. In addition to adjusting to the new schedule, many families needed to adjust to a family event that was traumatic in the first month that school started. This may be a coincidence in this study of twenty families, however, in case it is not coincidental, I included an explanation of those situations. Overall, this transition time was a bit overwhelming for most families. The families seemed to be looking for what the new normal would be.
**Children’s exhaustion.**

Alan Frye’s family mentioned his exhaustion in almost the first sentence of the second interview.

*J: What has been happening? How is this going for Alan and how is it going for you?*

*F: It has been a lot of fun. He is exhausted; just worn out all the time.*

*M: He even said it himself on one of the first days of school "you know kindergarten is exhausting."*

Caroline Banks already had an older son who was in second grade and she was still surprised at how difficult this transition was for her family, especially because their school was on one of the earliest bus routes.

*J: How have you been adjusting to the new school year?*

*M: I didn’t know that getting up would be a big deal. I didn’t know that it would be quite this crazy. My husband has to go to work at 6:00 so I didn’t think it would be this hard. Chloe is very tired when she gets home. It is not a sleep-deprived tired, it is an I’ve-been-going-all-day-long-and-I-am-worn-out kind of tired. She has to go to bed early to function.*

Carolyn went on to tell me about how hard she worked to re-organize her family’s morning and evening routines to accommodate the new needs of her family. She re-organized her house so that the school-aged children slept in the same room. She also created a schedule of who bathed at which times and posted it on the bathroom door. She worked with her husband to stagger book reading and bed times so that each of the school-aged children had time with a parent and a few quiet minutes alone to fall asleep.
Carolyn and Edward felt as if this house and schedule rearrangement benefitted their children.

When I asked the Brockmans, who had only one child, Ian, who also attended afterschool care in addition to kindergarten, how long it took him to get past the exhaustion stage, they had to debate for a while before answering:

J: When did Ian get past that exhaustion stage?

F: I think about two full weeks and I don’t think he is past it. It was just really bad, like before, he would just cry on the way home because he couldn’t think of a word. Just mentally exhausted. He was just a grumpy kid… Now it is getting a little bit better. After two weeks is when I picked him up and he didn’t just look totally spanked. Then he actually started talking about his day because he wasn’t so exhausted.

J: When did he reach that point when he wasn’t as exhausted?

F: About a week after our last interview.

M: No, about a month after. It took him a long time.

J: So school has been in session 8 weeks now.

M: He has been okay for about 2-4 weeks.

J: So at least 4-6 weeks after school started.

M: He still, every once in a while, will go to sleep at 5:30 or 6:00 and sleep through the night.

F: One night he fell asleep in the car on the way home and slept through the night ‘til the next morning.
Parents reported that their children told them little about what happened in the first weeks of school due to their exhaustion. This lack of information relates to the inability of parents to assess how kindergarten was going. When I asked Angel Reynolds during the second interview about how Kimber was doing she said:

M: She is grouchy.

J: Grouchy! That shocks me because she has sweetest personality.

M: The hours are messing with her. She is not used to being up so early. She has to be on bus by 7:00. On her first day of school she said she had a good day, but when I asked her to tell me about it, she said there was “too much to talk about,” and she keeps telling me this as she walks into her room and falls asleep when I bring her home everyday.

The Dixon family had a more difficult transition because Levi had some behavior problems, such as crying and lying on the floor kicking and screaming. They mentioned that sometimes they wondered whether his difficult behavior was a result of being tired.

F: Yes, they work him hard at school. He falls asleep on the bus.

J: Do you feel like that is influencing this transition and making it more difficult?

M: Seems like mornings are better, but when he gets tired he has the behavior problems.

Teresa James wondered if exhaustion were a factor in her son’s behavior problems as well, and by the time of the fourth interview, when I asked her the thing that was most surprising to her about her son coming to school, it was related to sleep:
J: When you thought about him coming to kindergarten and what your experience would be, is this like what you thought it would be like?

M: It is different in the aspect of not having naps; I wasn’t ready for that ‘cause I thought all kindergarteners got to take naps because it helps kids to not have to go through the whole day. Think maybe that is part of his anger issues that he is tired and exhausted. They are used to taking a nap all through preschool and day care, and then they get to kindergarten and no naps, and I think it is probably hard for them because after lunch time he is tired and exhausted and he is ready to take a nap and he can’t.

This collection of quotes illustrates that children were more tired than parents anticipated. These tired, irritable children shared little information about their school experiences in the evenings. They often fell asleep on the bus or in the car after school or headed to bed for the evening at an extremely early hour. Three parents whose children had behavior issues wondered if part of their children’s behavior problems were due in part to their exhaustion. All parents in the study mentioned their child’s exhaustion during our interviews.

**Homework.**

Most of the parents whose children had homework in kindergarten were simply asked to read to the child each night. There were a few children whose parents were asked to do a homework packet over the weekend. But for the children who were asked to do homework in the evenings, it seemed stressful to them due to the issue of exhaustion. The Brockmans, who felt a little overwhelmed as working parents, sometimes had a hard time getting it done.
J: Does he have homework now?

M: Not much but a little bit. We procrastinate a lot. I just don't know how other families do it. We don't get home until about 6:00, sometimes 8:00 if we have church or something. We are even eating out or bringing home carry-out much more often now because we don't have time to cook a meal. I'm like, how does anybody get things done and get in bed at the right time? I just don't get it. How are parents who both work able to do that? That is kind of crazy.

The Dixon family felt that homework was a stressor that caused conflict in their family.

F: We are still trying to figure out the whole homework thing. Some nights are still a struggle. It is a battle and a half to get him through all of the homework. Sometimes we end up yelling and screaming at him and each other trying to figure it out, and it is like what else should we be trying to do to help him?

Mr. Martinez expressed that he had been giving it a lot of thought and during the fourth interview when I asked him what would have been helpful or what would have made the transition to kindergarten better, he replied:

J: Is there anything school could have or should have done to help make this transition better for you and your son?

F: No, I don't know what they can do. Sometimes I question myself why the teachers tell us to show them how to read and write letters and numbers when they are in school all day, and they expect us to do a lot more when
they come home. I try to figure out what they want us to do; they want us to teach the same thing to help the child get them.

J: Are you saying that the school has Austin all day long practicing these things and yet he comes home and you are busy and they want you to do a lot more. Sometimes you don’t have time to fit it in.

F: Exactly!

J: There are some people who are saying kids need less homework but sometimes parents can help children learn more effectively because they know each other so well.

F: That is what I kind of figured. Whatever helps him to know more and learn more is what we have to do.

This quote made me feel as if Mr. Martinez were grappling with what his role was in his son’s education and how teachers were asking him to be involved and supportive of learning. He clearly wanted to be involved and helpful in his child’s education, but he was not quite sure of what they were asking him to do and why. This comment seemed to mirror Valdes’ (1996) and Lopez’ (2001) comments about Mexican American parents’ understandings that they are to have the child prepared for school with the proper values and that the teachers should be the ones to teach the subject matter. This father seemed to be struggling to understand the way that the American teacher wanted him to be supporting his son’s education at home.

Interestingly, two parents wanted the school to give more homework and hoped that more would be sent home. At the end of each interview, I asked each parent what
else I should know, and during the second interview, Whitney Champion gave a surprising response:

   J: Anything else I would want to know?

   M: (She pauses and thinks for a minute.) I know they don’t give out that much homework for real in kindergarten and kids are so advanced now it wouldn’t hurt to give them a little homework, even if it is just like writing their letters or something. I know that is something that they do in first grade. She already knows her name and how to write her letters and stuff....

   J: It sounds like you wish she had a little bit of homework.

   M: Yes, even when my older daughter wasn’t getting homework, I would get them flash cards and the little tracing books where they write stuff.

   J: Did you have a hard time once you get home from your busy day full of classes and stuff to be able to sit down with your older daughter last year to get homework done or you liked doing that?

   M: Because they give them a week to do the homework and I only have classes on Tuesday and Thursdays, if someone is watching them here, I am able to sit down and do her work with her after school for like an hour and a half, but it usually doesn’t take long and it is fairly easy. She catches on quick.

   J: So you are glad when she has a few minutes of homework?
M: I actually like to make her do it herself and then I just look over it and
tell her which ones are wrong and then I tell her how to make it right
without giving her the answer. She will go back through and figure it out.

Whitney Champion and one other parent expressed that they liked to help with
homework and it helped them to feel involved with their child’s education. Although
kindergarten isn’t known for having a lot of homework, it was clearly an important topic
to some parents; some were striving to find time to do it, some were striving to do it
without fighting about it, some were wondering why they were doing it, and some were
hoping to have more homework sent home. Notably, two of the families, when asked
what else I should know about the experience of having a child transition to kindergarten,
brought up homework as an important topic.

New schedules for parents.

In addition to helping their children adjust to the exhausting first weeks of school,
parents were often adjusting as well. For some parents, their youngest or only child was
entering school. Some of these parents were waiting with excitement for this milestone
so that they could embark on something new for themselves, and this required an
adjustment for them. Whitney Champion sent her second daughter to kindergarten, and
soon after found Head Start placements for her two younger boys. By the time I saw her
in October, she had embarked on a new phase in her life. She had already started college
classes the previous year, but she currently had some time to study for her classes during
the day, and she had taken up a new exercise program. When I saw her, she had
changed; she was wearing a new outfit, make-up, and a new hairdo, and she had a new
sparkle in her eye that didn’t look the same as I had seen only a month before.
J: Tell me what has been going on.

M: I'm kid free during the days now (said with real excitement)! The boys are settled into Head Start, and I actually go to the gym before going to class now too.

J: You look good!

M: I have lost a few pounds already. (Said while spinning in a circle to show me her new look)

A few of the couples, when I asked how it was affecting them to have their child at school all day, giggled or wiggled their eyebrows and told me that it was helping their level of intimacy with their partner. One father, Reynaldo Ortega, who had participated little during the other interviews, answered the interview question as he walked through the living room like this:

F: Usually my wife is busy with the children and now that our youngest is gone during the day, she is better about taking care of my needs, so I think our relationship is better.

Martha giggled and told me that they take many more naps together now. One of the most dramatic transitions happened for the Cook family. When I was there in September, Kevin told me that I was cutting into his “special time with his wife” and wiggled his eyebrows at me. When I followed up in October and asked more about them having more time together, I got a response I wasn’t expecting:

J: Now that Nikki is in school, how do you think that is affecting your relationship with Kevin?
M: He is now lunchroom and playground supervisor and he loves it. First they asked him to mentor; then they started with having him coach Friday football at the end of the week. I suggested he apply for the part-time position they had open. Everyone says how the kids have turned around since he started there. It is good for him because he hasn't worked for several years due to medical reasons. Since he quit drinking a few years ago, he doesn't go out much. He is now back out in society and he is proud of it. Everyone tells him he has made such a difference.

J: Doesn't that make you feel good?

M: Yes. I love it that he loves it.

J: So is that better for his mental health; is he happier in the evenings?

M: Yes, they want him there all the time. He has made such a difference in these kids. We actually had a pizza party for the boys because none of them had an office referral since he has been working with them.

I had visited this family in my role as a parent educator for the previous eight years or so. Kevin had been the main caregiver for the children due to a back injury when he was a professional hockey player. He had not worked in all of the years I have known him. He cared for the children and cleaned house while Samantha worked and went to nursing school. During the visit in September, he was just getting rested and beginning to contemplate what he wanted to do next with his life. At that time, he told me he was thinking about going back to school to get a four-year degree in teaching so that he could be a physical education teacher. The school’s request that he work there was an interesting way that his child’s transition to kindergarten changed his schedule and
employment. His children attended a school in which there was a higher percentage of lower socio-economic children of single parents who had some difficulties meeting behavior expectations. They had him work specifically with those students. Kevin went from feeling isolated to being a school role model and helper about whom teachers and students said kind words. His self-esteem seemed much improved by the process. Several other parents started new jobs or started new education programs, but his experience seemed the most noteworthy. His story exemplifies the ways that parents were also changing in the first months of their children’s entrance into kindergarten.

**Other upheavals.**

During the first week or two of school, in this group of families, a considerable number of significant family events occurred in addition to the transition to kindergarten. Two had a baby in the first week of school (the mother who dropped out of the study and Shayla King), two had a family member die within the week before school started and the first week of school (Ms. Reynolds’s step-mother who had raised her and Mrs. Johnson’s grandmother), two children had major medical emergencies that involved hospital stays within the first two weeks (Levi Dixon and Darrin Western), one parent was hospitalized within the first month (Edward Banks), in two families, the parents split up during the first month (James and Lawrence families), one family’s house flooded the first week (Hughes family), one four-year-old sibling had major behavior issues for the first weeks (Banks), and three parents began new jobs (Baker, Cook, and Peters). This list represents a lot of stress within families, some positive and some negative. Several incidents are clearly coincidences, including deaths and births. However, some were possibly related to the start of the school year. For example, Darrin Western’s adenoids were found to be
restricting his breathing in a serious way during a physical exam the week before school started. The physical exam was required to begin the school year. The doctors said that it was so serious that he had to take the second week off school to have a surgery to make sure his breathing passages did not close. Another child’s doctor hypothesized that his seizure disorder started with the new demands and stresses of the full day at school. New jobs and college classes starting were probably partially a result of parents now having regular care for their child. The mother of a four-year-old thought his major behavior reaction was in response to all his siblings being gone during the day. Some of the upheavals in families seemed to be related to the child’s new school schedule. The main point of examining these upheavals is that they contribute to a picture of families in the midst of a fairly important time of transition. It is possible that this is a common story for all low-income families; that constant upheavals are the norm.

**Summary of cluster four: Exhaustion.**

This cluster explores the exhaustion that children and their families faced in the first month or two of kindergarten. Even children whose parents did not predict that they would be tired because they had been to full-day preschool and to summer school were extremely tired. Additionally, families tried to adjust schedules to accommodate homework and the new endeavors that parents began. Parents reported that they were looking for the new normal and it had not arrived yet at this phase in the transition to kindergarten. Parents also faced an unusual number of concurrent stressful events that contributed to this feeling.
Summary of Theme II: The Adjustment Phase

The families of children entering kindergarten in this study were in a period of adjustment during the first six to eight weeks of school. Many parents did not have new routines established yet due to continual schedule changes brought about by children falling asleep at odd hours, parents trying to figure out how to fit in homework, parents having their own new interests, jobs beginning, and myriad family upheavals that were concurrent with their child’s school entrance.

Theme III: The Honeymoon Phase

After the first few weeks passed, many families began to establish new routines. Children seemed to adjust or grow out of their exhaustion stage enough that some began to tell parents more about their teacher, their friends, and what happened during the day. Families began to have enough interactions with teachers to feel more confident in their capabilities as a teacher. By the third set of interviews, 12-16 weeks into the school year, most families were beginning to tell me that they liked the teacher and were pleased with the child’s new interests or skills. Even when children were having behavior issues at school, the parents still said that they liked the teacher and the way that the teacher handled the problem. Parents were able to tell me about when and how they communicated with teachers. Several parents noted that ease of communication with the teacher was one of the primary reasons that they trusted him or her. Parents commented on the technologies used by the school and how their questions were answered when they needed information.
Cluster Six: Growing Trust and Respect for Teachers

By the third interview, each of the parents in the study reported that they were feeling positive about their child’s teacher. Some parents pointed to what their child said about the teacher, some pointed to how much they saw their child learning, and some pointed to an interaction with the teacher. Even when the teacher came to the parent with a behavior concern, parents still said that they liked the teacher and saw that the teacher was looking out for their child’s best interests. Several parents commented that they felt like the teacher “went out of her way” to treat their child well.

The Brockman family was one of the notable families who exemplified that this relationship was built with teachers over time. Kendall was initially concerned about her son having this teacher:

J: Did you have a good feeling when you met his teacher?

M: I was real nervous about his teacher because I had heard her scream at other kids. And I had heard some things from some friends. She is older and I had just heard some bad things from other parents, but I have been pleasantly surprised because I had heard she yells and talks down to kids, but so far, so good. I had been trying to figure out how to get him a new teacher. Ian says she doesn’t yell and I haven’t seen anything like that yet. She actually seems really detailed. (Craig says something about how he hadn’t been worried) I wouldn't have just listened to other parents but I actually saw her first-hand yell at kids.

By the time I came for the interview in October. The parents saw things a little differently. Here is the way they expressed their changing feelings:
M: But his teacher is like.....

F: She has done an about-face in her opinion of his teacher.

M: His teacher is **on it.** (said emphatically)

F: I don’t know if you remember the last time...

J: She was definitely reserving judgment at that time.

M: I was! And I would rave about her now. Craig just thinks I feel bad because I didn’t like her. But I have completely.... She is definitely different than what I thought she was.

J: Is it more like you like her or respect her?

M&F: Both.

F: I respect what she does as a teacher. Her communication has been great. She e-mails and sends weekly checklists home about how the kids behaved. She is open.

M: She has been really sympathetic. I really wanted him to have a teacher who would not see him as one of those kids who struggles or label him as a bad kid or that’s the one that doesn’t sit still. He has a really good heart just doesn’t sit still and keep his hands to himself.

F: And she has some nice ways to accommodate that too. Sometimes if he is having a hard time focusing, he can move himself to a separate desk and come back whenever he wants to and work with the group. He gets to decide. She is not labeling him, but working with him on his strengths and weaknesses.
M: When I first met her I thought she is either one of two things….she will be like I originally thought with a short temper and yells or she is stern and kind of old school and just does things more her own way. I think it is the latter.

J: Do you think he has been responsive to that?

M: Yes. I think it has been better for him. At literacy night we met a nice, sweet teacher and I thought Ian would not do very well with her. He needs her “this is what we are doing” structure.

J: So he knows where he stands and where boundaries are?

M: Yes, he doesn't think she is stern or mean.

F: He knows what she expects.

M: She is very structured.

At the last interview, I asked more questions about how they were feeling about his teacher. The following interchange shows much about how they had created a relationship that included new understandings with this teacher.

J: After the conference were you still feeling good about Ms. K?

M: Awesome, it just keeps getting better.

J: If your opinion of Ms. K is better, why is it even better?

M: Because of the way she has worked with us, communicated with us, and how she doesn't make a big deal out of things. As a mom you sometimes let your child's performance reflect back on you. She doesn't do that. She is very encouraging. She says things very cut and dried and
doesn’t make you feel like you are failing as a parent. She is just very encouraging.

J: Do you think Ms. K likes Ian?

F: Absolutely.

M: She says Ian is the only child that gives her hugs.

J: You were worried about her being a screaming teacher. Have you ever found that to be true?

M: I think she does get short sometimes. I’ve come to understand that that doesn’t necessarily means she is really flustered or frustrated. When she talks, she knows what she is talking about. She gives us tips on how to deal with Ian that make sense. She talks about encouraging him. I don’t think she realizes when she raises her voice, but I see it in a different light now. I see it now like she isn’t out to shame them; she just has kindergarteners that she needs to get things done with. She doesn’t really yell at them, but she does get short sometimes; I’ve still heard it.

F: When you are wrangling 20 plus kids, raising your voice is not a big deal.

M: She has a student teacher with a different teaching style. It is just different. I'm not bothered by it any more. I don’t know why. My fear was that she was judging them but I don't think that is the case.

J: Do you think Ms. K thinks he is special?
M: Yes, I do. We were talking about how he loves animals and her eyes lit up. She does have 20 kids, but she told us stories about how he came to life when they were playing this animal game.

F: She seems to find something special in all the kids.

M: I have seen she has gone a little bit out of her way for us. I think she sees that I am still kind of sensitive about him and she sees that. She is kind of a mother figure too because she has kids. She will ask him if he wants a mom hug or a grandma hug, just that kind of thing. He hugs her all the time. I don’t know if she is that way with everyone or with all of the kids. I’m guessing that as far as you go to meet her, she will meet you. If you care, she cares. I think I would be that way with parents if I were a teacher. If I see parents that are really interested, that would make me more willing too.

This interaction shows what can happen when parents build a relationship with a teacher. This family decided not to let their son take the bus to school partly because they wanted to spend more time with him and partly because they wanted to get him off on the right foot each morning. They walked him in the door each day and took a minute or two to talk to the teacher. This may have provided the parents with an opportunity to see things from the teacher’s perspective. They understood her interest and kindness on a more personal basis. Craig also went on school field trips and, as a result, he had this to say about his involvement in kindergarten:

J: Craig, have you been as involved as you wanted to be?
F: I think yes, it has been above and beyond the expectations I was having.
I guess I thought he would go to school, come back home, and learn some stuff. That is about the only expectation that I had. It is way better than that and I am getting to do a lot more than I thought I would. I didn’t get to do much last year with my work schedule and it has really been enjoyable this year.

The Brockman family had a more complete change in their feelings about the teacher over the first months than any of the other families interviewed. They went from being concerned that she was not going to be a good teacher for their child to feeling as if she went out of their way to help Ian and to support and include them as well.

Michael Blake and Trixie Baker are parents who liked the teacher and school because of how much they saw their daughter learning.

J: What kind of things do you think Amanda is learning in school?
F: She can read words, spell words, she can count to 100; there is quite a bit she has learned.

M: She is more interested in reading books now too.

J: So you are proud of how much she has learned?
F: You can tell the difference, a big difference. We are real satisfied with this school. (His emphasis)

In the study, one grandparent was raising her grandson, Debra Western. She felt that the teacher went out of her way to be nice to her grandson, and she was amazed by the special treatment she felt he received.

J: Do you like his teacher, Mrs. W?
GM: Yes. I don’t know why she is so nice to him. I feel like she has picked him out of the group to take care of him. I think she feels sorry for him that his mom isn’t raising him.

Parents in this study were overwhelmingly positive about their child’s teacher. Throughout all of the interviews, no parent said anything negative about his or her child’s teacher. Even when the child had a behavior issue, the parent still said nice things about the teacher and felt that the teacher still cared about their child and acted in the child’s best interests. Here is what Teresa James said when the teacher called to tell her about her son’s misbehavior:

J: When his teacher called, did it make you sad or were you okay?

M: I was mad. It kind of embarrassed me because my child didn't act right in school and I don't want to have to leave work and go get him because he isn't doing well.

J: So you want him to do well and behave. When she called, it sounds like you were mad at Taylor. Were you mad at him, at the school, or the teachers?

M: No I wasn’t mad at them because I know how he is.

J: And the way Ms. M said it wasn't mean?

M: No, she just said he was having trouble controlling his anger.

J: Do you feel like she likes him or doesn't like him?

M: I think she understands that boys will be boys and this is his first year in school. She said he is a good student. He just has problems with his anger.
The teacher seemed to have informed the parent tactfully without sounding like he or she did not like the child. All of the parents who received any information from the teacher about their child misbehaving (Brockman, Dixon, James, Frye, and Martinez) still maintained that they liked the teacher, thought she or he was fair to their child, and felt as if the teacher acted in their child’s best interests to contact them. It is noteworthy that the five families who were contacted about their child’s behavior in this study were all families with boy children, which may show a gender difference in school adjustment (Discussed more fully in Chapter 5).

Two children in this study were bullied or hurt by other children during the first weeks (Hughes and Lawrence families). Hannah Lawrence’s daughter had been to the school only a few times when Hannah told the teacher about an incident in which she felt that her daughter had been bullied: some children picked her up and called her names due to her small stature.

**J:** What was your feeling when you talked to her about the bullying? Do you think she took you seriously? Did you think she handled it well?

**M:** I did. She did made adjustments. She asked me about where it happened, and I told her in the line, and she went over to look at the line, and the person that she was supposed to stand next to was the one we were complaining about. So she said she would move the children in the line so that they weren’t standing together again.

**J:** Do you feel like she liked and respected you?

**M:** Yes. I feel like she listened and handled it.
Just as Hannah Lawrence felt confident in the way her concerns were addressed, several other parents who brought concerns to the teacher about their child commented that they felt that the teacher cared when she listened and acted on what they said (Banks, Hughes, and Shavers families). Parents who needed to address concerns still felt positive about the teacher and supported the response she or he gave. The closest comment that any parent made to criticizing the teacher was this comment that carried a mixed message made by Teresa James:

*J:* Do you think he is learning?

*M:* Not as much as he needs to be.

*J:* What do you think he is learning?

*M:* Unnecessary stuff that he already knows. I want him to learn other stuff that he doesn't know.

*J:* Do you feel like she is doing a good job, or do you wish she were doing some different things?

*M:* She is doing a good job but I feel like he needs to be learning more. Like his little sister knows all her shapes, and he doesn't yet so I feel like somewhere he got messed up. He brought home a shape book and she knew all of them and he didn't know some of them.

*J:* It isn't that she is just so smart. You are worrying that maybe the school isn't doing their job to make sure he learns this?

*M:* Yes. I feel like if he didn't know, they should have taken the time to make sure he knew it.
Teresa’s message seemed to convey mixed emotions because she was not happy about something that was happening at school, but she still did not say anything negative about the teacher. She still reported that the teacher was “doing a good job.”

**Summary of cluster six: Growing trust and respect for teachers.**

All 20 parents in this study expressed that they were pleased with their child’s teacher. They said many wonderful things about the teachers of their children even when they entered the year with reservations about the teacher. When difficult behavior issues arose or when parents had to talk to the teacher about an issue with their child, they all continued to have positive feelings about the kindergarten teacher and his or her willingness to treat their child kindly and fairly.

**Cluster Seven: Communication Contributes to Parental Satisfaction**

When parents told about how much they liked the teacher, many gave comments about their ease in contacting the teacher and his or her responsiveness. This responsiveness seemed to foster parents’ trust because they could get their questions answered in an unobtrusive way that did not interrupt the class. When I asked about how easy it was for Whitney Champion and the teacher to communicate, she said:

*J: Sounds like you all don't hesitate to contact one another?*

*M: If I have a question, I'll shoot her an email.*

In an interview that took place on a Saturday afternoon, Mr. Dixon told me about how frequently he and his wife were in contact with their son’s teacher:
J: When you talk about what makes you feel good about him (the teacher, Mr. S), I am hearing that one aspect is communication.

F: He responds pretty quickly—even if I sent him a text right now, he would get back to me about it. Want me to text him now to see how long it would take him to get back to us?

Mr. Dixon was confident that this teacher would respond on a Saturday afternoon. I also had heard several of the parents say that they had their child’s teacher’s cell phone number. I wondered how often teachers were called in the evenings and on weekends. Another family mentioned that the teacher was not the only person at the school with whom communication was easy; the other staff members made an effort to communicate effectively as well.

J: What about the rest of the staff at the school?

M: The head secretary sends out e-mails pretty consistently. I had to e-mail her one time and she e-mailed right back, and she was super nice. She even called my cell phone to make sure I got the information. Every interaction I have had with her has been fantastic. She has been amazing.

F: I have been amazed by how hard-core they are about getting information to parents. Such a 180 from when I was in school. Stuff that would happen at school was like a wilderness over here and home was a whole other place and they never came together. It is so different and I don’t know if it is just a different time, but it is really neat that we get a newsletter every week. She sends home a folder with a newsletter every week about what they are doing and where they are at. We get e-mails
and you can friend them on Facebook and they will send out Facebook alerts about what is going on at school. (Mother: I didn’t know that) Yeah and there is like an emergency Twitter thing you can do too where if you add them to your Twitter they can tweet “We had a fire drill so don’t be worried if you saw all the kids standing outside.” They joke a lot about how over-bearing kindergarten parents can be, so they are like “It will be ok, we will take care of your kids.” It is neat; it is like a total different picture than what I was used to school being like. It is cool that they involve you whether you like it or not in a way. It is cool.

Only one family in the study, the Carters, felt as if their access to information was limited.

J: In terms of transition to kindergarten is there anything you haven't told me?

M: I'm wishing we would get more on how he is doing so we can help out as much as we can.

J: So you want them to get you more involved?

F: They could call. They don't just have to send a note. Like if he has a project, just call and let us know, like practicing different letters or tell us if there are any major projects coming up and what supplies we need to get or if they provide the supplies.

M: If anything, I wish she would let me know what's going on in the class so that I would know day by day of what all he does and to where I could possible find out the way to help and she could give me some websites to
where there are papers I can print off that he could do at home too. I want to know what he is doing and what he needs help with and what can I do.

F: Like today was mismatch day and we didn't know anything about it. We never got a letter. We found out from another parent that every day this week something different is going on for bully prevention.

J: So you wish they would keep you more informed?

M: Yes.

F: They kept us informed about parent/teacher conference and field trips. We probably would not have known anything about Thanksgiving Feast if we had not gone to parent/teacher conference, seemed to be the whole school doing it.

In spite of feeling that they were not getting enough information about what happened during their son’s day at school and how he was functioning in the classroom, they both said earlier in the same interview that they thought she was doing a good job:

J: How did you feel about the teacher while she was talking about Chris? Do you feel like she is doing a good job? Do you feel like she likes Chris?

F: I think she has concern for each child. She broke it down to categories they would be working on and for the most part he had already surpassed the goals set for him on that paper. To me, I don't see her not liking our son.

J: So you feel like she likes Chris?

F: Yes.
J: Does she like you?
M: Yes.

This interaction seems to show that providing enough information and communicating well are not the only things that made parents like the teacher and say that she was doing a good job, however, most parents reported that they liked the teacher and felt as if she communicated a lot of information with them.

In regard to building trust, four parents said that they were not upset even when the school called to report that they had to evacuate the school for a carbon monoxide leak, or a sent home a note about a person who had been spotted exposing himself in the woods near the school, or explained that a lock-down occurred during a police chase. They were grateful that the school contacted them and were open and honest about the situation. In fact, these actions seemed to increase the school’s credibility; parents felt that their children were safe and that they would be informed of anything that was not going well. Here are the comments that Jenay Shavers made:

M: And I don’t know about the rest of the schools, but Crown Ridge is on top of things. The teachers will call if anything is going on in the neighborhoods. When something went on two blocks from the school, the school was on lock down, Mrs. S and Mrs. R both called to let me know.

Unlike the findings of prior research (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003), the parents in this study enjoyed easy communication with the schools. When I asked parents how they would contact the school if they needed to, all were able to name the method (e.g., call, email, text the teacher, go to the school) that they would use to get their questions answered.
Technology.

More than half of the parents (13) mentioned this new accessibility when telling about the ways that the school made contact. Carolyn Banks loved that the school sent all the newsletters by email so that she could sit and read them when she had time. She said that she used to get overwhelmed by all the paperwork that her son brought home in the prior year, and she was thrilled that the magnet school her children attended had moved toward doing more communication electronically. The Brockmans also mentioned that they felt overwhelmed this year with how many different papers their son brought home; they said it was hard to figure out which ones were most relevant to their child. These comments seemed to indicate that some schools were sending home a lot of paperwork and some were moving toward more e-newsletters. Trina Johnson said that one of her favorite things about her son’s school was that they had a way she could see him and other children throughout the day because they took lots of random pictures and posted them to Twitter.

*M: Did you know that his school is on Twitter? I can see pictures of him in class randomly, which I like. "Pictures can say 1000 words". It really can. You can see him working on an iPad. When you see the class throughout the day, you know that they are doing okay. His teacher also writes a blog called Puddlejump.com. In her blog she talks about things they do in class and I like reading it. That was him and one of his classmates (Trina pulled out her iPad and showed me a picture). The blog and Twitter feed help to see the characteristics of the children in his class and it helps me to learn their names.
Later at the end of the interview, when I was asking what else I should know, she said:

\[M: \text{The one thing is that I do appreciate the Twitter feed because that is one thing that is really important to me.}\]

**Summary of cluster seven: Communication contributes to parental satisfaction.**

This meaning cluster reflects how parents felt about their child’s teacher. I found that parents overwhelmingly were thrilled with their children’s teachers once they emerged from the adjustment phase and had some time to build a relationship with the teacher. Parents felt that their ease of communication with the teacher and their knowledge of what was happening with their child helped them to feel that their child was safe and learning. Parents reported that they knew how to contact the school and get questions answered when needed. The increasing use of technology by teachers and schools added to parent comfort in regard to getting information and being able to have questions answered.

**Cluster Eight: Lingering Concerns**

Although parents expressed good feelings about their child’s transition to kindergarten, some parents still had concerns at the time the study ended. By the last interview, all parents told me that they felt as if their child had made a successful transition to kindergarten, and they were settled into the routines and expectations of the school year. A number of parents, however, still expressed some concern. Considering how many concerns were expressed at the start of the school year, the number of lingering concerns was quite small by comparison. However, it is important to understand the concerns still present for some parents.
Safety.

When I asked one family if they still had any worries, the mother told me that she still wondered if they had enough staff for supervision on the playground at lunchtime. She worried because her older son had been hurt twice during lunch playtime. Another family, the Fryes, was also concerned about supervision in the early morning hours before children came into the classrooms. Mr. Martinez said that he still worried about his son’s safety in general while he was on the bus or at school:

*J: When Austin is at school, do you feel like he is safe and she is taking good care of him?*

*F: No. I don't feel like he is safe but I think that is what happens with kids.*

*J: Do you feel he is not safe at school or on the bus?*

*F: Both.*

*J: You still worry?*

*F: Yes. If he runs or the other kids run, they may get hurt but there is nothing we can do. I told him not to run but to walk slow down the stairs.*

*J: You still worry that he could get hurt at school or other kids can hurt him?*

*F: He can get hurt and other kids can get hurt too.*

Mr. Martinez seemed to be acknowledging that children could still get hurt when they were at school and that it might be impossible to completely protect them. He seemed to be working on this by reminding his son to be careful while he was at school.
Support staff.

Two parents mentioned that they were concerned about the lunchroom staff. When Debra Western and the Baker/Blake family went to the school, they both felt as if the lunchroom staff was overly tough on the students. Here are the comments from the Baker/Blake family:

*M: I sat with Amanda during lunchtime. Yeah, and I don’t know who that lady was (Father says—The classroom monitor?) I call her the guard—*  
She said, “Everyone be quiet unless you have a visitor with you. **No talking.**” They are tough on them. Then time to go and clean up. See who can be the quietest table. *(emphasis by mom)*

*F: It's like a bunch of Nazis.*

*M: When I went to school we could talk to each other but we couldn't be too loud, but we could still talk.*

*J: So this absolute silence at lunch bothers parents.*

*F: Eat and get out of there.*

*M: Eat, shut up, and go; that’s all they want them to do.*

This father clearly described what he thought was a blatant over-use of power. Ms. Western’s comments also included similar concerns. She said that her grandson’s lunchroom supervisor screamed, and that her grandson reported being scared. These two families both made time to visit their kindergarteners at lunchtime, which was not common among the parents. This raises the question of how widespread these concerns would be if all the parents in the study had gone to the school to eat lunch.
Always watching.

Although most families in November and December were thrilled with the schools, two parents echoed this comment from Keith Cook:

\textit{J: I'm getting the impression that it is going very well. Are there any things that you don’t think are going well? It sounds like you are trusting this teacher.}

\textit{F: Let’s get this straight (pointing his finger at me). I don’t trust anyone with my child except her mom. So far things are looking pretty positive, but I would never say that I trust any teacher or the school. I will always be watching, but for now, I’m feeling pretty good about it.}

This parent seemed to be saying that he would continue to be vigilant, and that he was presently feeling good about the schools, but he would continue to reevaluate the safety of his child in a more ongoing manner.

\textbf{Summary of cluster eight: Lingering concerns.}

Parents felt as if teachers were doing a good job, however, they maintained some concerns about safety and about the support staff. Several parents also found it important to relay that even though they were feeling good about the teacher at that point in the transition to kindergarten, they would remain vigilant.

\textbf{Summary of Theme III: The Honeymoon Phase}

The parents in the study seemed to emerge from the adjustment phase into a new phase of feeling positive about their child’s school experience as they began to see that their children were learning and happy at school. In addition, after the exhaustion issues dissipated for the children, they begin to tell parents more about what happened during
each day. Parents soon felt that they liked the teacher and said positive things about their child’s experiences in kindergarten. However, parents still had some lingering concerns about their children’s safety and about the other support staff members who cared for them, particularly the playground and lunchroom workers. Three parents also reported that they never fully trust their child with anyone as a reminder that they would continue to be vigilant about the care and safety of their child while at school.

**Summary of Meaning Clusters**

Some of these clusters of meaning were supported by information from all four interviews. However, when I looked at the experiences as a phenomenon, a certain phase or stage-like quality about the parental experiences emerged. Regardless of the background of parents (race, number of children, marital status, etc.), all parents found themselves settling into the new routines of the school year in phases of adjustment. The fundamental structure that emerged was of the phases of this transition. 1) Parents were excited about the transition and felt many worries and concerns before it began (The Emotional Phase). 2) Then, parents needed an adjustment period because they had not yet found a new routine that worked consistently for all the new components of the day that they were juggling (The Adjustment Phase). 3) This was followed by a settling-in period in which they began to love and trust the teacher (The Honeymoon Phase). Understanding this phase-based transition may be useful to kindergarten teachers in developing ways to help ease families into the school year more smoothly.
Chapter Five

Implications and Recommendations

Low-income parents’ descriptions of their experiences as their children transitioned into kindergarten revealed much about the process for the families and their feelings surrounding the transition. These parents reported feeling positive and supportive of their child, the school, and the teacher at this earliest time in their child’s schooling career. These positive feelings were influenced by the skill of the kindergarten teachers, who were able to support a group of diverse parents and children.

Each of the clusters of meaning and themes that emerged from this research comes with its own implications. Knowing the experiences of these children and parents during their transition to kindergarten may help schools and teachers work more effectively and productively with parents of students. The areas in which the implication leads to a recommendation, the recommendation is given in italics,

**Implications of Theme I: The Emotional Phase**

**Implications of Cluster One: An Emotional Time**

This cluster focused on the variety and intensity of emotions that these parents were feeling before their children began school. Some of the parents felt much excitement on which schools and teachers could capitalize and many questions in their minds. *Starting from the time that parents enroll their children in April, a variety of informational meetings that go beyond filling out enrollment paperwork could be offered to parents.* These could include a series of classes about what to expect during kindergarten, why reading with their child is so important, how to help their child with
homework, or how to support their child in learning to read. Parents may be more willing to attend school events during this time than at any other time.

Several parents mentioned that they did not know when the Open House was for their school even though they were enrolled in April. The school’s website had not been updated since the prior spring and did not include Open House information. Another school’s web site showed a school calendar that was two years old. Janay Shavers was particularly upset because she knew that the kindergarteners were to come for an assessment appointment sometime on Aug. 21 or 22, but the school would not assign her appointment time until the week before school started. However, she was required to give her employer two weeks notice to be able to leave work during her shift to take her daughter to the assessment. This added to her stress in the weeks before school started.

Schools need to be clear soon after the time of kindergarten registration in April about when Open Houses and assessment dates will be. Websites need to be updated over the summer to provide information for incoming parents. Parents are likely to be excited and full of concerns at this time, and additional stresses about work should be prevented when possible. Additionally, as several researchers mentioned (Epstein, 2010; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003) it may be important to work with area employers to make sure that employees can take off work without penalty to take their children to school events to start the new year.

All parents in this study who had more than one child in school noted that the amount of paperwork they were required to complete needed to be streamlined. Parents said that they were required to provide the same information on multiple forms. They were frustrated when they had to fill out the same papers for their other two or three
children. Parents requested that the schools move to an electronic format that would repopulate questions that had already been answered.

Parents are filled with emotions during this time, and schools should capitalize on their excitement and should attend to their needs for information and to have their concerns addressed appropriately. If parents feel stress and concern, these feelings may influence their children’s sense of safety and comfort as they begin school due to the intertwined emotions of parents and children during this transition into kindergarten (Griebel and Niesel, 2002).

**Implications of Cluster Two: Content of Concerns**

The parents expressed various concerns during this time period and seemed to need and want more information on several topics. The Brockmans suggested in our last interview that a handbook would be helpful, and Kendall told about a session she attended that was provided by her employer and presented by a local kindergarten teacher:

\[J:\textit{What else do I need to know about how you are feeling about this kindergarten transition?}\]

\[F:\textit{They need a handbook for it.}\]

\[J:\textit{What would you want in it?}\]

\[F:\textit{Like a US Ranger Survival Handbook. Your child will be tired. Your child will be cranky. You will be tired. You will be cranky.}\]

\[M:\textit{Mrs. S did it perfectly for our company. (Discussion about who Mrs. S is)}\]

\[J:\textit{I didn’t know your company provided a session.}\]
M: She hit the nail on the head. She gave tips. It was perfect and it did help. There were general ideas and also really specific ideas. Lay out clothes, practice lunch code, get into a routine, set up expectations, don’t just assume they know what is going to happen.

The idea expressed by this father is a good one. The local public library available to parents in this study had several short books that include parents tips, but a book or pamphlet produced by the local school district might be better read and more effective in providing information to parents and soothing concerns. It is impressive that a large company in the community provided a session about helping a child begin kindergarten.

Whether provided by private companies or the school district, and whether in the form of a handbook or a presentation, these practices to provide information should be encouraged. Part of an information session could be used to encourage parents to explore and process their own experiences of attending school. Parents might then be less likely to bring concerns from their past experience into the start of the school year, or at least more likely to become more aware of their concerns and how they may influence their children.

Additionally, trainings for classroom teachers and administrators on the concerns that African American families have regarding historical racism and on current subtle means of racial discrimination in classrooms should be provided. Trainings that help teachers reach out to families of marginalized populations and help teachers to understand that parents may be showing support and involvement in their child’s schooling regardless of not conforming to traditional scripted methods should be encouraged.
Implications of Cluster Three: Experience Tempers Concerns

Concerns were usually less complex for the parents whose children attended preschool or summer school prior to the beginning of kindergarten. Additionally, the families who had access to a PAT educator who may have helped them to find Title One preschool and summer school so that their child could have a more positive kindergarten transition was beneficial. *Better promotion or expansion of these programs (Title One preschool, summer school, and PAT) would provide more children needed experiences prior to the beginning of kindergarten, which would help to lessen parental concerns.*

Additionally, the Frye family did not send their child to summer school because when they heard about it at kindergarten registration in April, they thought that there was a cost for the program and declined to send their son for that reason. *Advertising summer school more effectively to incoming kindergarten families so that they understand it fully might be helpful so that parents realize that it is a free service with transportation provided.*

*Several schools in the district made an effort to place children who had been in summer school with that same teacher for kindergarten in the fall. This practice was advantageous for those children and their families and should be supported in school districts.*

Summary of Implications of Theme I: The Emotional Phase

Theme I included the meaning clusters that represent the emotional time that these parents experienced as their children transition into kindergarten. This time was filled with excitement and concerns and was also a time when parents wanted information that should be provided. *Parents need the school district to be more pro-active about offering informative sessions that would be of interest to parents or to work with area employers*
and businesses to provide them. One parent asked me how she was supposed to have
known the kindergarten registration was in April and why the school district did not call
to tell her about it. The best answer to this seemed to be that the school district needed to
work a bit more closely with the local Head Starts and private preschools to make sure
that they all had information posted for parents who may have children going to
kindergarten.

might be willing to create a kindergarten transition committee to work with Head Starts,
child care centers, media outlets, employers, public libraries, school districts to make
sure that all are working together to help support families whose children are
transitioning to kindergarten. This could involve the publication of a pamphlet or DVD
about the upcoming experience. In addition, administrators could find times when
teachers could meet individually or in small groups with families before conferences in
October. Perhaps home visits before the school year begins or “get togethers” at a local
park the week before school starts.

Implications of Theme II: The Adjustment Phase

Implications of Cluster Four: Busing Problems

The busing problems that occurred at the beginning of the school year were
stressful to the parents. Schools, teachers, and bus companies need to be careful about
getting information correctly from parents and then transferring it effectively to the
parties who need it. Procedures need to be in place to double-check the existing
information with parent understandings on the first day of kindergarten. Several parents
also mentioned the jammed phone lines to the bus company on the first days of school.
Additional staff and/or phone lines need to be added for the first days of school so that families’ fear and frustration does not become overwhelming and affect the trust relationship being built.

**Implications of Cluster Five: Exhaustion**

Because these parents saw their children so exhausted during this time, *schools should allow a rest-time or naptime daily during the first weeks of kindergarten.* It seemed as if some schools had rest time and some schools did not. At a minimum, *parents should be given information on how many hours of sleep kindergarten children usually need* in the first weeks of school. One of the parents in the study told me that her child was in bed by 10:00 each night, so she was not sure why he had a hard time getting out of bed in the morning. This bedtime seemed too late to provide the child with enough sleep before the bus arrived at 6:50 the next morning.

Exhaustion is a concern, not only because it is uncomfortable for children, but it is likely to exert a negative influence on children’s behavior. If children are having a difficult time behaving in school in the first weeks due to being tired, it may work to influence how they feel about school and how they feel about themselves. If they often have days in which they are in trouble, this may set a pattern of behavior that affects the trajectory of their school experiences. The connection that their child’s lack of sleep may have created to behavior problems was specifically noted by the Dixon and James families, but was also hinted at by the Brockmans.

**Summary of Implications of Theme II: The Adjustment Phase**

Because of the concurrent busing issues and children’s exhaustion expressed in these two clusters of meaning, *one option to be explored might be a system in which*
kindergarten children go home at 1:00 or 1:30 p.m. for the first month or two of school. This would allow the bus companies to be more careful in dropping off kindergarten children, and it would allow children to go home for a nap instead of so many falling asleep on the buses. This strategy would allow a more gradual transition into the demands of kindergarten that might be more appropriate for the age of the children.

Because teachers would be working a shorter day, the extra time could be used to meet individually with parents, make phone calls to them, or find ways to build a stronger relationship so that parents feel included, involved, and integral to their child’s school experiences. Several parents expressed that they had one-on-one time with the teacher on the assessment day before she or he even knew their child, but that the next time they had time to talk to the teacher was three months later at parent conferences. Some parents noted that they had a craving to hear more personal information from the teacher about their child soon after the start of school when the teacher had spent some time with their child, but they were not sure how to go about getting more personal information. The extra time created if the hours for kindergarteners were decreased in the first month or two of school could be designated time for the teachers to make home visits, invite parents for personal meetings at the school, or otherwise work to build parent relationships. It would be an effective time to teach parents how to help their child with homework before any homework was given or to teach parents what supporting reading and writing at home would look like. It might be logistically difficult to implement for some of the families in the study, for school districts, and because of the costs it would incur for transportation. However, knowing this need for transition existed might allow some schools to let parents of tired children pick them up early if it fit into their schedule.
Teachers also might consider making sure that most of the important curriculum pieces take place in the morning, leaving the less structured pieces for the afternoon. Alternatively, schools could provide a nap room for the children who need it. In addition, administrators need to support teachers and parents in making the best decisions to decrease exhaustions for their children in the first six to eight weeks.

Because these parents reported how tired they and their children were during this adjustment period, teachers should encourage reading to their child as the only recommended homework for the first month or two. The parents who had homework in the first two months found it extremely difficult and stressful to accomplish. Homework can be given after that period, if teachers find it necessary to give homework. By then, teachers would have had more time to explain expectations about homework to parents (e.g., Does the child have to do the homework even if tired and crying? How much can parents help?).

Some of the parents in the study said that they craved more information about their child and more involvement in their child’s experience, and others said that they could not handle anything extra during this time period. Another recommendation is that teachers let parents guide the amount of interaction; some will need much handholding and support while others, especially those with older siblings, may need less support.

**Implications of Theme III: The Honeymoon Phase**

**Implications of Cluster Six: Growing Trust and Respect for Teachers**

Parents seemed to move through the excitement and worry about what the school year would bring and then settled into new routines. Along the way, they seemed to develop a greater trust and respect for their child’s teacher. When asked why they liked
their child’s teacher, parents’ answers usually noted that she was nice: she looked pleasant, she was friendly, and/or she spoke nicely to children. When families had an older child in school, they often reported liking the kindergarten teacher more than the teacher of the older child. They often commented on the ease of communicating with the kindergarten teacher and their assurance that they would get their questions answered. Teachers and schools should be proud of this response to teachers from low-income families. However, I wonder about the toll it takes on the teacher to be so available and to gain the trust of parents. Parents really appreciated that the teacher “went out of her way” for their child, but being so available and going out of his or her way takes extra hours for a teacher. This is another reason that it might be a good suggestion to make a shorter school day for kindergarteners in the first six to eight weeks. Teachers should have more time to meet with parents, make phone calls, and answer questions from parents without it taking so many hours of their personal time after the school day is over. Alternatively, if days were kept at the same length, teachers could be given extra compensation for the hours they invest in creating positive family relationships during the first months of school.

Implications of Cluster Seven: Communication Contributes to Parental Satisfaction

Parents found that communication with teachers greatly influenced how much they liked the teacher. The ability to call, text, or email the teacher to get their questions answered was much appreciated by parents. They were also appreciative of the information that came home from the teachers in notes and weekly work folders, as well as from the school as notifications of school events. Two parents requested that information that comes from the school, whether it was actual papers or emails, have
some sort of code on it. The code would denote whether it is specifically relevant to their child, their child’s grade level, the whole school, or just information given for community events. Some parents felt a little overwhelmed by the quantity of paperwork coming home in their child’s backpack. There was less concern from parents who had electronic information sent from the school, although I wondered how many low-income families would not have access to the Internet or email at home.

The other clear implication is that the families whose schools used technology to communicate with parents really liked it. Increased use of technology (e.g., email, twitter, Facebook, texting) helped families in this study feel more connected to the schools and included in their child’s education. The use of digital communications and social media should be encouraged, however, the needs of families without regular Internet access should also be acknowledged and met so that parents who need it can receive information in hard copy.

Prior research revealed that many parents of children in kindergarten felt as if they could not get their questions answered easily due to an understanding that kindergarten teachers were busier than the preschool teachers were (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003). However, my discussion with parents has revealed that they found it easy to get their questions answered and to contact the school. In the years during which Pianta and Kraft-Sayre collected data, parents were likely to have had fewer methods of contacting teachers. When parents wanted to contact a teacher a decade ago, they had to call the school and wait for the office to ring the teacher’s classroom or leave a message. Parents currently have better access to teachers. Some parents told me that if they had a concern, they would call the teacher directly. Others mentioned that they would text, email, or use
Facebook to make contact. Significantly, when I asked parents how they would contact the school if they needed to, all were able to name a method (e.g., call, email, text the teacher, go to the school) that they would use to get their questions answered.

**Implications of Cluster Eight: Lingering Concerns**

Contrary to much information in the popular press, all of the low-income parents in this study were genuinely supportive of their children’s schools and teachers as their children completed the first quarter of kindergarten. Overall, they felt as if the schools and teachers were helpful, kind, and educating their children well. This cluster of lingering concerns however, reminds us that after the school year begins and families are accustomed to the routines of daily school attendance, teachers and school personnel need to continue to be good stewards of their trust. Parents must feel as if schools are keeping their children safe and including families in their children’s educational process.

The implication of parents’ lingering concerns is that schools and teachers need to provide parents a way to ask questions about any worries without breaking the social mores of kindness and appreciation for teachers. For example, when parents were concerned about whether there was enough playground supervision or about the strictness of the lunchroom supervisor, they did not seem to know how to address these non-classroom concerns. _Telling parents before school starts that it is all right to ask questions and how they might address grievances would be helpful._ This practice may also decrease the number of parents who handle their grievances the way Mrs. King did when she was unhappy about the way her older son was treated—by yelling at his teacher.
**Implications of Theme III: The Honeymoon Phase**

Together, the three clusters of meaning in this theme demonstrate that by the end of the first quarter of kindergarten, parents in this study were extremely supportive of their child’s school. During this honeymoon period, parents’ concerns about the transition had eased, leaving only the positive, grateful feelings. Parents seem to be proud of their child for making this transition work so well and pleased with the schools for being effective. *If teachers had more time in the first months of the school year to meet with parents individually, they might be able to capture parent interest and convey* Hoover-Dempsey’s and Sandler’s (1997) main precepts for garnering parent support: *that parents are wanted and needed in their child’s education.* Teachers could also advise parents on issues like sleep and how to help with homework so that parents build the construct that they can effectively help their children learn and can support their education. Parents would also have time to share understandings about their family that would allow the teacher to be even more effective in connecting with each child. Setting a more firm foundation for parent support during this period might increase that support throughout the kindergarten year and into the next school years.

**Implications of the Fundamental Structure**

The key finding of this study is that the transition into kindergarten occurred in phases. The families were excited and worried at first; then needed time to settle into their new schedules; and after six to eight weeks, they began to really like what the kindergarten experience bought to their child and family. This idea of phases of transition allows educators to understand that families need time to settle into the routines of the new school year. Each family had its own challenges and issues to work through,
and each family needed a differing amount of time and support in each phase. *This view reminds schools and teachers to inform and include families and to realize that many of the families are still a bit fragile in the first months of school. Teachers should decrease expectations for homework and any other after-school activity until the exhaustion of the children has decreased and parents are more settled into their new routines.* These practices may be especially helpful for families of low-income status, due to the possibility that they are in the midst of a greater number of stress-producing events in addition to their kindergartener beginning school.

### Areas for Further Research

The paucity of studies completed in the past 10 years on the transition to kindergarten (Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011) clearly indicates that additional research is needed to best support children, parents, schools, and communities during this time, the transition into full-day, public schooling.

#### Decreased Day Length

The findings of this study indicate a potential value in ending the kindergarten day at 1:00 p.m. or so for the first month or two of school. A study of a school that has tried this would be helpful to assess the merit of the idea, including its effectiveness as a strategy for more successfully engaging parents.

#### Full year or Longitudinal Study of Kindergarteners

Because the parents seem to be so pleased with teachers at the time of parent-teacher conferences in November and December, a study that followed kindergartener children throughout the remainder of the school year to determine if parents’ appreciation for teachers waned at any point would be interesting. Additionally, following the same
parents longitudinally for the next few years to explore their support for the teachers and schools would also add needed information. As mentioned in the literature review, some research regarding whether the parents who had good feelings about their child’s teacher and school actually result in parents who were more supportive and involved at home or at the school would be useful. This would allow a closer look at any connections between parents having stronger relationships and positive feelings about teachers and whether that results in more parent involvement over time.

**Strategies Used by Kindergarten Teachers**

This study included several parents who had two or more children in school. Parents reported that they liked the kindergarten teacher more than the teachers at the older grade levels. Research to determine the strategies used by kindergarten teachers to gain such positive parent support might be helpful. Are kindergarten teachers acting in a way that builds relationships more effectively than teachers in older grade levels? Could any of their strategies be extended into the older grade levels to produce better parent support and involvement?

**Gender Bias**

This research revealed that the child’s gender seemed to play a role in parents’ experiences as their child transitioned to kindergarten. The only families that received calls about behavior were families of male children. Prior research has addressed gender differences in schooling (Skiba, Michael, Nardo & Peterson, 2002; Wallace, Goodkind, Wallace & Bachman, 2009), however, none has addressed this issue as children transition into kindergarten. It would also be interesting to do this study again and include
interviews with teachers comparing in-school behaviors of children in the first few weeks of school and to compare the results for the boy children versus the girl children.

Racial Bias

One family bought up the need for a committee of colleagues to be formed in schools in order to help teachers analyze their own behaviors for evidence of racial bias. Encouraging teachers to self-evaluate and then to support one another in achieving racial parity in the transition to kindergarten might also be warranted. This might be especially comforting to the African American community, based on the greater concerns expressed by parents of African American boys that their children might not receive fair treatment. Additionally, the literature review revealed that many parents of African American children have concerns about their ability to question the school and teachers (Lareau & Horvat, 1999; Lareau & Munoz, 2012; Lawrence-Lightfoot, 2003). Based on this, research may be warranted on how to help families feel more comfortable in addressing grievances with the school.

Communicating Information

A need for more information for parents ready to make the transition to kindergarten seemed apparent, including what to expect in the transition and how much sleep might be necessary. In addition, research regarding the most effective ways to communicate information to parents might be helpful. Are parent information sessions best received when they are closer to the time of kindergarten registration in the spring or when they are closer to the time that school begins in August? It would be interesting to find out at which time attendance and interest was higher. In addition to providing
electronic information for parents, would some sort of handbook or pamphlet be effective for parents who do not prefer to receive information electronically?

**Community Support**

Hampton, Fantuzzo, Cohen, and Sekino (2004) found that low-income families cited work responsibilities as the reason they were not involved at school as often as they wanted to be. This was definitely true in my study as well. Epstein (2010) and Pianta and Kraft-Sayre (2003) both suggested that a community-wide coalition be built to support families in the transition to kindergarten. My findings also support involvement of employers to find ways to allow parents to attend school events without fear of penalty. Additional research on how to build support for this type of community coalition or committee might be necessary because, although the researchers mentioned that it would be helpful, suggestions for building community support were not apparent.

**Length of Day and Behavior**

Based on the theme of exhaustion, further research might be done on how the length of the school day affects behavior. If more behavior problems emerge when the day is longer, this would suggest that it would be beneficial to have shorter days for kindergarteners or to allow them to build gradually to a full school day over time.

This theme of exhaustion also relates to families’ needs for after-school care. After-school care that took place in the school cafeteria and on the playground was available to the families in this study, but it was fairly expensive and parents had to pick up their children before 6:00 p.m. One family in this study used this service (paid for by grandparents). Two other families used after-school care that was available for low-income children until 7:00 p.m. every day. These parents reported that they were
encouraged to leave their children in the program until it ended each evening, and the
children were transported back home around 7:00 p.m. One mother worked until 5:00
p.m. and one mother did not work outside the home. Both mothers felt as if they were
acting in their children’s best interest to allow them to stay at these programs until after
dinner and were encouraged to do this by the staff of the programs. These programs
offered a much-needed childcare service, however, I wonder whether this practice
contributes to behavior problems the next day in exhausted kindergarteners. After
coming home at 7:00 p.m. and having a bath, parents would have little time to talk, hug,
and be with their children to help them prepare for the demands of the next day. For
some of the students, the next day began with a bus ride as early as 6:50 a.m. Especially
in the first months of kindergarten, attempts to decrease the length of the day in other
ways besides shortening the school day seem advantageous as well.

**Strengthening Social Resources**

The study by Hilado et al. (2011) suggested that parent involvement was
improved in a preschool setting when the preschool was more helpful in providing
information to low-income families about accessing social resources in the community.
A similar study could be done for families who are transitioning into kindergarten to see
if stronger relationships were forged with families and more parent involvement was seen
when the school provided more support for accessing community resources.

**Decreasing Stress on Kindergarten Teachers**

Due to the heavy demands on kindergarten teachers during this time, research
could address whether kindergarten teachers report more stress and if so, ways to
decrease their workload and stress levels. Shortening the length of the day for
kindergarteners was suggested earlier, however, there may be other ways to support kindergarten teachers as well. These might include reducing class sizes, adding a family-support staff person who spends time connecting with parents, and decreasing teachers’ supervision responsibilities during recess and before-school care. In addition to teaching a full class of children, kindergarten teachers are working as ambassadors who are welcoming families to the school system. Care should be taken so that burnout does not result. A study that interviewed kindergarten teachers about their stress levels and the best ways to help them manage or decrease their stress might be worthy of investigation.

**Research Extended to Other Populations**

It is worthy to note that some prevailing stereotypes of low-income families are that they are not involved or that they do not care about their children’s schooling. In this study, all 20 families cared deeply about the child’s transition to kindergarten and were willing to tell their experiences of concern and developing comfort with their child’s teachers. However, more research is needed about other populations of families to discover whether this sample population was typical of the experiences of most families.

**Middle-Class Families**

This study focused on low-income families. Research done with middle-income families or research comparing low-income and middle-income families would be interesting to see if any differences arise from differing income levels and the resources that are attached to increased income.

**Non-PAT Families**

This research included families who were all participants of the PAT program, and those families’ children experienced successful transitions to kindergarten. PAT is
an evidence-based program that is designed in part to support families in building kindergarten readiness and to help families feel more proactive in their child’s education (Parents as Teachers National Center, 2011). The parents in this study had all been involved in a program meant to connect families with resources in the community and services such as Title One preschool and summer school within the district. It may have provided families the maximum amount of support in order to have a successful kindergarten transition experience. What role did this program play in the results of this study? Would similar results be seen with low-income families who had not been in the PAT program? It would yield interesting information to repeat this study with families who had not been in PAT.

Other School Districts

Our local school district is considered to be a high quality school district in a community that has many resources for families. Would we see similar results in other communities, including smaller communities or more rural communities? A similar study done in other communities would be an interesting comparison.

Parents of Bi-Lingual Learners and Other Cultural Groups

While choosing participants for the study, I attempted to eliminate families who were immigrant or for whom English was not the home language. There were two families who were bi-lingual that were eventually included in the study. Although needs of these bi-lingual learners were not the focus of this study, it was clear that speakers of other languages or bi-lingual children and their parents would have very different needs for support. Each population and cultural group would have its own challenges and
concerns. Studies done to allow the significant issues of different cultural groups to emerge would provide needed information for the teachers of these students.

**Parents of Disabled Students**

Parents of disabled students were not included in my study because their interests and experiences might be significantly different from the parents of typically developing children. A study to look more closely at the experiences of families who have a child with a significant delay or disability would be helpful to help teachers to best support the special needs of these children and their parents.

**Single or Divorced Parents**

This sample of participants included many single parents, some of whom had another parent with whom the child had contact. However, this was not a focus of the study. A study done to understand how well teachers communicate with or include both parents might provide important information that would help to support the children’s educational experience.

**Gay/Lesbian/Transgendered Parents**

None of the families recommended for my study had lesbian, gay, or transgendered parents. These parents probably face some different challenges as they meet teachers and other parents, in addition to making sure that their child is treated well and is accepted in the new environment of school. A study to understand the concerns of these parents and how they address those concerns might be warranted.

**Conclusion**

This study produced many findings that were supportive of the current practices of schools. The low-income families in this research were enfolded into the culture of
schools and the expectations of kindergarten effectively, and kindergarten teachers gained the trust and support of parents. However, this research also revealed ways to improve the transition to kindergarten for children and their parents. Knowing that the transition comes in phases for these low-income families can inform educators’ practices. The first phase, before school begins, is a time when the excitement of parents should be capitalized upon to meet parental needs for more information. The second phase reminds educators to be careful in monitoring bus transportation of children so that families feel that their children are safe. The second phase also encourages teachers to mention children’s increased need for sleep to parents and to limit expectations for out-of-school activity for children and parents in the fragile first few months of school. The last phase occurs when parents begin to see that their children are enjoying school, learning much, and emerging from the exhaustion phase. This is a time when parents are satisfied with the schools and might have the energy to come to more events and begin homework if the teacher finds that useful. Educators should also continue to invest in relationships with parents so that the satisfaction that they feel with the schools continues.

The needs of teachers cannot be forgotten in this process. There is heavy pressure on teachers in the transition to kindergarten. They are facing the physical demands of caring for 20-25 children all day long and then attempting to comfort, inform, and include their families in the educational process. Whatever support administrators can give to teachers in this process, including a small class size, should be encouraged. Teachers and schools are helping families feel welcomed at this stage of their schooling. Educational leaders can build on this foundation of support by further working to smooth the transition to kindergarten for children, parents, and teachers. The resulting benefits of
parents feeling even more needed and included in their child’s education will be worth the efforts.
References


Parents as Teachers National Center, Inc. (2011). *Foundational curriculum.* St. Louis, MO: Parents as Teachers National Center, Inc.


Appendix A

Interview Questions

Interview Before School Begins

A.

Family Demographics (race, number in family)

Tell me about your child.

Tell me about your child’s experiences in group settings (child care, church, etc.).

Was your child a leader? A Follower?

Tell me about your family.

Tell me about any significant life experiences that may influence your child’s first year of schooling.

B.

Tell me about the things your child is interested in doing at home.

Take me through an average day for your family.

Tell me about the eating and sleeping habits of your child.

C.

What do you think it will be like for your child to begin school?

How do you think your child will adjust to going to school each day?

What do you think your child will learn during kindergarten?

Do you plan to be involved in your child’s education? In what ways?

(How were you involved with your other children in kindergarten? If appropriate)

How do you think your child beginning school will affect your daily life and routines?
Do you think going to school will affect your child’s personality? If so, how? If not, why not?

How were your parents involved in your education when you were a child?

What do you think is the school’s job in the education of your child?

Tell me about any worries or concerns about your child beginning school?

What is your hope for your child?

What is your hope for your child’s teacher?

What are your expectations about the school year?

What are your hopes for your child this school year?

What are your hopes for your child’s teacher for this year?

**Interviews after school starts**

1. Tell me what it has been like for you to have a child in kindergarten?

2. Has your life been different since your child started school? In what ways?

3. Tell me what your child says about going to kindergarten. Is that what you expected?

4. Have you been to the school for any reasons since we last spoke? What for?

5. Has the teacher contacted you for any reasons? Why did she contact you?

6. How do you feel about your child’s teacher? What has the teacher done that makes you feel this way about her.

7. Do you feel like the teacher likes your child? You?

8. What do you think your child has been learning? Are you happy with what your child is learning at school?

9. Do you think the teacher is doing a good job?
10. Do you feel as if your child’s personality has changed since starting school? In what ways?

11. Do you look in your child’s backpack daily? What kind of things come home?

12. Do they send home Friday Folders? What is in them?

13. Does your child have homework? What kinds?

14. Is your child’s teacher experienced?

15. Have you met any other parents?

16. Have you been asked to help?

17. How has your partner been involved? (for parents whose partners aren’t at interview)

18. Do you feel comfortable when you are at the school?

19. Does your child seem to want to read more or less now?

20. Do you feel like she is successful? Why?

21. Do you think the teacher feels like your child is doing well?

22. Do you feel like the teacher likes your child?

23. How do you feel that you are supporting her in her education?

24. Do you think he is more of a leader or more of a follower in his classroom now and has this changed?

**Last Interview:**

1. Do you feel as if she has made a successful transition to kindergarten?

2. Do you feel as if you were as involved as you wanted to be?
## Appendix B
### Demographic Table
Gender of Child, Race of Child, Which Parent Interviewed, Preschool Experience, Summer School Experience

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*Grandmother

Boy/Girl = Gender of Child
Caucasian/African American/Latino/Multi-Racial = Race of Child
Mother/Father/Both = Which Parent(s) Interviewed
Title 1 Pre/Private Pre or Head Start (HS)/NO Pre = Preschool Experience
Public SS, Private SS or Head Start (HS)/NO SS = Summer School Experience
Appendix C

Family Descriptions

Baker/Blake

Trixie Baker was an older mother of 45 when she and her partner, Michael Blake, had their daughter, Amanda. She believed that she could not get pregnant and was thrilled to have Amanda. Trixie worked nights as a custodian in an assisted living facility. She loved to read and had some community college experience. Michael did a variety of different jobs and had some community college as well. This Caucasian family lived in an older trailer and used public transportation to get around. This mother had surprisingly few times when she has been away from her daughter except to be at work, and Amanda had never stayed with anyone except her parents by the time school started. Parents were worried about her entering school and were surprised that she made such a smooth transition. This was one of the families that I had in my pilot study and some information was gained at that time. I visited them in PAT since the time Amanda was a newborn.

Banks

Carolyn and Edward Banks had four children. They had an older son, their daughter, Chloe who started kindergarten, and a younger son and daughter. Chloe went to summer school, and she and her brother attended a small magnet school geared to science and technology interests. The family had a rough summer in which Edward had some serious health issues, as well as the death of a family member, a car accident, and the basement flooded. Carolyn did not drive, but managed to be a remarkably active parent in the school. She was homeroom mother and a Facebook friend with most of the
teachers. She and her husband met in college and soon had a child and put their education on hold. Carolyn was Caucasian and did in-home child care and Edward was African American and worked in appliance delivery. Chloe went to summer school, but did not receive Title I preschool services due to her high academic scores.

Brockman

Kendall and Craig Brockman had a son, Ian, who started kindergarten after he attended a private church preschool and public school summer school. Both parents had a change in career lately. Kendall had to adjust to longer hours at a new job and having less time at home. Craig worked nights as a chef and transitioned into a position in which he worked days at the family business. Ian attended the magnet school for the arts. This Caucasian family lived in a duplex and parents both had some college education.

Carter

Talisha Carter and her partner, Max Jeffries, had two children. Their son, Chris, went to kindergarten. Their older daughter, who was 8, lived with her Grandmother. Talisha enrolled in a community college and was excited to begin classes just as soon as her son started school. Max had his General Education Degree (G.E.D.) and worked at a fast food restaurant. They are African American and lived in a housing area in which rent was on a sliding scale fee. Chris had a slight speech delay and saw a speech teacher in kindergarten.

Champion

Whitney Champion was an African American, single mother who worked full time and was also in college working on a nursing degree. She had four children ages 7, 5, 3, and one. She had a boyfriend and some support from her mother. Jamiya attended
Title I preschool and summer school. Just as the school year began, Whitney obtained positions for the younger children in Head Start, and for the first time, she had all children in care settings for the whole day. She smiled a lot on the visits after all the children started school and expressed that she was really happy to have time for herself after all these years.

**Cook**

Samantha and Kevin Cook had two children; their oldest son was 8 and Nikki started kindergarten. Samantha worked in registration at the hospital and was enrolled in classes to be a nurse. Kevin was an ex-hockey player on disability for a back injury who has been the primary caregiver for his two children. Kevin is African American and obtained a high school diploma. Samantha is Caucasian. Nikki attended summer school, but did not qualify for Title I preschool due to her high academic scores.

**Dixon**

Jennifer and Hyram Dixon had two children, their five-year-old son, Levi, and a younger daughter, Bella. Both parents worked full time and Levi had been in child-care settings for much of his early years. Jennifer had a bachelor’s degree in medicinal chemistry and Hyram had an associate’s degree in Communications. Levi attended Title I preschool and summer school prior to kindergarten entrance. This Caucasian family had some medical trauma in the past with Hyram now permanently in a wheelchair; Jennifer had childhood history of ADHD and Tourette’s; and Levi’s younger sister needed a cranial surgery last year. Levi had medical issues arise shortly after beginning school that were influential in his adjustment to school.
Frye

Kaylee Frye and her son Alan lived as a family with Malcolm Reeves for the last two years. Malcolm felt as if his life was greatly enriched by being in a father role for Alan. Malcolm and Kaylee had some college education and are Caucasian. Alan went to a preschool prior to kindergarten that accepted childcare subsidies. This family held interviews close to campus where both were employed.

Hughes

Noelle was a single, African American mother who had two children. Her oldest child, Iman, started kindergarten and her younger child was one year old. Noelle attended a training program for construction workers after she finished high school, but worked at a fast food restaurant and hoped that a job would become available in her field. She lived in a housing community that accepted sliding scale fees. Noelle’s mother and sister were often at the interviews even though they had their own duplex elsewhere. This was one of the families that I worked with from the time that Noelle was a pregnant teenager in our PAT high school program. She was in the pilot study and some information was gained at that time.

James

Teresa James was a single, African-American mother with two young children. Her son, Tre’von, entered kindergarten and her younger daughter was three. Teresa worked two jobs and was enrolled in classes at the community college. She recently had to take a semester off when she felt like she was away from her children too much. Teresa had a boyfriend she had been with for the last two years and her mother for support. However, just as school started, Teresa and her boyfriend separated.
Johnson

Trina and David Johnson had a son going to kindergarten, Jonathan, and a six-year-old daughter, Adrian. David worked at the high school coaching football, and Trina attended college. She had just finished her undergraduate degree and started work on a Master’s degree. They had help from Nana, who lived with them. Jonathan attended a co-op preschool and went to summer school. This African American family learned much about children with special needs when their daughter was diagnosed with autism. Trina decided to work toward her degree so that she could help to support others in similar situations.

King

Shayla King was a single, African American mother with two boys. She had the kindergartener, Blake, and a fifth grader. She was pregnant when the study began, and had a baby girl on the day that school started. Ms. King worked full time with disabled adults and had an associate’s degree. Elijah had attended Title I Preschool since he was three and had attended summer school as well.

Lawrence

Hannah Lawrence and her partner, Brad Bailey, had two children together. Cheyenne started kindergarten and her younger brother was three. Hannah and Brad are Caucasian and both hold full-time jobs; Hannah was a manager at a hotel and Brad was a construction worker. Both parents were there at the last visit, but they shared with me that they no longer lived together. Hannah and Brad both were committed to being part of their children’s lives, however, they were still in the process of figuring out how that might work.
Martinez

Rogelio Martinez was a Latino single father. He and his child, Austin, lived with Rogelio’s brother. Austin’s mother was Caucasian and she moved to a neighboring city the prior year. She still saw Austin about one weekend a month. Austin had attended Head Start for two years. Rogelio had finished high school and led a crew of men on a construction site. After the school bus brought Austin home, he usually went with his father back to the construction site.

Ortega

Marta and Reynaldo Ortega were a Latino family that had moved to the Midwest in the prior year from the San Antonio area. Their older daughter, Destiny, began kindergarten and their younger daughter was four years old. Reynaldo worked in a hotel and was fluent in English. Marta seemed to understand in English, but was more comfortable speaking in Spanish. Her mother-in-law was present to translate during the interviews. Destiny went to Title I preschool and summer school.

Peters

Cassie Peters is a Caucasian single mother who lived with her parents and her son, Tyler, in a rural setting. She finished her G.E.D. and volunteered at a community agency until her son began kindergarten and then the same agency hired her full time. Cassie reported that she had been in a class for learning disabled students when she was in school. Tyler went to Title I preschool and summer school.

Reynolds

Angel Reynolds was a single mother when she had her daughter, Kimber. She and her fiancé had a two-year-old son together at the time of this study. Angel worked at
a physician’s office and was also enrolled in a math class she needed for nursing school. This Caucasian family lived in a trailer at the edge of town.

**Shavers**

Jenay Shavers was a Caucasian single mother with four children. The oldest three boys were ages 9, 8, and 7 and the youngest child, DeNay, was going into kindergarten. Their father is African American and was in their lives on and off. Jenay worked hard and often held down two jobs. She stayed in school until the 11th grade. Her mother who lived a few doors down helped Jenay with her children. DeNay has been to Title I preschool for two years and went to summer school. I had worked with this family for about eight years as their parent educator and have stayed with them through their frequent changes of address over the years. They were also in my pilot study and some information used in the study was gained at that time.

**Wells**

Cheryl and Adam Wells met and married when Cherise was about two years old. Cherise was beginning kindergarten, and their son, Adam, was three years old. Both parents had some college education and Adam worked as a supervisor at a factory and Cheryl did childcare in her home. This African American family attended church often and their faith was important to them. I worked with this family from the time Cheryl was 17 and pregnant with Cherise. These parents were in the pilot study and some information was gained at that time.

**Western**

Debra Western was a grandmother raising her son’s child. Darrin started kindergarten with no prior school experience. Debra lived with her daughter and a
roommate. Debra was on probation after being incarcerated for several years before Darrin was born. She was committed to Darrin and they spend most of their time together. Debra was Caucasian, her son was bi-racial, and Darrin’s mother was African American. Darrin appears African American, but reports that he is White if asked.

Debra had associate’s degrees in three areas and would have liked to go back to school when Darrin started school, but needed to have more money saved before doing so.
Appendix D

Example of Recursive Nature of Data Analysis

Many times when interviewing a family, I thought about what they said later and connected it to something said by another family. I analyzed parent comments in my field journal and in my researcher’s notes. I would braid the new information into questions and conclusions gained in the following interviews. The example given below is of the Dixon family. The parents told about Levi’s bus problem in the second visit when he had only been in school for a week and a half. They talked for a long time about this bus incident. I included the lengthy transcript from that interview, followed by my thoughts about how this might have been significant that I documented in the field journal. Later when I noticed that a bus incident was significant for two other families, I noted this as something to watch in the researcher’s notes. Then on the next visit, I asked how the bus had been since that time and the family led me to believe that it wasn’t significant to them. Again, at the fourth interview when I asked again about it, not much significance was given regarding the busing situation. However, when I asked Hyram what had been the most difficult thing about his son’s transition to kindergarten, he said that the bus situation on the first day he took the bus was the most difficult part of his transition to kindergarten. This was surprising to me as a researcher because this child had experienced significant health and behavior problems in the transition to kindergarten, yet the thing that his father remembered and mentioned as most problematic was the busing. This is also interesting because Mr. Dixon had assured me that he knew that when there is a problem with the bus company it is separate from having a problem with the school. I concluded that bus problems may be more influential in parental
experiences and parental trust than educators or parents even realize about the experience of transitioning into kindergarten. This busing example is just one of the many times that I braided thoughts from interviews into questions and conclusions made in other interviews. This illustrates the recursive nature of my data analysis procedures.

**Example of Data Analysis: Dixon Busing Incident**

This is an excerpt from the transcript from the second interview on 8-31-13. Hyram and Jennifer Dixon told about their experience on the first day that Levi rode the bus home. This excerpt from the transcript is five-pages long and it is followed by comments pulled from the field journal, researcher’s notes, and subsequent interview transcripts.

*F: We did have an incident with the bus when they tried to deliver him to the house.*

*M: The first time he rode the bus, somebody got something mixed up because they didn’t have any delivery address at all for him. First Student hadn’t gotten the information to the school. And so they got him to the transfer point and didn’t know which bus to put him on, of course when they checked, the only address that they could pull up in their system was our home address. So they put him on the wrong bus, came here, sat here waiting for 35 minutes for someone to hopefully come out and of course no one did because no one was here because this is not where he was to go and eventually...*
F: A quarter after four, I called and texted the daycare and asked if Lee was there yet. She said “No and we are starting to get concerned.”

Starting? He was supposed to be there half an hour ago.

J: I had heard that it was difficult for the first day on the bus.

F: Oh this was the second day he went to school. The first day we brought and picked him up.

M: Of course we called the school and no one answered because everyone was gone from the school. Then I called the school board office because I couldn’t get an answer...

F: Yes, she called the school board because I couldn’t get hold of the bus company.

M: They were able to get hold of the bus company and found out where he was at and that they were getting him over to his day care. It was almost 5:00 before they finally got him there.

F: The worst part about it was that I kept calling and finally got through to the bus company and I got this lady on the phone and after I finally got her to figure out what I was trying to ask her...I don’t know...I never did quite understand....she put me on hold, then she hung up on me. I was getting ready...I was almost to the point of hanging up anyway and the next thing I know I hear a click and a busy tone and I was like, “You have got to be kidding me. They hung up on me?”

M: We didn’t get a real good impression of the people that work at the bus company.
F: After I got off with them, she called me in the meantime while I was on hold on my cell phone. I was on the work phone on my cheek and holding on to my phone on the other cheek going “Well I got ahold of the school board”

M: This was last Friday, so Monday morning, I went up to the school and I showed the people in the office his shirt with the wrong sticker with the wrong bus number on it. I told them, “This is not going to happen again.” I was very calm about it, but I was like I want to get this fixed so this does not happen again because I told them in no uncertain terms that Friday was a disaster.

F: I wonder if any of that has added stress on to him. I don’t know. I mean he still likes the school bus so I don’t know....

M: Yeah, he says he likes it just fine.

F: But you know I’ve never been able to pull the information you need out of a 5-year-old, but I wonder if some of it is that they tried to deliver him to the wrong place. Maybe that had to do with all the behavior problems he had on Monday. I don’t know.

M: My mom said that once she finally got there to pick him up from the sitter that day, he told her, “I want you to pick me up now.”

F: He didn’t seem that upset though. The only thing he said was that he was thirsty when he got there, so they got him something to drink when he got there.
J: So he seemed ok when the ordeal was over. So what about you guys? Was your trust and your....

F: I was pissed as hell. I wasn’t mad at school, I was mad at the bus company.

M: When he first called me about what was going on, I was mad. When I started making phone calls and I still didn’t know where he was at, I got frantic and started to cry, not knowing where my son is at. Then I went back to being mad again.

F: The worst problem is that she wasn’t gonna be the one that got him when he got off the school bus, it was going to be grandma. That part didn’t set well with me because Grandma was already dead-set on him not riding the bus anyway. So I thought, this is not going to end well anyway it comes out and...

J: You just made an important point. You just said that you aren’t mad at the school, you are mad at the bus company. I’m beginning to wonder if parents separate out the bus system from the school people and understand that it is two separate things or does the bus thing make people not trust the schools?

M: I made sure to get all my facts straight about what happened that caused the problem on Friday before I started placing blame on somebody. The school told me that the bus company dropped the ball and did not give them the information that they had because when I talked to the bus company on Friday, they told me that they had him on 112 going to
(address of child care provider) and I said that is not where he ended up. When I talked to the bus company on Monday, they said that Levi wasn’t the only child that this happened to where they didn’t get the information to us when they should have. So it was the bus company that didn’t get the critical information to the school.

M: I’m still not impressed with the bus company. When I called the bus company again on Monday to make sure he had gotten on the bus he was supposed to, the first person I called didn’t even ask me student name or anything, he said ok and put me on hold and never came back to me, so I just kept trying to call and get someone.

F: When I called, I told the lady, I don’t know what bus he is on. He is supposed to be on 112. He is supposed to go to his babysitter on Riverview and it took me...

M: When I called the school board, I told them I couldn’t reach the school or the bus company and my son is not at my daycare yet and I need to find out where he is at. He was supposed to be on 112 and I don’t know if he made it on that bus or not and so the school board took my number, called the bus company, and called me back. They told me he was on 108 and I said, “He’s not supposed to be on bus 108 he is supposed to be on 112. Bus 108 is trying to get him delivered.

F: When I called, one of the dispatchers I talked to...I tried to get it through her head that my son was supposed to be on 112 and “I said, what bus is the one that should go to our house on Floyd Lane?” You
would have thought I was talking Greek, I couldn’t make it compute to her that there is a possibility that somewhere someone along that line has got my son on the wrong bus and that he...

M: When I called the school board, I called my husband to tell him that I got a different number to call for the bus company and so after about 10 more minute or so, I called my mom and asked her if he had gotten there yet and she said no. So I called the bus company and said that my son is still not at daycare, I understand he got on the wrong bus. Where is he?

F: I guess by then they were in the process of driving him over and the wrong bus was taking him over.

M: I tried to tell them that he was supposed to be on Bus 108 going to Riverview, but that is not his home. No one is at our home.

F: At least in their defense, they had enough common sense not to dump him at the house and

M: So they put me on hold and told me that the bus was there on Riverview and that they can’t find the house and could someone go outside and wave them down.

J: Did it work better with his transportation the next week?

M: Yes, because I talked to the person at the main office and I made sure he got on the main bus.

F: Then I had to talk to Nana and tell her that I didn’t want to just go to her picking him up everyday.
M: Yeah, because we wanted to use it as an incentive sometimes that if he had a good day, Nana could pick him up once a week or so.

When I wrote in my field journal that day (8-31-13):

They are concerned because the bus dropped him off at their house one day and not the day care. They seemed pretty upset about this. It was a big deal to them.

I also wrote in my researcher’s notes that day (8-31-13):

Bus problems are influential in parent’s feelings about the school. Are parents able to separate bus problems from problems with teachers?

Then when I interviewed the Lawrence family later that day and then the Ortega family on 9-7-13, I began to notice a pattern in busing. I wrote in my researcher’s notes (9-7-13):

Bus problems: for parents who are new to kindergarten and the school system, they don’t understand how the system works and who has to have the information on where to take their child. They don’t know what information to make sure the school has and what information to make sure the bus company has. Also calculate how many minutes the Dixons talked about this.

For the discussion section (Chapter 5), consider that the families trust in the schools has to be somewhat tarnished when they are scared for their child. Families with a bus issue that was a big deal to them: Ortega, Dixon, and Lawrence.
I calculated the number of minutes they talked about the bus situation and found that it was nine minutes of a 41 minute interview (noted in researcher notes 9-10-13).

During the third interview, I asked about the bus situation. Here is an except from that transcript (10-5-13):

\[ J: \text{ How is the bus transportation going now?} \]
\[ F: \text{ The bus situation is getting better. He and another child were getting pretty wound up there for a while, but things are better and calmer now.} \]
\[ J: \text{ Do you remember when the bus problems happened dropping him off at the wrong place and you all were panicked?} \]
\[ M: \text{ That only happened the first day. (excerpted from 10-5-13 transcript)} \]

So they did not seem too concerned about the bus problem anymore. However, I asked about it again on the fourth visit. Here is an except from that transcript (11-23-13):

\[ J: \text{ Has the bus situation continued to be okay since those first days?} \]
\[ M: \text{ Yes. The day of the pie tasting was out of his routine and he got in trouble on the bus. The bus driver threatened to write him up. He has since been moved to a different seat. But everything else has been fine.} \]

Then when I asked this question at the end of the fourth visit is when I heard this part of the parents’ thinking (transcript from 11-23-13):

\[ J: \text{ Has there been anything that upset you so far this year about Levi’s transition to kindergarten?} \]
\[ F: \text{ The biggest thing was the school bus.} \]
\[ M: \text{ That was the bus company being so rude on the phone.} \]
Then in my researcher’s notes that night (11-23-13), I documented this:

*Hyram said something today that I think I should look at again. He told me that the only thing he was upset with about his son’s school experience was the bus incident. He told me during the visit after school started that he knew the bus company and the schools were separate entities, however, I still think there is overlap in his mind. Being upset with the bus company had a negative influence on Levi’s school transition for these parents.*

I also wrote in my researcher’s notes (11-26-13) at the end of an interview with another family that was dissatisfied with the lunchroom staff:

*Consider wrapping this lunchroom staff situation in with the problems with the bus. Secondary personnel do make a difference. They are the only people that families have expressed dissatisfaction with.*

This busing situation of the Dixon family was used to illustrate the recursive nature of data collection and analysis. It also shows how I considered grouping data together. In the end, the busing situation was not grouped with the lunch room situations due to my feeling that the strongest patterns in data analysis were in the form of stages of adjustment and those pieces were from two separate stages and therefore, different in some important ways.
Appendix E
Meaning Clusters

List of 10 Initial Meaning Clusters

1. Great Emotion
2. Concerns
3. Type of Teacher
4. Parents Own School Experiences
5. Prior Group Experiences
6. Busing
7. Sleep
8. Parents Pleased
9. Communication
10. Lingering Concerns

List of 16 Smaller Meaning Clusters That Emerged

1. Parent Role/School Role
2. Those with Behavior Issues
3. Parents not Pleased
4. Want to be Involved
5. Common Answers
6. Support Staff
7. Upheavals
8. Parents Feeling Harried
9. Homework
10. Race
11. Goals for the Child
12. Parent Conferences
13. “Good School”
14. Security of Schools/Buzzer System
15. Important and Unique Answers/Miscellaneous
16. New Things Parents Do Now that Children are at School

Final List of 8 Meaning Clusters

1. An Emotional Time
2. Content of Concerns
3. Experience Tempers Concerns
4. Busing Problems
5. Exhaustion
6. Growing Trust and Respect for Teachers
7. Communication Contributes to Trust
8. Lingering Concerns
Appendix F

Concerns Mentioned by Each Family

* Concerns that developed after the school year began

**Baker/Blake**
Adjusting to school demands might be difficult.
She might get picked on.
She might get in trouble.
She might not listen.
She won’t want her mother to leave.
She might get hurt.
It might be difficult for her to sit still and be quiet.
Will the school involve and include Mom?
Will she stand up for herself?
Will buying lunches be too expensive?
Lunchroom staff is tough on children.*

**Banks:**
She might not get into the gifted program like brother did and it might hurt her self-esteem.
Bus schedule, bus stop, and early start times were difficult.*
Exhaustion was problematic.*

**Brockman**
He might get in trouble or have behavior issues
He’s too energetic.
Teachers will peg him wrong as not a good kid.
Teachers might not like him.
He might get in with the wrong crowd.
He likes girls more than boys.
He demands too much attention.
Educationally will an art school be rigorous enough?
Will her be able to adjust and be successful?
He may be influenced by the “wrong kids.”
His teacher has a reputation as a yeller.
Don’t want the school usurping parents’ authority.
Exhaustion was problematic*
Homework*

**Carter:**
They may not be able to afford to buy school pictures.
Mother doesn’t want to sell things door to door for school fun-raiser.
Teachers don’t give her enough information about his day.*
He won’t talk about his day.*
Bus stop location was a concern.*

**Champion:**
When she doesn’t feel well, she doesn’t talk.
Sleep and being tired may be problematic.
Mother wants her daughter to have more homework.*
Bus Stop Location was a concern.*

**Cook:**
She might get hurt or sick and parents won’t be there.
School shootings may happen.
Bullying may happen.
She won’t poop at school.*
Not enough supervision is provided on the playground.*

**Dixon**
Mild concerns about behavior were expressed.
Didn’t want him to bully others.
That he may have a bad teacher.
Bus problems occurred.*
Behavior outbursts happened.*
Are behavior problems due to medications or just behavior?*
Exhaustion was problematic.*
Homework was stressful to family to complete.*

**Frye**
He might have social/emotional issues. ("Anger Issues")
The teachers might not use language that he responds well to.
He might follow the behavior of the wrong role models at school.
Curriculum might not be challenging enough for him.
Exhaustion was problematic*
Not enough supervision before school*
A guy was seen in the woods behind the school exposing himself.*

**Hughes:**
Will the new school start times hurt her search for employment?
Will she have friends? Will she have someone to sit with at lunch?
There will be a lot of kids and little supervision in the mornings.
School security might be an issue.
Will she have a good bus driver?
Kids these days are rough.
Will she follow directions?
Will they involve her and let her help?
Bullying did occur.*
James:
Behavior/Will he hit someone
Won’t get enough attention
Taught better than she was (won’t learn enough)
Other kids picking on him
Bullying might occur.
Being able to get to the bus.
Behavior was a problem.*
Exhaustion was problematic.*

Johnson:
Long days will be difficult for him.
Will he make friends?
Will he adjust within the classroom?
Bullying might occur.
Will kids be nice to him?
Will teachers like him?
Will anyone be mean to him and will he be able to handle it?
Teacher? Is she nice, what expectations does she have?
Class size/School size/teacher and student ratios might be high.
How will he maneuver through the playground and lunch times?
Will he get a good education?
Historical levels of racism might be a factor.
Will he be treated fairly?
Bus problems with name calling occurred.*

King
Historical Racism might be a problem.
Experienced Racism with his school last year, will it be a problem this year?
Bus problems over the summer, will there be any this fall?
Her son said recess was too hot and he doesn’t like to eat fruit at lunch (her son’s complaints).*

Lawrence
Bus concerns over the summer, will it work to ride the bus this fall?
She might not eat enough at school.
Sometimes says she doesn’t want to go to school*
Kids picking her up and bullied her.*
Bus Problems occurred.*

Martinez
He is shy and follows other kids.
He might get picked on.
Might not be safe at school or on the bus.
The safety of the stairwell was a concern.*
Ortega
It was a long time between meals for her daughter.
Bus problems occurred.*

Peters:
There might be kids he doesn’t get along with.
He might be bored at school.
Will they challenge him?

Reynolds
School Staff might not do as mother asked (had an incident in summer school).
Exhaustion was problematic.*
Bus problems with other riders did occur.*

Shaver
School didn’t give dates of open house in advance.

Wells
She might get picked on by other children.
School personnel/teacher may not be honest or work well with parents.
They may try to get DFS involved.

Western
Someone might hurt his feelings.
How to pay for gas money to get him to school?*
How to pay for lunches and new school clothes?*
Lunchroom staff person was screaming and scary for her Grandson.*
Vita

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