

Transition to Kindergarten: How Home Visits Shape the Experiences of Teachers and Parents

By

Moonjoo Woo

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The dissertation is approved by the following members of the Final Oral Committee:

M. Elizabeth Graue, Professor, Curriculum & Instruction

Simone Schweber, Professor, Educational Policy Studies affiliated with Curriculum & Instruction

Amy Claessens, Associate Professor, Educational Policy Studies

Emily Machado, Assistant Professor, Curriculum & Instruction

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## Abstract

The transition to five-year-old kindergarten is a pivotal time in children's development, setting the tone for the children's and their families' subsequent formal education experiences. Establishing connections between home and school is a key to creating a supportive learning environment for every child. This dissertation examines how home visiting facilitated connections between parents and teachers in support of their children's transition to kindergarten. Guided by Bronfenbrenner's bioecological model, this research conceptualizes the transition as a socially and culturally mediated process occurring within multilayered contexts. Participants included six kindergarten teachers and twelve families across five schools that were purposively selected to reflect the diverse population in the district. Data sources involved semi-structured interviews with parents and teachers, home visit reflections, and observations collected during the 2018-2019 school year. The data were analyzed using MaxQDA, a qualitative data analysis software program. The findings revealed that initiating and building home-school relationships was a significant benefit of home visiting. This advantage stood out when parents compared their experiences with generic transition practices including kindergarten orientation, play dates, and open house events. The findings also suggest that how teachers utilized home visits varied based on their beliefs and values. The teachers' goals for teaching and learning in kindergarten played a substantial role in how they perceived the effectiveness of home visits. This research adds contextual richness to the dynamics of home-school relations during the kindergarten transition period, suggesting the need for a shift from a school-centered approach to a relational approach in transition practices.

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## Chapter 1. Introduction

### 1.1 Problem Statement

Building a mutually beneficial partnership between parents and teachers emerged as a promising strategy in support of the transition to kindergarten (Pianta & Cox, 1999; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000; Pianta et al., 2001). Parent-teacher collaboration is critical because the transition experience from preschool or in-home care entails significant social, instructional, and cultural changes. These changes can lead to unfavorable experiences for many children, as shown in a national teacher survey indicating that approximately half of children had difficulty adjusting to kindergarten (Jiang et al., 2021; Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, & Cox, 2000). The kindergarten experience establishes the groundwork for children's educational trajectories in later grades (e.g., Blair & Raver, 2015; Duncan et al., 2007, 2020). Thus, identifying how to optimize the transition experiences has been a research theme for several decades. Numerous studies have underscored that children benefit from a positive relationship between parents and teachers built on mutual trust and respect (Corrie, 2001; Dockett & Perry, 2001; Pianta et al., 2001). This partnership is also the foundation for high-quality support from parents and teachers in and out of school.

Schools have implemented transition practices including deliberate activities designed to improve the transition experiences of children, families, and teachers. Most practices are based on ecological models, which frame the transition as a process rather than a single event moving across institutions (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998; Sameroff, 1995). Based on this approach, facilitating ongoing relationships between individuals in multilayered contexts is a key element driving successful transition. Combined with the importance of home-school relations, transition



practices can establish and sustain collaborative relationships between parents and teachers (Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000).

Commonly used transition practices in schools, however, have traditionally been less personal and involved more generic contact such as sending flyers to each family or holding large orientation events (e.g., Early et al., 2001; Little, Cohen-Vogel, & Curran, 2016; Purtell et al., 2019). These types of practices are low-intensity, indicating that they provide little opportunity for family engagement (Daley, Munk, & Carlson, 2011; Pianta et al., 1999). High-intensity practices such as home visits and individual conferences provide relatively personal experiences for parents of school children (Rous & Hallam, 2012; Schulting, 2010). However, schools and teachers have reported that implementing high-intensity practices involve resource barriers and challenges (Pianta et al., 1999) that include funding and scheduling kindergarten teachers' extra-curricular contact with students and their families (La Paro, Pianta, & Cox, 2000; Pianta & Cox, 1999) while managing shifting class rosters and late entrants (Early et al., 2001). Consequently, many schools have low family participation in transition practices.

Schools serving poorly resourced communities are typically even more constrained and often engage in fewer transition practices for incoming children and families (Little et al., 2016). Studies found that children from low-income households or those living in poverty engaged in fewer high-intensity practices than their better-off peers (e.g., Daley et al., 2011). Although schools responsible for facilitating the transition have begun to understand that practices need to reflect the diverse needs children and families, research is less conclusive on what practices are effective. In sum, considerable research has been dedicated to a comprehensive understanding of transition practices, but little attention has been directed toward the process of fostering home-school relations as resources and tailoring practices to individual needs.

## 1.2 Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The purpose of this study is to learn how parents and teachers connect through home visits and how they leverage or do not leverage partnerships to drive children's successful transition. Previous research has treated home visits as a significant practice by which educators, students, and their families can build positive relationships and can ease the transition process (Johnston & Mermin, 1994; Meyer & Mann, 2006; Pianta et al., 1999). One study found that even a one-time home visit before the start of the school year helped teachers in kindergarten, first grade, and second grade better understand their students and build positive relationships with the parents (Meyer & Mann, 2006). Given the positive influence home visits seem to have on building relationships, as reported in the literature (Meyer & Mann, 2006; Stetson et al., 2012; Vesely, Brown, & Mehta, 2017), I conceptualized home visits as a significantly intensive transition practice.

I emphasize home visiting as a transition practice that prioritizes opportunities for mutual engagement and collaboration with families, placing greater emphasis on using the family culture and knowledge to create a more inclusive classroom (Whyte & Karabon, 2016; Moll et al., 1992, 2006). My focus moves away from determining if home visiting is a best practice, but, instead, I am interested in how home visits mediate the evolving nature of the relationship-building process between parents and teachers. Taken together, my research questions are as follows:

- How do teachers and parents experience home visits to facilitate the transition to kindergarten?
- How are teachers' and parents' experiences contingent on contextual and individual factors?

## Chapter 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. The Transition to Kindergarten

The transition to kindergarten refers to the process by which young children move from home or early childhood education settings into the formal school environment of kindergarten. This transition encompasses not only the logistical aspects of starting school but also the emotional, social, and academic adjustments that children and their families must navigate during this period (Griebel & Niesel, 2009; Kielty, Passe, & Mayle, 2013; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000).

The transition to kindergarten has been defined as a multifaceted process that involves child readiness, family involvement, and school preparedness. Some of the barometers of readiness that researchers have investigated include literacy and numeracy skills (e.g., Murray & Harrison, 2011), the ability to manage emotions and behaviors in school settings, and positive interactions with peers and adults, which are all essential for classroom dynamics (e.g., Blair & Raver, 2015; Vitiello et al., 2022). In terms of family involvement, home practices that help children become familiar with school routines and provide learning opportunities at home are pivotal in supporting the child's adjustment to the new school environment (e.g., Cobar-Rodriguez, Cambray, & Jarrett, 2020). In addition, the active engagement of families in school activities and their communication with teachers has been shown to be an effective strategy in recent studies (Barnett et al., 2020 Hoffman et al., 2020). Lastly, how schools welcome and accommodate prospective kindergartners has been also a major thread of the transition research. This includes implementing professional development, structured programs, and inclusive practices for special needs students (Cook, Dearing, & Zachrisson, 2018; García & Weiss, 2017; Little et al., 2016).

## 2.2 Supporting the Transition through School Practices

Most elementary schools in the United States have implemented a variety of transition practices for building relationships and for easing the transition processes of children, families, and teachers (Pianta et al., 1999; Schulting, Malone, & Dodge, 2005). Research has shown that common practices include events where school officials or kindergarten teachers (1) send letters and information packets to prospective families (Laverick, 2007; Duda & Minick, 2006), (2) invite families to visit kindergarten classrooms (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 1999), (3) hold an orientation session (Early et al., 2001), and (4) make home visits (Johnston & Mermin, 1994; Pianta et al., 1999). While some research has examined the practices of school personnel in preschools and Head Start programs (Cook & Coley, 2017; 2019), a vast majority of the findings rest on reports from school officials or kindergarten teachers, who constitute the dominant group designing and executing the transition practices (Early et al., 2001; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008; Pianta et al., 1999; Schulting et al., 2005).

Researchers have approached transition practices from several perspectives. At the most basic level, researchers have examined the kinds of practices that schools and teachers use in institutions (i.e., kindergartens, preschools, Head Start programs), the families that engage in those practices, and the barriers that schools and families face when implementing those practices.

Given these interests, early comprehensive studies in this area conducted descriptive and correlational analyses of large national samples, and investigated strategies that might lessen challenges presented by social, institutional, and educational shifts during transition (Hubbell et al., 1987; Love et al., 1992; Pianta et al., 1999). A study of 3,595 kindergarten teachers' use of 21 transition practices reported that the teachers' most frequent practice (95%) was "talk with

parents after school” (Pianta et al., 1999). Other practices the teachers used fairly often included open house before the start of school (62%) or afterward (81%), letters to parents before the start of school (61%) or afterward (88%), and flyers before the start of school (69%) or afterward (76%). Pianta et al. (1999) called these traditional practices “low-intensity,” as they involve less personal contact. More importantly, the researchers found that marginalized children in high-poverty districts or in low-income families were more likely than their privileged counterparts to receive exposure to these low-intensity practices.

The research community replicated Pianta et al.’s work over nearly two decades, emphasizing that schools and teachers tended to engage in more low-intensity practices than high-intensity practices (Early et al., 2001; La Paro, Kraft-Sayre, & Pianta, 2003; Pianta et al., 1999; Schulting et al., 2005; Little et al., 2016; Purtell et al., 2019). High-intensity practices such as home visits and individual conferences provide relatively personal experiences to parents of school children (Schulting, 2010); however, schools and teachers reported resource barriers for implementation (Pianta et al., 1999). Consequently, many schools continue to lack personal interaction with children and families regarding their participation specifically in transition practices. Echoing Pianta et al. (1999), Daley and colleagues (2011) verified that low-income children or those in poverty were exposed to fewer transition practices than were the children’s better-off peers. Considering a slight increase in the prevalence of transition practices from the 1998–1999 school year to the 2010–2011 school year (Little et al., 2016), the context of kindergarten transition has changed only marginally.

A qualitative study of 69 educators at eleven districts in Ohio, conducted by Purtell et al. (2019), revealed several difficulties in implementing transition practices across institutions. The researchers found clear disconnections among educators in preschools and kindergarten, and

noted that these disconnections inhibited implementation of more embracive transition practices such as knowledge transfer and alignment/ bridging activities. Unsurprisingly, low-intensity practices (e.g., flyers, orientations) were far more common than institutional-bridging and information-sharing practices, validating the findings of past large-scale studies (Schulting et al., 2005; Little et al., 2016; Cook & Coley, 2017). Furthermore, most of the practices took place around the start of the school year, focusing on the delivery of school-preparation information to families.

While comprehensive in their narrow focus, these studies have addressed only some of the many applied transition practices and only some of the many ways in which institutions interact, sometimes collaboratively, with families and children. Perhaps due to the variance between early childhood settings and their coordination, research has revolved around what kindergarten teachers do to receive children, and less on the so-called “vertical transition practices” that prepare a given school for its prospective students and their families (Cook & Coley, 2017).

Most kindergarten transition practices are based chiefly on ecological models, with an underlying premise that transition practices are meant to facilitate an ongoing relationship process among all partners (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003). However, studies on transition practices have revealed few opportunities for personal interaction. Indeed, according to the studies, families need both information from schools and active collaboration with teachers if the children’s schooling is to receive adequate support (McIntyre et al., 2010; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003). Other studies have supported this perspective, indicating that parents typically seek educational information on both academic expectations and in-home activities that, at the kindergarten level, can facilitate children’s extracurricular learning (Dockett & Perry, 2007;

McIntyre et al., 2007; Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011). This line of research has shown that schools continue to be the provider while families are the service receivers.

Shifting from the comprehensive investigation of transition practices, researchers have assessed the impact of transition practices on children's school success, mostly defined by their academic and social adjustment. To assess these effects, researchers typically examine the causal link between the number of relevant practices and either children's assessment scores or teachers' reports on the children's social and self-regulatory behaviors. However, several large empirical studies have reported mixed findings. Some researchers have observed moderate effects on children's outcomes (Schulting et al., 2005), but overall, the results have not consistently pointed to specific types of practices that are more effective than others.

Studies presenting mixed findings include a quantitative project conducted by Cook and Coley (2017), who analyzed a sample of 5,050 kindergartners from an Early Childhood Longitudinal Study Birth Cohort. The analysis revealed little association between the prevalence of transition practices and either children's behavioral adjustments or children's academic outcomes. Interestingly, out of seven practices identified by the authors, parent orientation appeared to be the only one related to children's improved math and reading scores. The rationale for this finding was the authors' claim that parents, when exposed to orientation, could learn about kindergarten's intellectual demands and could then academically support their children. The study's findings rejected the idea of *the more the better* as it applied to the provision of transition practices and, instead, suggested that rigorous investigation is needed to see if specific practices produce certain benefits.

In a study of 17,000 kindergarteners, by contrast, Schulting et al. (2005) concluded that a great number of school-initiated practices predicted students' heightened end-of-year academic

growth. This finding of a positive association was verified in a study on longitudinal data from Finland (Ahtola et al., 2011) and in another study of pre-kindergarten teachers' use of practices (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008). However, perhaps because they lacked a randomized controlled design, none of these studies claimed causal *effects* of treatment (i.e., transition practices) on the treated (i.e., children with or without experiences of the practices). Moreover, Schulting et al. (2005) did not take into account families' participation in the practices, focusing only on what practices were offered to the families. Family involvement's importance in transition practices is relatively underestimated in empirical transition-practice research. This trend might continue because, in recent research, family involvement in transition practices does not appear as a predictor of students' academic and social adjustment (Kang, Horn, & Palmer, 2017).

### **2.3 Home Visiting Programs in Early Childhood Education**

Home visits have been historically used as a strategy for schools to deeply understand families and develop relationships with parents to provide the best approach for their children. Home visiting practices were initially professional-centered where trained visitors or teachers assessed the development of prospective students and evaluated children's interactions with parents. The trend is now toward being more family-centered with major goals of recognizing families' needs to better support their children in school (e.g., Allen, 2007). Beringer (2012) reflected this recent trend by stating that, "home visits should be done 'with' families, as opposed to being done 'to' families" (p.80). Thus, newly launched home visiting programs were more likely to focus on establishing a mutual partnership between schools and families based on reciprocal benefits.



Despite this major shift, the common goals of home visits remain the same: 1) to promote the healthy development of children and their families (Ammerman et al., 2007), and 2) to reach out to at-risk families that lack educational resources and information (Nix et al., 2005). Home visiting programs often provide parent education so parents can enhance their parental efficacy and respond to their children's needs based on their physical, social-emotional, and cognitive development (Family Strengthening Policy Center, 2007).

An underlying assumption of home visits is that enhancing parenting skills will promote children's overall well-being, including school readiness (Beringer, 2012). Home visits are also beneficial for teachers when they prepare for a new school year. Laverick (2003) strongly argues that conducting home visits is a proactive strategy to eventually help with a smooth transition to kindergarten both for teachers and students. One study showed that even a one-time home visit before starting the school year helped K-2 teachers better understand their students and build positive relationships with the parents (Meyer & Mann, 2006). The information gained from the child's home environment and communication with parents allows teachers to better address children's' needs in curriculum and daily practices.

### **Funds of Knowledge and Home Visiting Programs**

Using the Funds of Knowledge (FoK) framework to reconceptualize home visiting programs is helpful to recognize the assets and capabilities that families bring into the practices. Home visiting has been traditionally considered a delivery service or "modeling" program for disadvantaged families (Sama-Miller et al., 2017). A meta-analytic review reported that three-fourths of home visiting programs are to support families with various risk factors such as low-income, child abuse/neglect, and teenage or depressed mothers. (Sweet & Appelbaum, 2004).

Home visits contribute to building partnerships between households and schools and prevent potential problems. However, parents and students could easily be seen as “recipients” during home visits since home visiting programs provide resources that families need. Using FoK, as an asset-based approach could reorient the position of teachers and families; teachers could take on a new role as learners of the valuable knowledge and experiences that the families already have (Rodriguez, 2013). This would eventually allow both teachers and parents “to recognize the shared responsibility and power as joint teachers of the child” (Beringer, 2012, p.80). Moreover, a more sophisticated understanding earned from the home visits would be a great asset for the teachers to create responsive classrooms (Rodriguez, 2013).

### **Effectiveness of Home Visiting Programs**

While home visiting programs for children aged zero to three were designed to provide positive parenting models and prevent child maltreatment (Ammerman et al., 2007), programs for older children were more likely to focus on children’s school adjustment and their readiness skills. Among the various national models, the Home Instruction Program for Preschool Youngsters (HIPPY), the Parent-Child Home Program (PCHP), and the Parents as Teachers (PAT) program were the three major programs that particularly pursue children’s school success by empowering parents (Family Strengthening Policy Center, 2007).

The HIPPY program was designed to support families with three to five year olds before children enter kindergarten. The HIPPY aimed to promote the home environment as an extension of school. Paraprofessionals, called home-based educators, visited each home for 30 weeks throughout the school year and each visit lasted 45-60 minutes. Parents learned how to use the HIPPY curriculum/materials to do practical activities with their children. Children who

participated in the HIPPPY tended to have higher test scores in later grades, better adjusted to the second-grade classroom, and behaved well in the classroom as evaluated by teachers (Bradley & Gilkey, 2002). However, the sustainability of these impacts remained unanswered.

The PAT program also richly contributed to students' school readiness and third-grade achievement due to the enhanced positive impact of parenting practices as a result of the home visitation program (Zigler, Pfannenstiel, & Seitz, 2008). This study found that parents with PAT experiences were more likely to provide quality learning opportunities to their children by having more reading time at home and enrolling their children in preschool. In addition, in a comparison study of the PCHP, Levenstein et al. (1998) found that children who received home visits were more likely to graduate from high school with lower dropout rates than those who did not. Stetson et al. (2012) also found that low-income African American mothers participating in the PAT valued the home visits and were less likely to drop out from the program when they felt a strong reciprocity with the home visitors. Despite these advantages, challenges such as uncomfortable feelings, scheduling issues, and cultural differences were noted among the teachers prior to their home visits (Stetson et al., 2012). Considering these challenges is necessary to help ensure that successful implementation.

### **Home Visiting Program Structure**

Regarding the frequency and duration of home visits of home visiting programs, the best practices are not yet determined, and it is still controversial whether a longer duration is the most beneficial model or if a concentrated duration with short but frequent meetings is a better structure (Bakermans-Kranenburg, Van, & Bradley, 2005). The frequency and duration of the home visits varied among the programs, but the visits were usually made on a monthly or weekly

basis by paraprofessionals and education or social work experts (Family Strengthening Policy Center, 2007). For the HIPPY, which is designed to support at-risk families with preschoolers before the children enter kindergarten, paraprofessionals made 30 weekly visits during the school year and each visit lasted for 45-60 minutes. Necoechea (2007) found that the preschoolers' receptive language skills were positively correlated with these high-intensity home visits. This finding is aligned with previous research indicating that families with frequent home visits benefited more from the intervention (Wagner & Clayton, 1999). In contrast to the high number of visits in the HIPPY, the PAT required at least twelve home visits per year, and each visit lasted for an hour. The PCHP required more frequent (twice a week) but shorter (30 minutes) visits (Sama-miller et al., 2017). A high percentage of studies on the treatment intensity including frequency and duration were with infant/toddler home visiting programs such as the Another Road to Safety Program or the Home Observation for Measurement of the Environment (Allen, 2007; Bakermans-Kranenburg et al., 2005). Therefore, more research is necessary to determine what treatment intensity would maximize the effectiveness of the home visits for 3-5 year olds and their families.

## **2.4 Conceptualizing Home-School Relations**

Home-school relations are the connection between the key stakeholders in a given home and those in a neighboring school: in brief, between parents and teachers. Starting from the assumption that school is inseparable from the home context, education researchers have consistently emphasized the role of parents in children's various developmental trajectories (Barnard, 2004; Dearing et al., 2006). Parents are seen as a child's first teachers and are responsible for creating a supportive home-learning environment through social, cultural, and

educational resources (National Education Goals Panel, 1997). Parents are also expected to actively engage in their children's school lives and communicate with the teachers to promote children's development and learning (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003; McIntyre et al., 2010).

The term 'home-school relations' widely embraces the current literature's dichotomy between family involvement and family-school partnership (or family engagement). While the former focuses on parents' active engagement in the context of school, the latter implies collaboration between parents and teachers (Semke & Sheridan, 2012). These two orientations in the literature are valuable and require considerable commitment from both parties. One study has positively argued that family involvement constitutes a family-school partnership (Ferlazzo & Hammond, 2009). However, this take on family involvement is somewhat lacking in egalitarian values, as it positions parents as participants and teachers as learning resources and information providers.

When studying home-school relations, researchers have focused on specific activities in which parents engage. Just as these researchers are far more likely to use the label 'family involvement' than 'family-school partnership' (Semke & Sheridan, 2012), their discourse typically revolves around what schools and educators do to help parents become productive partners in their children's school success. This approach suggests that school-based strategies can enhance families' involvement in their children's education and can, in turn and more generally, enhance home-school relations. Given this assumption, researchers have sought ways to draw more parents into the school context through various events, including rigorous intervention programs.

Researchers and educators have idealized the contributions that family involvement can make to children's education. For instance, Epstein's (2001, 2011) model, which has widely set a

standard for policies and practices regarding home–school relations, identifies six types of involvement: (1) parenting, (2) communicating, (3) volunteering, (4) learning at home, (5) decision-making, and (6) collaborating with the community. Using this model, schools and educators have strategically designed and implemented activities ranging from the establishment of two-way communication channels between home and school to resource coordination for the advancement of parenting skills. Similarly, McNeal (2001) used four “social capital” measures of parental involvement: (1) parent–child discussion, (2) parental monitoring of child behavior, (3) parental involvement in parent–teacher organizations, and (4) parental support in educational practices. These four measures imply that schools are accountable for building parents’ capacity for competent participation in schools. Indeed, from a public-policy perspective, the measures are reflected in the US federal government’s requirement that schools, to receive Title I funding, implement parental-involvement activities. While most policy makers have suggested that schools jointly develop these activities with parents, many have argued that schools generally have taken greater control of the initiatives (Durand & Secakusuma, 2019; Graue & Oen, 2009)). School control leads to activities that reflect schools’ views on effective ways to engage families. In particular, schools often search for ways to promote the contributions that parents can make to their children’s learning both in and out of school.

Along with general school-wide activities, rigorous parent-involvement programs connect families and schools together as partners working toward specific goals. Many times, the programs pay laser-like attention to selected demographic groups, academic outcomes, and attitudes toward school. Regarding the purpose of the programs, some educators have aimed to increase parental efficacy by teaching parents how they can help their children with homework (Balli, 1998) and enhance early-literacy skills (Crosby et al., 2015; Koskinen et al., 2000;

Reutzell, Fawson, & Smith, 2006; St. Clair & Jackson, 2006). A small number of these initiatives have been based on a partnership model in pursuit of enhanced collaboration and communication between parents and teachers (Jeynes, 2012). In general, schools have held the view that families from disadvantaged backgrounds should be the main beneficiaries of the programs. A central premise of this view is that schools should acknowledge the drawbacks of unequally distributed resources in society and should help those who are consequently most in need (Lightfoot, 2003).

A large body of research has addressed the impact of family-involvement practices and programs on children's measurable outcomes. Researchers who have conceptualized home-school relations in terms of family involvement have led this thread of measurable-outcomes research. They have proposed a basic hypothesis—children's learning capacity will grow when parents prioritize their own participation in activities geared toward boosting the children's education. To verify this hypothesis, researchers have consistently cited statistical associations between family involvement and children's achievement (Castro et al., 2015; Daniel, Wang, & Berthelsen, 2016; Jeynes, 2012).

Numerous empirical studies have also shown positive and significant effects of parent involvement on children's academic outcomes. The evidence of these effects has rested on a wide range of standards including children's standardized test scores, positive attitudes toward learning, attendance, and kindergarten readiness (Dearing et al., 2006; Fantuzzo et al., 2004; Galindo & Sheldon, 2012; Simpkins et al., 2006; Sheldon, 2003). Moreover, based on a large sample size of 16,425 kindergartners, family involvement seems to be a mediating mechanism that translates schools' outreach efforts into children's enhanced reading and math skills (Galindo & Sheldon, 2012). While there are fewer studies on specific family-involvement programs, a quasi-experimental study conducted by St. Clair and Jackson (2006) contributed to

this discussion by showing significantly higher language skills among 14 immigrant kindergartners whose parents received training on how to facilitate children's learning at home. This type of favorable outcome has strengthened the argument for more school-initiated practices as a means to increase family involvement and reduce educational disparities among children.

The value of family-involvement practices has been widely accepted in the research community given the accumulation of scientific evidence. However, several meta-analysis studies conducted by Jeynes (2003, 2005, 2012) suggest that subtle aspects of parental involvement (e.g., maintaining high expectations of one's children, communicating with children, and parental style) have a greater impact on academic achievement than what schools think of as effective practices (e.g., participation in school activities, checking homework). In a study, Jeynes (2012) noted a lack of "genuine consensus about the effectiveness of school-based parental involvement programs" (p. 707) and postulated that the variance in opinion stems from uncertainty about whether or not—and if so, how—specific types of practices impact learning. This point suggests an important direction for future research on home–school relations: current school-initiated practices that reflect mainly the values and norms of schools might not be the best solutions for genuine parent engagement in schools (Durand & Secakusuma, 2019; Graue & Oen, 2009; Jeynes, 2012).

## **2.5 Process-oriented Approach to the Transition and Home-School Relations**

Transition and home–school relations are complex issues that can be better understood through the lens of *processes* rather than *practices*. The basic premise is that processes are composed of and constructed through individuals' perspectives, knowledge, and values. Researchers, especially those with ecological, sociocultural, and critical perspectives, have



indicated that a *process* perspective is a useful analytic lens to understand social phenomena in which various individuals and institutions play a part. From this perspective, both transition and home–school relations are a learning, negotiating, and internalizing process that all individuals experience within specific social, cultural, and historical contexts. Thus, considering the dynamics of processes, *practices* including events and activities at a certain point in time may not fully reflect individuals’ experiences. For this reason, a growing number of researchers have highlighted the need to approach transition and home–school relations from a process-oriented perspective (Boyle, Petriwskyj, & Grieshaber, 2018; Crafter & Maunder, 2012; Peters, 2012; Lam & Pollard, 2006).

From a process-oriented approach, the transition to kindergarten is not a single event of children moving from home or preschool to the new educational setting. Rather, it is a process of learning and changes that children, parents, teachers, and communities collectively construct over time by interacting with each other (Hviid & Zittoun, 2008; Pianta et al., 1999). This construction is a social process where individuals bring their values, beliefs, and cultures (Graue & Reineke, 2014). Through multiple interactions and interdependencies, individuals gradually acquire new norms by negotiating what they bring, what others bring, and what originally existed. Recognizing this learning process, Lam and Pollard (2006) defined transition as “a process of change and a shift of identity” (2006, p. 129), focusing on how individuals embody their newly acquired knowledge, expectations, and cultures. Lastly, transition is an ongoing process where a longitudinal approach to data collection (e.g., pre- and post-interviews) might better portray parents’ experiences (Miller, 2015).

Home-school relations is also defined as an iterative process of building relationships between parents and teachers, rather than as the practices in which parents engage (Durand &

Secakusuma, 2019). This process-oriented perspective is suited for the recent shift to a family–school partnership perspective than for the family-involvement perspective because the former focuses on pursuing the authentic meaning of parental involvement in school. Home–school relations are far more multifaceted insofar as relationship building is influenced by individuals’ past experiences and specific contexts (Graue, Kroeger, & Prager, 2001). One important aspect of home–school relations is how parents and teachers can form an equitable partnership based on mutual engagement and responsibility for their children’s education. Researchers have examined this process of becoming a team by looking at how parents and teachers share values and expectations and how this sharing strengthens or weakens the relationship.

Conceptualizing transition and home-school relations as processes contribute to the literature by empowering families. Empowering starts with recognizing an individual’s active agency. In the field of education, schools acknowledge parents and children as active agents in their learning. In other words, they are knowledgeable enough to navigate their social-learning process within their cultural and institutional contexts (Lam & Pollard, 2006; Vygostky, 1978). This is especially meaningful in the general-education field, where schools have a specific impression of ideal parents and children (Boyle et al., 2018; Miller, 2018). On the basis of this idealism, schools encourage parents to actively participate in their children’s school and generate normative benchmarks for their children’s academic performance. This universal approach often fails to value families, and instead leads to a deficit view of families, especially those from marginalized or disadvantaged groups. For example, parents who do not show up for parent–teacher conferences may be seen as uninterested in their children’s education. Children who fall below the schools’ academic benchmark may be labeled “vulnerable” or “at-risk.” In addition, if a child has intellectual interests that are not well aligned with the kindergarten curriculum, it may

not address them. However, viewing parents and children as active agents will help schools respect each child's pace of learning, the choices parents make, and the diversity that exists in communities.

Because the process-oriented approach focuses on individual contributions to transition and home-school relations, researchers and educators who subscribe to the approach are likely to view and treat parents as experts of their own children. From this standpoint, all parents possess great insight into their children's strengths and potential, and this insight rests on the parents' particular cultural, relational, and contextual backgrounds (Miller, 2015, 2018). Parental knowledge on a variety of topics and factors that trigger children's learning interests could serve as valuable resources for teachers to create inclusive learning environments (Moll et al., 1992; Pacheco & Gutiérrez, 2009). When educators view parents as resources, learning can flow from home to school rather than uniquely from school to home. Considering that transition to kindergarten involves simultaneous changes including physical settings, people (i.e., peers and teachers), and educational content, parental knowledge can serve as a buffer between children's school and home lives.

The perspective of home-school relations as a process also helps researchers and educators create practices that promote parent-teacher partnerships. This perspective changes the focus from the traditional view of family involvement in school. A partnership implies that parents and teachers are collaborators in the process of establishing and sustaining a strong partnership (Lightfoot, 1977, 2004). While the field of early-childhood education has suggested a variety of practices based on ecological and dynamic models (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000), scholars have repeatedly indicated that those practices do not adequately create communities of collaboration (Cook & Coley, 2019; Purtell et al., 2019). The

process-oriented approach, rather than idealize a single type of relationship, sheds light on the development of an equal partnership between parents and teachers. From this perspective, schools and educators prioritize opportunities for mutual engagement and collaboration with families, placing greater emphasis on appreciating the family culture and knowledge. Through more engaging practices, parents and teachers mutually share their hopes and expectations for children and the kindergarten year. Researchers have argued that this sharing can eventually facilitate children's learning process and benefit the children by closing the gap in knowledge and practice between home and school (Moll et al., 1992; Pacheco & Gutiérrez, 2009).

One way to examine processes is to focus on individuals' roles, perspectives, and interactions. Researchers who have taken this process-oriented approach have indicated that transition and home-school relations are highly context-specific social phenomena and, thus, cannot be fully examined with a universal approach. From this standpoint, some researchers have analyzed narratives from children, parents, and teachers (Compton-Lilly, 2009; Peters, 2012; Recchia & Dvorakova, 2012). For example, to add contextual richness to the transition process, Miller (2018) asked eight low-income families to photograph what they thought was relevant to their child's preparedness for school. Three interviews then took place to clarify how parents made sense of their interaction with their child and what their underlying expectations and intentions were for those interactions. This photo-elicitation effectively empowered parents by demonstrating the ways in which parents actually worked with their children at home. Some of these interactions centered on learning activities, and other interactions rested on technology and community resources.

Dockett & Perry (2005) asked children in four kindergarten classrooms to take photos of something important to them and emphasized how children actively made sense of their school

context through educational content, out-of-bounds rules, and play equipment. In terms of home–school relations, Durand and Secakusuma (2019) documented how teachers negotiated the boundaries between home and school, felt reluctant to reach out, and identified barriers to equal collaboration. By examining parents’ perspective on their relationship with teachers, Graue, and colleagues (2001) presented yet more evidence that building relationships is a personal process that is influenced by parents’ previous experiences and social networks.

## **2.6 Theoretical Frameworks**

This study used Uri Bronfenbrenner’s ecological frameworks as the theoretical lenses (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). He developed both ecological and bioecological models with their own unique contributions to the current research. First, Bronfenbrenner’s earlier ecological model helped me situate transition within a broader context outside the classroom (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The model posits that human development occurs within a complex system of relationships affected by a multi-layered environment. The bioecological model, also known as the Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model, offers a more comprehensive lens, emphasizing that human development results from dynamic interaction between individuals and their changing environment over time (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). This perspective helped me understand the roles and influence of the home–school relationship on the transition. In this section, I explain the key concepts of each framework and the key applications to this research.

## **Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory**

Ecological frameworks originated from the idea that individuals directly and indirectly influence and are influenced by their environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This approach to conducting research is most frequently used in transition studies because it provides a wide lens through which to recognize the significant role of contexts in children's transition to kindergarten (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000; Sameroff, 1995). From this perspective, kindergarten transition can be rigorously explored through the interrelated environments that affect children's experiences. The framework is useful largely because it recognizes that all individuals and environments outside of school are valuable contexts in any effort to understand kindergarten transition and are similarly important to the school context.

Bronfenbrenner's ecological system theory states that children's development should be understood through bidirectional interactions with environments. In his earlier model, Bronfenbrenner (1979) locates children at the center of four environmental layers consisting of a microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem. The first layer, a microsystem, includes individuals such as peers, families, teachers, and caregivers who have direct interaction with children. The mesosystem, the second layer, involves relationships across contexts such as home-school connections, relations among educators and institutions, and curricular continuity between settings. The third layer, an exosystem, refers to indirect environments such as community, local industry, and government. It also broadly includes resources and opportunities that are available at a particular location. The fourth layer, a macrosystem, takes into account the societal and cultural values and political ideologies that may be distal to the child but are embedded in our daily lives.

In transition research, the microsystem is an instrumental tool to recognize children's proximal environments: home and school. These environments are the immediate and most direct settings where children spend most of their time. More importantly, both settings have considerable influence on children's overall well-being and learning. In these settings, parents and teachers are the key authority figures, as they create a loving and nurturing environment and provide learning opportunities for children. How the authority figures work with a child reflects their own schooling experiences, values, and culture (O'Farrelly & Hennessy, 2013; Skinner et al., 1998).

Transition researchers have focused on the home as the major setting in a microsystem by examining the reciprocal interactions between parents and children. The baseline of this approach has been to produce descriptive work looking at how parents' characteristics relate to their children's transition experiences. These researchers have also investigated the resources parents receive and provide to their children. These resources include not only learning materials (books, computers, worksheets), but also parent-education programs designed to improve parenting skills that, in turn, help parents prepare their children for school (Ponzetti, 2015). Another research thread focuses on the opportunities that parents create for their children and themselves to engage in school events. Researchers and stakeholders use this information to determine the associations between children's experiences and behaviors in the first year of school.

Another important context in the examination of microsystems is institutions, given the proximal effect that they have on children's experiences. Institutions, including schools, preschools, and Head Start programs, have been seen as critical contexts of transition. The main research thread has traditionally focused on the institutional level, investigating transition

activities implemented by institutions (Little et al., 2016; Love et al., 1992). Researchers have also examined more individual levels to investigate how the kindergarten class and teacher characteristics are related to children's school adjustment, with pertinent topics including class size, teachers' years of experience, teachers' highest degree, and average classroom demographics (Arby et al., 2015). However, most research has centered on the kindergarten setting and relatively little is known about how other institutions help children and families successfully enter the school system (Cook & Coley, 2019; Purtell et al., 2019).

### **Bronfenbrenner's Process-Person-Context-Time model**

Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model is an expanded version of Bronfenbrenner's earlier work. Whereas the original model highlighted the role of person–context interactions in human development, the expanded model features the additional dimensions of *process* and *time*, treating them as critical components. Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998) discuss the expanded model in detail:

The form, power, content, and direction of the proximal processes affecting development vary systematically as a joint function of the characteristics of the developing person; of the environment—both immediate and more remote—in which the processes are taking place; the nature of the developmental outcomes under consideration; and the social continuities and changes occurring over time through the life course and the historical period during which the person has lived. (p. 996)

*Process* is the key concept of the PPCT model as Bronfenbrenner explicitly noted that proximal processes are “the engines of development” (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000, p. 118). This shows that Bronfenbrenner's attention turned towards proximal processes, referring to the lasting and consistent modes of interaction within the immediate surroundings. His emphasis transitioned from external environmental impacts to the developmental processes individuals



undergo across time. These processes, in turn, are contingent on individual characteristics, various contexts, and the timing of these interactions (Bronfenbrenner & Evans, 2000).

Bronfenbrenner brought proximal processes to the forefront; however, acknowledged the relevance of the rest three dimensions – person, context, and time. First, *Person* dimension refers to individual characteristics that influence the dynamic of the proximal processes. It was further divided into three types – resources (e.g., knowledge, skills, abilities), demand (e.g., age, gender, physical appearance), and forces (e.g., temperament, motivation, persistence) (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998, 2006). From this viewpoint, both children and their caregivers including parents and teachers are active participants who can influence in the transition process.

Next, *Context* dimension involves the interrelated environmental systems in Bronfenbrenner's original ecological model. Fundamental to this dimension is that factors from mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem can either facilitate or impede the development of proximal processes. To better understand the role of context, Tudge et al. (2009, 2016) emphasized the importance of assessing the varying influence of two or more within-system (e.g., home and school for microsystem, middle- and working-class families for macrosystem) which I adopted to my data collection process.

Lastly, *Time* is the newly added dimension, which recognizes that proximal processes occur and change over time through dynamic interactions with person and context dimensions. When applied to transition research, it considers how individuals' experiences and interactions within their environments change and shape their transitions as they move through various life stages. This notion underscores the need to conceptualize transitions in the stream of time, taking into account the temporal aspects of individuals' lives and the changing contexts they reside.

Taken together, the PPCT model provides me with a useful conceptual framework to understand the evolving nature of development – how individuals navigate the transition to kindergarten through interpersonal interactions. It is necessary to take a longitudinal perspective because the home-school relationship, the research interest in this dissertation, is a constantly changing unit based on individuals' social and cultural interactions. This indeterminateness has informed my inquiry into how parents and teachers initially build a relationship, and how they establish a more meaningful relationship that can promote children's successful transition.

## **2.7 Summary**

The purpose of this dissertation is to understand the transition to kindergarten as a dynamic and complex process that can be better understood through social interactions among individuals at home and school. Specifically, my research focuses on the interactions between parents and teachers, both of whom are actively engaged in children's transition.

To explore the ongoing interactions that are socially, culturally, and historically constructed (Graue & Reineke, 2014), I used Bronfenbrenner's Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) model to understand how processes (i.e., interactions between parents and teachers) vary based on their individual and contextual characteristics over time. Whereas his earlier ecological model highlighted the role of person-context interrelatedness in human development (here the transition to kindergarten), I chose the PPCT model because it features the additional elements of process and time. Given the evolving nature of development, this longitudinal perspective provides a valuable lens to understand the transition as a collective learning process in which children, parents, and teachers interact within the school and home contexts as well as how they interact with one another (Tudge et al., 2009, 2016).

In terms of the four elements in the PPCT model, I examine the data and present my understanding of the process (how home visits shaped the transition to kindergarten and home-school relations), person (perspectives on home-school relations and the parenting role, goals for teaching and learning in kindergarten), contexts (school and home, culture and practices), and time (relationship building throughout the school year, reflections on their transition experiences at two time points). More importantly, my focus is the process and how it relates to the remaining three elements. The interactive focus of the PPCT model helped me understand (1) how parents and teachers experienced the transition process over the course of the year; and (2) how those experiences translated into practice.

## **Chapter 3. Methodology**

This chapter includes four sections describing the context and the methodology for this dissertation. I start by introducing the home visit project, a larger study within which this dissertation is situated. After describing the overall context, I explain how I selected a subset of participants from the home visit project. In the following section, I discuss the methods used for data collection. Finally, I describe my data analysis process in the last section.

### **3.1 The Home Visit Project**

This dissertation is based on a home visit project in which I served as a research assistant during the 2018–2019 school year. Researchers from the Madison Education Partnership (MEP) and the Center for Research on Early Childhood Education (CRECE) conducted the home visit project, which was funded by a Spencer Foundation grant (201900002). The objective of the project was to determine if and how home visits could support the transition to kindergarten for teachers, parents, and children. My affiliation to CRECE allowed me to join the project from the beginning. I participated in research activities including designing the study, planning for teacher and family recruitment, developing and leading home visit training for teachers, developing the data collection instruments (i.e., interview protocols, forms for teacher reflections, and home visit observation), and analyzing the data.

At the time of the project, the Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD) sought to improve students' experiences related to various transitions between schools. Along with the transitions to middle school and to high school, MMSD identified the transition from pre-kindergarten to kindergarten (the transition, hereafter) as an important time of growth and change. MMSD encouraged schools to form a transition team at each school, and to make

detailed plans to implement various transition practices (e.g., orientation, open house events, parent-teacher conferences).

In support of the district's work, the research team set out to explore how home visits around kindergarten entry could improve the transition experiences for teachers, parents, and children. When it comes to traditional home visiting programs, trained visitors and teachers target areas for improvement (e.g., parenting skills, children's physical, social-emotional, and cognitive development) and provide educational resources to family members (Family Strengthening Policy Center, 2007; Nix et al., 2005). However, our research team did not take the traditional approach to home visit programs. The research team took a family-centered approach to home visits, which reflected teachers' focus on establishing a mutual partnership with families and children instead of identifying challenges that could be linked to problems in school. We conceptualized home visits as an intensive transition practice by which teachers, students, and their families could build positive relationships and thus help ease the transition process (Johnston & Mermin, 1994 ; Meyer & Mann, 2006; Pianta et al., 1999).

The project lasted throughout the 2018–2019 school year with the motivation to support the transition to kindergarten through home visits. The research team invited all kindergarten teachers in the district. Twelve teachers volunteered to participate in the project and were compensated at \$25 per hour for training, home visits, and interviews. Table 1 shows the timeline of the project.

Table 1. Home visit project timeline

Year	2018								2019				
Month	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	J	F	M	A	M
Teacher recruitment	■	■											
Teacher training for home visits		■											
Family recruitment		■	■										
First home visits			■	■	■								
Second home visits				■	■	■							
First interviews							■	■					
Data analysis								■	■	■	■		
Follow-up interviews												■	■

All twelve teachers participated in a three-hour training either in person or via video. The goal of the training was to help teachers conduct home visits with the funds of knowledge approach. The idea of funds of knowledge appreciating of the ways resources in the child's family and home life can support his/her learning experiences in classrooms (Moll et al., 1992). During the training session, the teachers learned that funds of knowledge are personal, social, and cultural resources in the home they could use to create a more inclusive learning environment in school. Home visits were introduced as opportunities where teachers could acquire insights into these funds of knowledge. Group discussions helped the teachers think about going into home visits with this frame of mind and how it would change the ways they interacted with students and families.

After completing the home visit training, the teachers conducted home visits with 80 randomly selected families. Each family was visited twice: the first visit occurred in the summer of 2018 and the second was between early September and mid-October. Following the two home visits, the research team conducted follow-up interviews with all twelve teachers and a selected group of families in the fall of 2018. For this dissertation, I followed up with six teachers and

twelve families in the spring of 2019. In the following section, I describe how I selected and recruited the participants for this dissertation from the home visit project.

### **3.2 Participants**

In an effort to support of the transition to kindergarten in the 2018-2019 school year, twelve kindergarten teachers conducted home visits with six to eight randomly selected families in their class rosters as of July 2018. The participants for this dissertation included six of the kindergarten teachers across five different schools and two families per teacher. Two teachers were in the same school. All names for individuals and schools are pseudonyms.

When inviting families, the research team employed a random sampling method specifically targeting 4K students who were expected to attend kindergarten at the selected schools. This approach aimed to recruit a representative group within this specific cohort. However, when the team was unable to reach some families or parents refused to participate, substitutions were made. This adjustment led to a relatively more advantaged sample than originally intended.

After multiple rounds of selection, the 80 families that initially participated in the home visit project were likely to be among the more affluent in the district, based on their eligibility for free or reduced lunch. By race and ethnic group, White participants accounted for nearly two-thirds of the families followed by Latinx (12%), Black (10%), Asian (5%), and multiracial group (3%). Although the largest racial group in the district was White, people of color and lower-income families were relatively under-recruited. The research team later reported logistical issues including roster changes, scheduling conflicts, and challenges contacting families that might have contributed to the lower racial and socioeconomic distribution of the participants.

### *3.2.1 Selection of Participants*

The purpose of sampling for this dissertation was to hear stories from diverse groups of teachers and parents. Guided by bioecological frameworks, my baseline assumptions were 1) people do not experience transitions in the same ways and 2) the ways parents and teachers connect with each other to support their children's transition to kindergarten vary based on individual and contextual features (e.g., home and school, early childhood programs). To ensure that I had collected appropriate data to answer my assumptions, I used different matrices for recruiting schools, teachers, and parents. The matrices optimized the process of selecting a subset of participants with social and cultural diversity. Below I describe my sampling process.

First, using publicly available school profiles, I purposively chose five schools to reflect the diverse population in the district. Table 3 provides an overview of the demographic characteristics of the five schools: Brington, Frost, Harbor, Maret, and Ridgewood Elementary Schools (using pseudonyms). The enrollment of each school ranged from 325 to 443 students, although Ridgewood's enrollment data were not listed. The racial and ethnic breakdown of students varied widely from 23% White at Ridgewood to 63% at Brington. The proportion of Black students was the highest at Maret (40%) and the lowest at Frost (14%). Latinx students were most prevalent at Ridgewood (39%) and least prevalent at Harbor (8%). The percentage of students who were eligible for free/reduced lunch varied significantly, with Maret having the highest at 76% and Harbor having the lowest at 35%. Ridgewood, Frost, and Brington had 70%, 45%, and 36%, respectively.

In addition to using school profiles, I revisited transcripts from the first round of teacher interviews and looked for clues that might have influenced the rapport between teachers and parents. Teachers' responses to school climate and family engagement in schooling especially



helped me identify issues related to home-school relations. For example, Brighton Elementary School (Brighton, hereafter) serves the immediate neighborhood and is tightly connected to the community. Teachers at Brighton reported frequent face-to-face communication with parents at the daily community breakfasts families were welcome to join after they dropped off their children. In contrast, Harbor Elementary School (Harbor, hereafter) serves a mixed attendance area with about half of the students commuting from across a busy highway. The teachers at Harbor still met the parents at pick-up and/or drop-off times, but the frequency was low since many children took the bus to school. Given this variability, I recruited a mix of schools considering the extent of teachers' daily social interactions with parents.

Table 3. School profiles

School Name	Brighton	Frost	Harbor	Maret	Ridgewood
Enrollment (N)	348	436	443	325	N/A
Race/Ethnicity (%)					
White	63	53	53	26	23
Black	16	14	19	40	26
Latinx	11	22	8	14	39
Others	10	11	20	20	12
Eligible for free/reduced lunch (%)	36	45	35	76	70
English language learner (%)	15	31	21	19	42
Mean score of PALS	91	86	82	75	69
Eligible for special education (%)	11	12	13	13	10
Parent-teacher direct interactions	H	M	L	H	L

*Notes.* PALS stands for Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening. Data were retrieved from the 2017-18 school profiles available on the district website at the time I searched. The most recent data for Ridgewood were from 2016-17 school year. The extent of teachers' face-to-face conversations with parents were denoted as "H" for frequent interactions, "M" for moderate interactions, "L" for low interactions.

For teacher selection for follow-up interviews, I reached out to six teachers, considering their beliefs about home visits and their goals for teaching and learning in kindergarten. I hypothesized that these distinct beliefs would influence how teachers approach the learning that

happened during home visits and constructed their relationships with parents. When I chose the sampling for this dissertation, the research team had already analyzed the first interviews and had identified the diverse values of the twelve teachers. Some teachers strongly believed in the advantages of home visits while others did not or remained neutral. Regarding their instructional goals, many teachers reported that helping students achieve a balance between academic and socio-emotional skills was their main goal for teaching in kindergarten, whereas some focused more on academic readiness. I used these typologies to follow up with six teachers having different points of views toward home visits and goals of kindergarten education. Furthermore, as a research assistant, I was fortunate to have worked closely with four of the six teachers with whom I scheduled home visits and accompanied on some of the home visits. My deeper understanding of their experiences allowed me to better understand the data.

For follow-up interviews with families, I met twelve families once again at the end of kindergarten to learn about their home visit experiences over the past year. I invited two families for each of the six teachers. To recruit families from diverse groups, I considered race/ethnicity, gender, eligibility for free or reduced lunch, and parent education in the sampling process. The purpose was to understand how, if at all, different family backgrounds might play a role in the practices with a home visit intervention and their different interactions with the teachers. As shown in Table 2, the demographic characteristics of the twelve families were diverse: four White families, three African American families, and six Latino families. Half of the families qualified for free or reduced lunch.

Table 2 summarizes the demographic information of the students and families in the larger home visit project as well as the select group for this dissertation.

Table 2. Student demographics

Dimension	Home visit project (N=80)		Dissertation (N=12)	
	N	%	N	%
Gender: Female	42	53	7	58
Race/Ethnicity				
White	50	63	5	42
Black	10	12	2	16
Latinx	12	15	5	42
Asian	5	6	-	-
Multiracial	3	4	-	-
English language learner	12	15	3	25
Eligible for free/reduced lunch	26	33	6	50
Eligible for special education services	7	9	2	16

*Notes.* The participants for this dissertation were a subset of the home visit project participants followed at the end of kindergarten. The label used for race/ethnicity and gender derived from the district student data.

### ***3.2.1 Recruitment of Participants***

After listing teachers and parents with whom I hoped to follow up, I sent official invitation letters individually via email. The letter started off by thanking them for their participation in the initial interviews in the fall of 2019. The letter then indicated that the purpose of the end-of-the-year follow-up interviews was to learn about their transition experiences throughout the year after the home visits the previous summer. Consent forms were attached to the emails to explain the interview procedure. All six teachers and ten out of twelve families agreed to participate once again and signed the consent forms in person before participating in the face-to-face interviews. The teachers of the two families who could not be reached volunteered to help connect me with the families via phone. The invitation letters and consent forms in Appendix A were reviewed by the principal investigators of the project and Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval was obtained before distribution.

### 3.3 Data Collection

My focus in this dissertation centers on parents' and teachers' lived experiences of home visits and their relationships over the course of the transition to kindergarten. Three data sources were used to explore my objectives: audio files/transcripts of the interviews with the parents and teachers, home visit reflections completed by the teachers, and my home visit observation notes and those of other research assistants. Table 4 outlines the data sources I analyzed for this dissertation.

Table 4. Data sources

Data source	Timing	Number	Description
Semi-structured Interviews	Fall 2018 Spring 2019	48	One-on-one interviews with teachers and families about their experiences, and beliefs about home visiting, transition, and home-school communication
Home visit reflections	Summer-Fall 2018 at each visit	24	Summary of each visit completed by teachers focusing on cultural knowledge, familial knowledge, or practice
Home visit observations	Summer-Fall 2018	13	Completed by the project assistant focusing on teacher-family interactions and conversations

In the following sections, I describe the details of data collection methods — how the data were collected and how each data source contributed to my understanding of the participants' experiences in a unique way.

#### 3.3.1 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from six kindergarten teachers and twelve families. Each participant completed two interviews: one in the fall of 2018 after the

home visits and the other toward the end of the kindergarten school year. I conducted most of the interviews except for two teachers who were paired with another research assistant.

Individual interviews were conducted with the teachers and parents. Given my interest in how they are mutually inclusive in the transition process, listening to the stories from both teachers and parents was critical to data collection. Along with the research team, I also developed separate parent and teacher interview protocols to examine the following constructs: expectations and experiences of home visits, beliefs about the home-school relationship, and their roles in the transition process. We created specific questions to address these constructs. The interview protocols can be found in Appendix B.

**Teacher interviews.** When we first followed up with teachers after completing the two home visits, teachers were asked to reflect on the following: 1) what they learned from the home visits and how they used the knowledge to support the transition, 2) how they built a relationship with both families with and without home visits, and 3) their overall thoughts on the implementation of the home visit project. The closing interview was more of a reflection on the year including new questions about 1) their year-long relationship with the families, 2) the long-term effects of home visits and their thoughts on future use of home visits, 3) school transition practices besides home visits, and 4) goals for teaching in kindergarten. The questions related to transitions practices and teaching goals emerged after analyzing the data from the first interviews.

**Parent interviews.** The interview protocols for the parents involved questions about their 1) experiences with home visits and the transition, 2) experiences building relationships with previous caregivers (e.g., childcare providers and/or pre-K teachers) and the kindergarten teacher, especially how they connected with them, and 3) beliefs about parenting and schooling. When we reached out again at the end of the kindergarten year, we asked the parents about their

1) overall reflection of their child's kindergarten experiences, 2) collaboration with teachers regarding their child's learning, and 3) experiences with school transition practices besides home visits.

### ***3.3.2 Teacher Home Visit Reflections***

Teachers wrote home visit reflections after each visit which were a valuable data source in addition to the interview data. The research team developed a separate two-page document for each of the first and second round of visits. The forms are included in Appendix C.

The first home visit reflection began with listing the people the teacher met with and their relationships to the student. Then the teacher reflected on four questions: 1) a general summary of the visit, 2) what the teacher learned about the child, 3) what the teacher learned about the family, and 4) a written note to the child. The teachers were also asked to describe the physical setting and the knowledge gained from their interactions and conversations with the participants. This question helped teachers recall memories and set up the background for further details about the student and families. The next two questions were the core of the reflection: describing what the teacher *learned*. The teachers described what the student liked and disliked, the student's strengths and challenges, and other characteristics they noticed. Teachers also wrote about the family in general and their resources and assets that could help the support students' transition to kindergarten. The reflection ended with a note to the student describing the first meeting and the teacher's hope for the student.

The second home visit reflection also started with a summary of the visit and participants. However, the focus was on goal setting for the kindergarten year. The school had already started by the time the second visit took place, so, presumably, the teachers had a better sense of their

students and could set challenging but achievable goals. Understanding how the teachers used the visits to help students reach the goals was critical to the study. Thus, the teachers were asked to build on the knowledge they had gained from the visits to address what they hoped their students would accomplish by the end of the year. Finally, the last component was to review and make changes to the note they had written to student after the first visit.

The teachers' home visit reflections were tools that allowed the teachers to recount their visits and make their observations more explicit than they might have been otherwise. It was also an important tool for the research team to better understand the teachers' experiences and thoughts because the selective home visits had been arranged by the research assistants due to logistical constraints. Teachers' responses to the thought-provoking questions were what they perceived they had learned from the visits. This was especially important for me to make connections between the teachers' perspectives on kindergarten goals and their use of home visits.

### ***3.3.3 Home Visit Observations***

Research assistants wrote home visit observations that were written records of what they saw, heard, and noticed during the home visit. The four research assistants, including me, accompanied the teachers on the 40 randomly chosen visits. I was assigned to 15 of the 40 visits and wrote 3-6 single-spaced observation notes after each visit. When scheduling the visits with the parents, I told the parents in advance that I would be present and made it clear that they were chosen randomly to help the research team better understand home visit experiences. The observation notes helped me understand the context of the teachers' reflections by providing background information and setting of each home visit.

The process of writing home visit observation notes was divided into two phases: jotting notes during the visits and expanding them into full field notes later (Emerson, Freiz, & Shaw, 2011; Richardson & St Pierre, 2008). During the visits, I perceived my role as more of a non-participant observer with little involvement in the interactions among the teachers, parents, and students. After I briefly told the parents about the purpose of the observation, I sat to the side (e.g., at the corner of a table or in a less conspicuous place in the room) and started to take notes by hand. I intentionally avoided using electronic devices to prevent distraction or disruption.

I observed each home visit with a specific focus on the interaction among the participants and the content of the conversations. After briefly describing the participants and the physical setting, I attended to the verbal and nonverbal social interactions throughout the visit. I made reference to the distinct types of interactions: parent-teacher, student-teacher, parent-student, and other interactions with siblings or extended family members. My goal was to capture the language as spoken by the participants. The strategy I used was to jot down key words and phrases as Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (2011) described, "jottings translate to-be-remembered observations into writing on paper as quickly rendered scribbles about actions and dialogue (p. 29)." In addition, I paid attention to the degree to which the teachers engaged with the topics the parents shared. Identifying how the conversation flowed was an interesting point to note since it implied how the home visits progressed (e.g., guided by whom and which topics). I also kept a running record of time to understand the pacing.

I revisited my observation notes and turned them into full notes as soon as possible after the visits while my memory was fresh. In this phase, I included details about who was present, how the setting looked, and what the parents and teachers talked about. When describing



participants' characteristics, I avoided using judgement statements but, instead, described how they acted. For example, the following snippet is from my observation notes before revision.

Having the interpreter seemed to be really helpful for the mother to express her thoughts and feelings more deeply because she had not been actively engaged in conversations during the first meeting at home. The father took the role as an interpreter that time. This time, the mother was more likely to ask questions, talk about the student, and share her concerns. (9/5/2018, Ms. Carney's visit to Ms. Rose)

After drafting this note, I realized that the first sentence contained a judgmental nuance and revised it to "With the help of the interpreter, the mother expressed her thoughts and feelings more frequently than she did during the first visit." I repeated this process for the rest of my notes to ensure that the data were observational rather than speculative.

Overall, accompanying the teachers on the home visits was a valuable asset for this dissertation. The first-hand experience of home visits substantially increased my understanding of what the parents and teachers shared during the interviews. I also had the opportunity to reflect on what I learned by writing observation notes. I used the observation notes as supplementary information to the teachers' home visit reflections, especially to understand how the teachers interacted with the students and families. At least two observations were available for each of the six teachers participating in this dissertation. When necessary, I will draw on excerpts from the available data.

### **3.4. Data Analysis**

#### ***3.4.1 Data Processing***

I used software program MaxQDA to analyze the data for this dissertation. All data were prepared in word-processing files before importing them into MaxQDA. The first step was to create pseudonyms for schools, teachers, parents, and students to protect their confidentiality. Because of the number of participants, I also created a separate document containing the pseudonyms associated with their real names and saved it in a password-protected folder. Audio files from the teacher and parent interviews were transformed into texts by professional transcribers hired by MEP. For the two interviews with Spanish-speaking parents, the translator who accompanied me transcribed the interviews and then translated the text into English. I also manually typed some of the teachers' hand-written reflections. This process was not necessary for home visit observations as all of the notes were initially created in Microsoft Word files.

In the data preparation stage, creating "data sets" in MaxQDA was a useful function because parent-teacher dyad relationship was the case of analysis. I wanted to easily retrieve data chunks of a selected pair given the three different data sources – interviews, reflections, and observations. I created 12 data sets in total and each teacher was included in two data sets as each of the teachers worked with two different families. This helped me triangulate my assertions with the three different data sources at once because I did not have to go back and forth across data.

#### ***3.4.2 Coding***

*Coding is analysis* in qualitative research (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014).

Qualitative researchers use a coding process of reading their data and assigning codes to small

chunks of data. The codes may be several words or short phrases that are symbolic, descriptive, and categorical. The researchers name the codes that represent the meaning they derive from the data. The codes are assigned to all available forms of data: spoken language, written language, visuals, and sounds. Miles et al. (2014) defined the process as "a data condensation task that enables you [*the researcher, in this case*] to retrieve the most meaningful material, to assemble chunks of data that go together, and to further condense the bulk into readily analyzable units" (p.73). In this iterative process, researchers notice reoccurring patterns of codes that emerge from the data and gradually come to understand the social phenomenon and/or diverse perspectives.

For me, coding was also a rethinking process. Coding started with applying my understanding of the participants' experiences to the data. During data collection, I was fortunate enough to talk to teachers and parents in person. The more I interacted with them, the more I became aware of their perspectives on home visits, kindergarten transitions, and home-school relations. Reading and coding the data provided positive affirmation of what I perceived. Not surprisingly, there were moments when the data did not fully support my assertions and I eventually redirected my previous understanding I had gained from my personal interactions and experiences. For example, one of the participant teachers, Ms. Halverson, reported that she spent roughly an hour or more during her home visits, while other teachers stayed about 30-40 minutes on average. I interpreted this as her devotion to building close relationships with the parents. However, during parent interviews, Mr./Ms. Wilson and Mr. Dante did not necessarily describe their relationship with Ms. Halverson as an intimate bond. This gap was later explained during the end interview with Ms. Halverson. Due to the large class size, she was not able to maintain close relationships throughout the year. In this sense, the coding process went beyond breaking

the data into small chunks with assigned names. It was an ongoing and iterative process that led to in-depth understanding of the data.

**First-cycle coding.** I went through the two cycles of coding suggested by Saldaña (2012). Each cycle included a thorough reading of the data with a focus on assigning initial codes in the first cycle. I coded individual interviews, teacher home visit reflections, and home visit observations. I took an inductive approach to the data, which means codes were created as I read through the data. Before diving into the data, I developed primary codes as an initial list to plan and outline my analysis. Having these primary codes was especially important to condense my analysis into the research points and to avoid adding stand-alone codes. For the initial list, I revisited the protocols used for data collection and came up with categorical codes including teacher, family, school, home visits, and kindergarten transition. These codes included the primary stakeholders and social phenomenon I hoped to examine.

After the initial groundwork, I added subcodes under each primary code. I began with open descriptive coding, keeping in mind that it was critical to create labels that would describe concepts or themes representing participants' language, interactions, and experiences (Miles et al., 2014). While most of the codes were nouns or short phrases (e.g., parenting, idea of schooling, building trust), codes for human interactions were in sentence form like "parent shares child's characteristics," "parent shares strategies that work for child at home or school," and "teacher addresses parental concerns." Although I did not use direct quotes from the participants, this method is similar to in vivo coding (Saldana, 2012) in the way it prioritizes participants' actions and voices. Throughout the coding process, I revisited short memos in MaxQDA to check the reliability of my coding. When I was not sure about which code to assign to a data snippet, I put it in a tentative folder called "parking lot" to visit it later. By the time I finalized a

master code list, I had a much better understanding of the teachers' and parents' experiences from the summer home visits to the first few months of the kindergarten year, and I started to see respective instances that were positive, neutral, and not necessarily negative but flat.

**Second-cycle coding.** I revisited the data that were already coded in the first cycle, but this time I focused more on recurring themes. After collecting data from the six teachers and twelve families, I started data analysis with eighteen unique stories and experiences. During the second cycle, I began noticing similarities and differences across cases. The primary task at this stage was to code the emerging themes. Miles et al. (2014) explain,

First Cycle coding is a way to initially summarize segments of data. Pattern coding, as a Second Cycle method, is a way of grouping those summaries into a smaller number of categories, themes, or constructs... Pattern codes are explanatory or inferential codes, ones that identify an emergent theme, configuration, or explanation. They pull together a lot of material from First Cycle coding into more meaningful and parsimonious units of analysis. They are a sort of meta-code. (p.86)

At the stage of the pattern coding, I drew on the four constructs from the theoretical framework I used for this dissertation: process, person, context, and time (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). This deductive approach helped me examine how the constructs were interrelated and interdependent in the transition to kindergarten. By the end of the second cycle, I had developed a master code list.

### ***3.4.3 Memoing***

I used three types of memoing throughout the data analysis process: memos were written at the individual level, group level, and parent-teacher dyad level. At the early stage, the memos were reflective notes about what I learned from home visits and interviews with parents and teachers. These were more like “notes to myself” as a research assistant for the project. The ideas

and insights included in those memos revealed individual perspectives such as how parents and teachers made sense of their experiences with home visits and in support of the transition to kindergarten. I revisited these initial memos before reading the raw data because they allowed me to consider the social and cultural contexts in which participants were situated.

Throughout the coding process, I wrote analytical memos, which synthesized recurring patterns and themes across the data. I created separate memos for teachers and parents regarding what they shared about 1) school transition practices, 2) goals for teaching and learning in kindergarten, 3) home visit experiences, and 4) home-school relationships. I added exemplar quotes including both positive and neutral comments to each theme to present different points of view and opinions. These analytic memos provided a comprehensive understanding of the data and were further developed as a project report that provides details on the implementation of home visiting and lessons learned from the process.

Analytical memoing continued as I developed findings for this dissertation. Given that the purpose of this dissertation was to learn how home visiting facilitated *building relationships* to ease the transition to kindergarten, I realized that the parent-teacher dyad was the unit of analysis I was most interested in. Final memos emerged when I revisited the data with a focus on the dynamics from the parent-teacher dyads. This writing process guided my conceptual thinking to locate the kindergarten transition within human interactions. These memos demonstrated various ways parents and teachers collaborated with each other, and in a few cases, how teachers worked differently with each family depending on their particular needs. I organized the findings chapter based on these memos, detailing how the dyad relationships were formed through home visits and how they functioned throughout the year.

### 3.5 Summary

In this chapter, I discussed how this dissertation is situated within the broader Home Visit Project, focusing on the summer home visit program designed to support the transition to kindergarten. I detailed the participant selection process for this dissertation, ensuring a diverse representation of schools, teachers, and families to capture a wide range of experiences and perspectives. The data collection methods, including semi-structured interviews, teacher reflections, and home visit observations, provided a triangulated data set that enhances the depth and validity of the findings. The iterative data analysis process, facilitated by MaxQDA software, allowed for the emergence of nuanced themes and patterns grounded in the theoretical framework of bioecological perspectives.

The next chapter delves into the findings of this research, elucidating how home visits contribute to building relationships between teachers and families and support children's transition to kindergarten. These findings draw on the detailed data, highlighting the diverse experiences and interactions that shape the transition process.

## Chapter 4. Findings

In this chapter, I explore how parents and teachers built and sustained their relationships throughout the school year through home visits, and how these relationships promoted children's transition to kindergarten. The findings reveal how the parents and teachers applied their experience-based knowledge to their parenting and teaching practices. This chapter is divided into six sections describing each teacher and two home visit families. Each section starts with a teacher's personal and teaching background that shaped her interactions with the parents and perspectives on home visits. Then, I describe the two families the teacher visited, and how each family interacted with the teacher to help their child transition to a new school. At the end of each section, I discuss how the parents and teacher made sense of their experience and how home visits mediated (or did not mediate) their relationships.

Table 5. Overview of the teachers, parents, children transitioning to kindergarten

Section	Teacher	Parent(s)	Child	Child Gender
1	Ms. Schmidt	Ms. Avery	Alex	Male
		Ms. Bailey	Dan	Male
2	Ms. Carney	Ms. Rose	Diego	Male
		Ms. Grace	Emma	Female
3	Ms. Fried	Ms. Howard	Maya	Female
		Ms. Paine	Mia	Female
4	Ms. Hanson	Ms. Mandell	Aria	Female
		Mr. and Ms. Lopez	Dylan	Male
5	Ms. Halverson	Mr. and Ms. Wilson	Nelly	Female
		Mr. Dante	Nancy	Female
6	Ms. McDougal	Ms. Miller	Tom	Male
		Ms. Sherr	Taylor	Female



#### **4.1. Ms. Schmidt and two families**

##### **Teacher Ms. Schmidt at Harbor Elementary School**

Ms. Schmidt is a White woman who had been teaching kindergarten for seven consecutive years. She started her teaching career in her 50s after receiving her master's degree in elementary education and teaching pre-kindergarten through 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Harbor Elementary School (Harbor, hereafter) was her second school, and she was in her fourth-year teaching at the time of the home visit project. Her end goal for kindergartners was meeting the state standards. She said, "Academic work is what we do; kindergarten is less about play but more academics" (Ms. Schmidt Interview 1, 11/12/18). She was proud that seven of her seventeen students joined a higher math class for gifted children. Ms. Schmidt said that seeing students making progress was when teaching felt like a very rewarding job.

Harbor is a newer school in the district located in a quiet residential area. The community around the school is visibly fresh, and the school is surrounded by newly built houses with only one bus line available at the time. Ms. Schmidt appreciated Harbor's convenient facilities (e.g., bathrooms in the classroom, great custodial services, and extra storage to keep her bins with instructional materials) because her previous school did not have these amenities.

She reported that both schools where she had worked were "poverty schools" serving economically challenged populations, although parents in Harbor were slightly better well-off. This was an interesting point because according to the demographics, only 35% of the students at Harbor were eligible to free or reduced lunch, which was below the district average. Her perception likely reflected her great care about the families who faced barriers engaging with the schools. Their lower levels of school involvement stood out to Ms. Schmidt compared to those of more affluent families. The race/ethnicity breakdown at the time of the interview was relatively

diverse: 52% were White, 42% were Black, 13% Asian, with 8% Hispanic or Latino(a), and 7% were multiracial. The school population was largely divided between students from the immediate neighborhood and students who rode a bus to school. Ms. Schmidt often expressed concern about students living far away and their parents who could not attend school events due to the lack of transportation or non-traditional work hours.

They don't all come. I mean, even coming to Ready-Set-Go meetings [first parent-teacher conferences] in the beginning of the year is difficult for our families. And that's why I like the home visits. That really helps these parent-teacher conferences. The ones that I'm calling are the ones that are more disadvantaged. What does it take? We'll get them here. We have cab service for those very special things [like] for parent-teacher conferences. But I have to call and call to see if they'll come. (Ms. Schmidt Interview 1, 11/12/18)

For a smooth transition to kindergarten, Ms. Schmidt said that it was important to meet the families before the first day of school and have them visit her classroom. Over the years at Harbor, she witnessed that families in high poverty were less likely to come to school; thus, she made an extra effort to bring them in. She sought community support such as contacting churches to see if they had vans to help the families get to school for classroom visits. However, despite her numerous calls to families and transportation services provided by the school, Ms. Schmidt had not seen a tremendous increase in the number of families coming to school, which motivated her to participate in the home visit project. She wanted to see if home visits in the summer might be beneficial for families who struggled to meet her in person at school.

**Teacher Ms. Schmidt and Ms. Avery, Alex's mother**

Ms. Avery is a stay-at-home mother with four children. Alex, who was going to be in Ms. Schmidt's class, was the second child and he had three sisters ages 7, 2, and 17 months. Alex's older sister had gone to a Catholic school since kindergarten and his two younger sisters stayed at home with Ms. Avery. The mother preferred Catholic schools for religious reasons but enrolled Alex in a public elementary school because of the individualized educational plan (IEP). She wanted Alex to learn and thrive in kindergarten and believed that Catholic schools could not accommodate his developmental needs including pronouncing words and recognizing letters and numbers. Her current marriage was a second marriage for Ms. Avery. Mr. Avery worked full-time and also had a part-time job to support the family. Although Mr. Avery had a busy schedule with work, he managed to be present at both home visits. Mr. Avery was well aware of Alex's needs and behaviors and played a supportive role together with Ms. Avery. The family lived on the second floor of a building in a large apartment complex off a busy road. On the apartment door, there were instructions about taking care before entering the home as the youngest child had immune deficiencies. Ms. Avery let us know that the youngest had faced serious health problems for over a year, which led to hospitalizations, hence the warning on the door (RA HV1 Note, 8/15/18).

Home visits played an important role in building a good relationship between Ms. Avery and Ms. Schmidt. Ms. Schmidt's first home visit in mid-August included several getting-to-know-you moments. Ms. Schmidt was open with Mr. and Ms. Avery about her recent family events (e.g., having a grandchild, summer plans) and told the parents that she was very dedicated to advocating for her children academically, emotionally, and physically. Ms. Avery seemed eager to have the chance to converse with Ms. Schmidt (RA HV1 Note, 8/15/18). By both being

open, they shared a sensitive but important issue related to Alex's biological father. Ms. Schmidt noted in her reflection, "Mom informed me that the biological father has now reentered Alex's life and he stays with dad twice a week. All pickups and drop-offs of Alex for these sleepovers occur at their home not at school. Mom has sole custody of Alex" (Ms. Schmidt HV1 Note, 8/15/18). During the visit, Ms. Avery and Ms. Schmidt had in-depth conversations about Alex living in two households as Ms. Avery was concerned about how it might affect him when he already was facing adjustment to a new school, friends, and teachers.

Based on information about Alex's home life after the visits, Ms. Schmidt invited Alex to join the Cub Scouts after the school year started, which Ms. Avery very appreciated. Ms. Schmidt explained the motive behind this suggestion:

I just see Alex really needs male role models, although there are a very few females (in the Cub Scouts). In fact, the person in charge of the Cub Scouts is a female in this area from K-5th grade. There's a lot of den guys, the den—whatever it's called, the den fathers, anyhow, den leaders, they're males, and both of them need good male role models. Because Alex, he's on and off—his stepfather—but his stepfather and he clash a lot, and the stepfather works a lot. (Ms. Schmidt Interview 2, 5/16/19)

Ms. Schmidt thought that Alex would benefit from interacting with males other than his biological father and Mr. Avery after noticing behavior changes depending on whom he had stayed with. At the same time, the teacher understood that Ms. Avery had her hands full with her young child with health concerns, so she volunteered to take Alex twice a month to the Cub Scouts activities. In the interview with Ms. Avery, she said that the teacher offered this opportunity because Alex really wanted to join the Scouts. In fact, Alex had been asking when he could go to Cub Scouts after seeing his older sister participating in Girl Scouts.

I kept thinking in the back of my head, that's probably never going to happen, because I can't take you and the kids, and you don't listen when we're out in

public. And so, when the form came home and Ms. Schmidt volunteered herself and said, “I will take him – if you sign him up, I will take him.” And I’m like, “This is awesome.” Because I didn’t bring it up, because I didn’t think that was ever an option. But she said, “If you sign him up, I’ll take him. Don’t worry about it – I understand what’s going on at home.” And from there, it’s been great. I am very grateful for her. I am very, very grateful for her. (Ms. Avery Interview 1, 12/7/18)

Joining the Cub Scouts naturally created more face-to-face communication whenever Ms. Schmidt took Alex to the activities. These quick check-ins were especially meaningful for Ms. Avery who could make only a few school visits throughout the year. In addition, Ms. Schmidt and Ms. Avery frequently communicated through the phone application called Class Dojo. At the first home visit, the teacher discovered Ms. Avery’s communication needs and gave Ms. Avery her personal cell phone number to overcome any technology barriers.

Mom is clearly willing to communicate with me on a regular basis and I gave her my cell as well as discussed how I use Class Dojo and the school folder and email as other forms of communication. I learned there is no computer in the household. (Ms. Schmidt HV1 Note, 8/15/18)

Ms. Avery’s hope for close communication was related to Alex’s experience of being kicked out of five different daycare centers before kindergarten. Moreover, her own schooling experience growing up in the same district was not pleasant. Ms. Schmidt acknowledged her wariness, by noting: “As mom told me her story of being a ward of the state and having an extremely poor schooling experience, I could sense her trepidation for her son in the school system” (Ms. Schmidt HV1 Note, 8/15/18).

Ms. Avery’s communication with Alex’s previous care providers was not positive because he kept getting kicked out of daycares when he was a two- and three-year-old. Ms. Avery used different modes of communication including e-mails, phone calls, and in-person meetings with teachers believing that frequent check-ins would help them support Alex in

daycare. To her disappointment, the teachers told Ms. Avery that they could not handle Alex. When asked about the differences between her communication with Ms. Schmidt and previous care providers, she added that openness was the key to building a reciprocal relationship with Ms. Schmidt: "keeping our communication completely open, being pretty up front, and being honest about what's happening at home and at school" (Ms. Avery Interview 2, 5/21/19). From my observations, Ms. Avery's willingness to be vulnerable was one way to let the teacher know, "I trust you." The home visits were great opportunities for Ms. Avery to speak frankly about her struggles and challenges, and for Ms. Schmidt to see Ms. Avery as a strong advocate for Alex, a loving, responsible mother who took care of Alex and two younger children under the age of 3 including one with special needs.

**Teacher Ms. Schmidt and Ms. Bailey, Dan's mother**

Ms. Bailey is a White, single mother with two children: Dan in kindergarten and his older sister in fourth grade in Harbor Elementary School. Ms. and Mr. Bailey were divorced and shared 50-50 custody of their two children, which meant that the children regularly went back and forth between houses. Both parents were four-year college graduates and owned houses separately in relatively well-off areas. Co-parenting was part of their lives as they were both heavily involved in their children's school lives. Both parents were present at Ms. Schmidt's home visits and also attended teacher-parent conferences together. Although I invited both parents to participate in the interview, only Ms. Bailey agreed to participate.

Ms. Bailey worked full-time in a real estate company, so her children participated in various extracurricular activities after school. Her parents lived a few blocks away and took care of the children occasionally when there were no scheduled activities after school. Because Ms. Bailey had always worked, Dan had attended a private daycare center since he was a baby. When Dan turned four, Ms. Bailey enrolled him in 4K at Harbor for an easier transition to kindergarten. Ms. Bailey believed that his experiences in the daycare center and 4K made the transition to kindergarten quite easy because Dan was used to being in group settings and structured learning environments.

Home visiting helped Ms. Schmidt learn about Dan's baseline skills at the beginning of the year and supported his smooth transition to kindergarten by providing developmentally appropriate instruction (Ms. Schmidt Interview 1, 11/12/18). While some teachers who participated in the home visit project worried about the increasingly high academic expectations in kindergarten, Ms. Schmidt seemed to support the expectations and devoted herself to helping her students meet the standards. She was very explicit about her kindergarten classroom as a

place for academic growth and believed it was less about play. While driving to the home visits or waiting for families to arrive, she proudly shared stories with me about her students' accomplishments with difficult tasks including increased executive function skills, fine motor skills, and cognitive development. I could sense her teaching efficacy in witnessing her students' developmental progression in learning trajectories.

Ms. Schmidt's home visit with Ms. Bailey helped Ms. Schmidt strategically identify her expectations for Dan's areas for growth and the two women set shared goals for the kindergarten year. In the post interview when Ms. Bailey recollected the home visits, the first thing she remembered was the thought-provoking questions the teacher asked. Before kindergarten, Ms. Bailey attended parent-teacher conferences in preschool twice a year and was told about Dan's strengths and weaknesses, as well as strategies that would help him overcome his challenges. This is probably a common experience for many parents. In the parent-teacher conferences, parents typically listen to the teacher's assessment of their children's progress reports. However, the interaction between Ms. Bailey and Ms. Schmidt was somewhat different when they first met. Ms. Bailey recounted:

It's especially good for us to talk about and make us think about what things we want him to learn and what things we expect out of kindergarten. So, I think, just us talking about those things — she [Ms. Schmidt] asked us, "What are your expectations, what are your hopes, what do you want to focus on?"  
(Ms. Bailey Interview 2, 5/6/19)

Rather than telling the family what kindergarten would be like, Ms. Schmidt wanted to learn about Dan's needs through conversations with his parents. She also acknowledged the parents' enthusiasm about education, which Ms. Bailey also admitted: "Sometimes I think I have really high expectations of my kids and I have to remember that they're kids" (Ms. Bailey Interview 2, 5/6/19). In Ms. Schmidt's field notes, she wrote:



Parents admitted listening and being focused is an area that they have been working on with Dan. They clearly understand Dan is a high-energy kid. Mother was curious about homework, and I explained there is some but not daily, and I give the students a week to complete the work when there is any homework. (Ms. Schmidt HV1 Note, 8/24/18)

The parents' main concern was how to help Dan learn better listening skills. Thus, a fair portion of the teacher's reflection comments were devoted to strategies she would like to try such as teaching him to be more self-aware of his own behaviors or working out problems with his peers. Given the parents' interest in what Dan would learn in kindergarten, Ms. Schmidt also made a note to herself about sending home his daily work, homework, and the weekly newsletter to help the parents learn about the types of experiences Dan had during the week.

When I followed up at the end of the fall semester, Ms. Bailey said that she was very satisfied with the way the teacher communicated about Dan's learning progress. She received frequent updates through Class Dojo, like "Dan was on task" or "Dan did great in listening." For Ms. Bailey, the transition to kindergarten went smoothly as she heard good things about Dan's experiences and felt like she was on the same page with the teacher.

She has high expectations, which I love – you know, I want her to keep him in line and make him focus on the task that they're working on. I think that's really important, especially for Dan, because he's so busy-busy-busy with, you know, all the things going on in his head [laughs]. I'd say my relationship with her is good, and she's open, and has good communication. (Ms. Bailey Interview 1, 12/6/18)

In addition to learning about the parents' desires for their child, Ms. Schmidt learned important aspects of Dan's home life through home visits. Dan and his sister lived in two households because the parents shared custody. The siblings spent a few days at each parent's home splitting up the week, and rotated visits with one parent every other weekend. The first home visit took place at Mr. Bailey's soon-to-be home. In Ms. Schmidt's field notes, she wrote:

I learned that Dan's father has not formally moved into the home at the time of our visit, as the house was completely empty. Once the mother, Dan, and his sister arrived, we introduced ourselves to each other and sat in a circle on the living room floor. Dan seemed very excited to find an empty house to run through without the obstacles of furniture and then have the fun of picking his bedroom out. (Ms. Schmidt HV1 Note, 8/24/18)

During the interview, Ms. Bailey told me that they had never been to Mr. Bailey's new house, and it was a good opportunity for her to look around the place where the kids would spend a fair amount of their time. She also thought the home visit itself was a more effective explanation of the family's context, rather than simply telling Ms. Schmidt about Dan's split schedule.

I think it's probably helpful for the teacher to see what kind of environment Dan is living in, and for her to understand because we were at my ex-husband's house where Dan is half the time. We did not meet at my house though. Just for a good understanding of what Dan's home life is like, you know, so that helps her understand him better. (Ms. Bailey Interview 1, 12/6/18)

Ms. Schmidt told me that she collected a lot of information just by watching the children's interaction with their parents, especially with their father. She usually witnessed fathers who were minimally involved in their children's schooling, but it was not the case for Dan. Mr. Bailey participated in both visits and also came to all of the parent-teacher conferences at school. Based on her observations of how Dan's parents managed two households, Ms. Schmidt noted, "The family seems to be able to balance two separate lives with two children with certain ease" (Ms. Schmidt HV1 Note, 8/24/18).

Apart from home visits, Ms. Schmidt spent her personal time after work connecting with her students and their families, which was not true of all teachers in this study. In the closing interview, Ms. Bailey brought up an episode when the teacher showed up at Dan's hockey game

on the weekend, an extracurricular activity he had been participating in throughout the kindergarten year.

Ms. Schmidt actually came to one of Dan's hockey practices to support him, which was so cool. He was amazed that his teacher came to a hockey practice. You know, that was cool because it was an out-of-school event. She came and chatted with me and my parents and my daughter. Really cool. She said, "When does he have practice? I'd love to come and see him." So, that was cool. (Ms. Bailey Interview 2, 5/6/19)

As a qualitative researcher, I was trying to understand the nuances in her words. When she shared this experience of having the teacher at a non-school event, I could clearly sense the excitement and surprise in her voice. This one-time event seemed to mean a lot to Dan, Ms. Bailey, and the extended family members.

Ms. Schmidt talked about the same episode, saying that it was worth spending her non-contract hours if it could reinforce the home-school relationship she had already built through home visits. It was also her way of valuing family time outside of school and showing how much she cared about her students. She described her intention to build a strong relationship:

Forging a better relationship by being a learning partner with Alex, being willing to talk and listen. And for Dan, making that effort to go see him on a Saturday play hockey. And then meeting his grandmother and grandfather who were there watching too, so that extended family. You know, I know them better, I'm more comfortable, and they're more comfortable talking to me and asking questions. Whereas other families (without home visits), I'm not sure if they're as comfortable (as the families with home visits). (Ms. Schmidt Interview 2, 5/6/19)

Ms. Schmidt repeatedly talked about the comfort level she had with the families she had visited through the home visit program. Even when I probed, by reminding her of having to make two visits, she made it clear that "they know me and we have a stronger connection." Having met all of Dan's family members through the visits may have helped the teacher seek

more relationship-building opportunities. In this sense, home visiting served as a cornerstone of close home-school relations for Ms. Schmidt.

### **Summary**

The teacher, Ms. Schmidt, and Alex's mother, Ms. Avery, established a bond based on trust during the home visits and maintained a good connection throughout the year. As a mother of four, it was difficult for Ms. Avery to attend the school events including open house and parent-teacher conferences. Ms. Schmidt realized Ms. Avery's daily struggles during their first meeting and created opportunities for regular face-to-face conversations by volunteering to take Alex to Cub Scouts activities. Ms. Schmidt also had frequent check-ins through phone calls to Ms. Avery, knowing that it was her preferred mode of communication. Ms. Avery believed the time and effort Ms. Schmidt spent facilitated Alex's transition to kindergarten. This experience was in contrast to his previous experiences in several preschools where he was kicked out for behavioral issues. Meeting the teacher where Ms. Avery felt most comfortable facilitated open communication about the family's concerns. This led Ms. Schmidt to implement more individualized strategies because she had learned what she called "private things" before the school year started. Ms. Schmidt believed that home visiting helped Ms. Avery feel more comfortable approaching her, which is essential for home-school partnerships.

Ms. Schmidt worked with each family differently based on the knowledge she gained from the home visits. Ms. Schmidt learned that Dan's mother, Ms. Bailey, managed a two-household family after her divorce and had little time to spare between her work and home life. This provided background information about Ms. Bailey's limited involvement in school activities. Ms. Schmidt also acknowledged that Ms. Bailey had great interest in how Dan was adapting to the more rigorous academic requirements in kindergarten. Given Ms. Bailey's busy

work schedule, the two women decided that using a phone application was an effective mode of communication. Throughout the year, Ms. Schmidt gave frequent updates on how Dan did at school to make sure that Ms. Bailey was on the same page about Dan's learning progress. Ms. Bailey appreciated these little updates and believed that ongoing communication was a key to maintaining a good relationship with Ms. Schmidt.

## 4.2. Ms. Carney and two families

### Teacher Ms. Carney at Maret Elementary School

Ms. Carney is a White woman in her 20s who had been teaching kindergarten at Maret Elementary School (Maret, hereafter) for 5 years. Maret was her first school after she earned her teaching certificate in early childhood education. At the time of the study, she had two children under five. Although she was busy with her own children, she voluntarily responded to our project invitation e-mail and wondered how home visits would make a difference in the school year. Ms. Carney said she had thought about doing home visits herself because some of her colleagues teaching in other grades were doing home visits on their own, so the home visit project was well timed for her.

I was hoping to get to know my students better and to know their families better so there was more open communication, so I had more of an idea of what goes on at home, so I could respond to the students' needs in school, and so I could respond to their behaviors better as well. Just understanding where they live, who they live with, what they like to do together, understanding more about that. (Ms. Carney Interview 1, 11/30/18)

Ms. Carney made home visits in the summer as scheduled. Because her own children were at home, her youngest child accompanied her to some of the home visits. Ms. Carney was quite responsive in communication. Most of the time she sent me her home visit reflections on the same day of the visit or the next day and frequently gave me updates on her progress. When I had email conversations with participating kindergarten teachers, Ms. Carney was almost always the first one to reply. Parents also appreciated this responsiveness by saying that Ms. Carney never missed replying to their texts and e-mails. Ms. Carney also actively engaged in communication with parents. She was one of only a few participating teachers who directly contacted families to set up the home visits. Although she had the option to have me set up the

home visits, she chose to do her own scheduling and said, "It [scheduling her own visits] wasn't too bad. I think it would have been weird to have somebody else schedule home visits. It just made sense for me to do it" (Ms. Carney Interview 1, 1/3/19). She did not consider contacting parents to be time-consuming but believed it was a chance to speak with them directly.

Ms. Carney described Maret as a tight-knit community school where students live close to the school. She believed that a nice benefit of working at Maret was to see parents frequently as they often walked their children to school. Because of this, Ms. Carney met nine of the fifteen families on a daily basis during drop-offs and pick-ups. The other six students either took a bus or attended after-school programs at Maret. Ms. Carney said that she had fewer opportunities to have in-person conversations with the parents of these students.

Maret served a racially and ethnically diverse population: 40% Black, 26% White, 14% Hispanic or Latino(a), 9% Asian, and 11% multiracial at the time of this project. Ms. Carney reported that the school had students from predominantly low-income families. According to the school profile, 76% of the students received free/reduced lunch. When asked what it was like to be a kindergarten teacher at Maret, Ms. Carney said "it's difficult." She further described the hardship:

We get kids ranging from not having any school at all to already reading when they come in. It really varies, which is very difficult to differentiate teaching to reach all of those kids to give them what they need. We find quite a few behavior issues in our classrooms due to trauma, things that happened outside of school. I mean, things that kids are born with naturally as well, which I'm sure there is in all schools, but I really feel like we have a high population of kids who have, you know, pretty significant behavior problems. (Ms. Carney Interview 1, 11/30/18)

Students' learning gaps and behavioral issues made Ms. Carney wonder more about their home lives and eventually led her to participate in the home visit project. She believed that

students' behavioral issues were deeply rooted in their home situations but there was no way for her to know their situations beforehand unless social workers or nurses told her. The learning gap was another challenge she acknowledged given the more academically rigorous curriculum in kindergarten. Ms. Carney said that the wider the gap in what students brought, the harder it was for her to individually respond to the students' needs. This was a big issue for her as a teacher having firm perceptions of what schools should provide for students and what students should do to learn. She described her philosophy:

My goals for my students are rigorous and achievable. Students need to come to school every day in order to learn. They have weekly goals to complete work. They receive feedback about how they are doing and what they need to work on. Students know they come to school to learn, so they can be smarter, so they can graduate and go to college so they can get a good job in order to help others. (Ms. Carney Interview 2, 6/3/19)

Ms. Carney endeavored to provide goal-oriented instruction for her students to meet kindergarten standards. One time she showed me her attendance charts and student portfolios to keep track of students' learning throughout the kindergarten year. In her words, it was her way of demonstrating her students' learning and academic achievement in the classroom. She said that her efforts to better meet kindergarten goals paid off when parents were also actively involved in their children's learning in school. She believed that parents are her partners to facilitate an enriched learning experience for their children. Given the importance of communication between the two, she seemed a bit upset when she could not reach the families.

There's a few families that are really hard to get ahold of. You call and you call, and they don't respond. If you text, they don't respond back. So, I have no idea if they're getting it ... Zoe's family, the one you went to, they're very hard to get ahold of. Jose is having health issues as well, and it's very frustrating. To not be able to contact them [the parents] and talk to them about it, like when it's happening during the day. They don't answer their phone,



they don't call back—for me or for the nurse. (Ms. Carney Interview 1, 11/30/18)

Ms. Carney joined the home visit project with hopes and expectations that it could affect academics by building close relationships with parents. She wanted to see the difference between families with home visits and those without. In the second week of the school year, I asked how the first day of school went, and if meeting her students prior to the school year had helped. She met ten of the thirteen (eight students through home visits, two at an open house event) and said home visiting was very helpful. However, at the end of the year, she expressed the opposite opinion on home visits saying, "I will not choose to do home visits (in the future). It was more work than what we got out of it. It was difficult as well as rosters were not correct and registration occurs so late that home visits would not be plausible to do" (Ms. Carney Interview 2, 6/3/19). The next section describes how two of her home-visit families experienced home visits and their thoughts on the relationships with Ms. Carney, and eventually how their stories might have influenced Ms. Carney's changing perspective on home visiting.

**Teacher Ms. Carney and Ms. Rose, Diego's mother**

Ms. Rose, Diego's mother, grew up in a large family from Mexico. While her family was originally from Mexico, Ms. Rose was born in a large city in Illinois. Her family moved frequently until they settled down in the city when Ms. Rose was in junior high school. She attended junior high and high school in the school district where Maret Elementary School was located and then earned a college associate of arts (AA) degree. Mr. and Ms. Rose were hard-working parents: Mr. Carney worked full time at a restaurant and Ms. Carney worked at a call center 10 hours every day except Thursdays. She walked Diego to school on her day off. At the time of the study, three generations lived together in the house: Mr. and Ms. Rose, Diego's grandparents, Diego, and his younger brother. Mr. and Ms. Rose could work full time because Diego's grandmother was retired and cared for the kids while the parents were at work. This free child care allowed the parents to work full time, so their family income was above the threshold for free/reduced lunch eligibility.

Diego was the oldest child and the first to attend kindergarten. Ms. Rose was worried about Diego's transition to kindergarten due to his lack of English language proficiency. Spanish was Diego's main language because he spent most of his time at home with his Spanish-speaking grandparents. Although Ms. Rose was fluent in English, she did not have adequate time to play and interact with Diego after she returned home from work. Ms. Rose also reported that Diego had not attended center-based early childhood education settings prior to kindergarten. According to Ms. Rose, Diego spent most of the day playing independently doing video games, soccer, Legos, drawing, or coloring. Diego attended half-day 4K and summer school at Maret, but Ms. Rose did not think it was enough for him to meet the academic demands in kindergarten.

or for him to be organized in the classroom. Ms. Rose shared these concerns with Ms. Carney during the first home visit.

During the first interview, Ms. Rose shared her unfamiliar feelings about having Ms. Carney in her home. Home visits as well as communicating with Diego's teacher were relatively new experiences for her. Since her time was very limited due to her long hours at work, Ms. Rose could not attend the parent-teacher conferences at Diego's 4K and did not have many opportunities to talk with the summer school teachers. Ms. Rose accepted the home visit offer mainly because she thought it would be a great introduction for Diego to meet his kindergarten teacher and vice versa. In the interview with Ms. Rose, she shared her thoughts about the home visit:

I thought it was kind of weird at first. I don't know, because whatever experience you have like, a teacher in your house. I thought it was weird. But I gave it a try because I thought it would be good for Diego. Because he didn't really want to have a different teacher – he wanted to have the same 4K teacher. And I tried to explain to him, “You can't have the same one.” I think that was good because it got him into the mindset that she was going to be his teacher and not his 4K teacher anymore. (Ms. Rose Interview 1, 1/3/19)

Ms. Rose repeatedly said that the home visits were for her son with the purpose of introducing Diego to his new teacher. When asked about how home visits helped her build a connection with the teacher, Ms. Rose said that she felt that she learned more about Ms. Carney personally because she was there with her “baby son” during the visit. She expressed her sentiment as a working mother: “I got to see her, like, not just as a teacher and she does have like a different role as a mom” (Ms. Rose Interview 1, 1/3/19). Ms. Rose also described the visits as more about talking and going over the information about kindergarten expectations, paperwork, and logistical issues.

After the school year started, Ms. Rose and Ms. Carney worked to enhance Diego's English proficiency throughout the year. A large part of Ms. Carney's first home visit reflection was about Diego's language skills, especially about writing and reading in English. She wrote the following note to Diego:

I really enjoyed talking to you and learning about you and your family. I can tell we are going to have fun this year in kindergarten and was excited to see that you can already write your name! This year I hope I can teach you how to read and to help you be confident in your English skills. I am so excited to have you in my class! (Ms. Carney HV1 Note, 8/2/18)

Ms. Rose enrolled Diego in the after-school homework program because she did not have a lot of time to help him do the homework and practice at home. Ms. Carney communicated with the after-school program to let them know that Diego needed work retrieving English words more quickly and experiencing less confusion. Ms. Carney and Ms. Rose mainly communicated through an app called Bloomz where they both could send messages to each other. Ms. Carney actively used it to comment specifically on Diego's areas of growth. Ms. Rose reflected on these notes in the interview:

Ms. Carney has let me know the things that he needs to work on. I tried to implement that at home like "You gotta do this." She's told me that he needs more work on sight words and the sounds. She would like him to be able to do more Lexia and read in the Lexia. Also, she told me that he played with one friend. So, I have talked with him, "You have to learn to work with other people too." And she texted me and we text each other and she would tell me [things]. (Ms. Rose Interview 2, 5/2/19)

When it comes to Diego's academic progress and his peer relationships, Ms. Carney clearly led the way. Ms. Rose received information about Diego from Ms. Carney so the parents could help him make progress and incorporate the strategies at home. This is how they collaborated according to Ms. Rose. Ms. Carney also sent regular notifications and pictures of

the kids once a semester, posted questions about parent-teacher conferences and links for sign-up times. Since the app was designed for two-way communication, Ms. Rose sent messages to Ms. Carney as well, mostly about logistical issues such as “Diego will be absent,” or “late for school” or Diego is sick.”

Ms. Carney felt strongly that schools should and could provide guidance on family situations. For the home visit families, the project team offered the option to replace their first parent-teacher meetings called Ready-Set-Go (RSG) with the second round of home visits. However, Ms. Carney preferred that her family go to school and eventually did all of her second home visits at school just like normal RSG meetings. Ms. Carney justified the benefits of RSGs being held at the school:

My student’s mom had more questions about school and needed to make sure he was signed up for after-school [program]. This is why it is nice to have RSG conferences at school as there are the correct adults around to answer questions that I cannot. (Ms. Carney RSG Note, 8/30/18)

When asked about how Ms. Carney incorporated what she learned from the home visits into her daily practice in the classroom, her answer was that she saw little to no connection. Home and school were separate entities to her. She seemed to be disappointed that there was no difference between students who had home visits and those without them in terms of school attendance and academic performance. Home visits also had nothing to do with building community and a partnership with the families because it was something she did with all students and families throughout the year (Ms. Carney Interview 2, 6/3/19). A one-time home visit was more of a chance to see the environment students came from. Ms. Rose also indicated that home visits had little influence on her relationship with Ms. Carney. When I asked Ms. Rose about the benefits of home visits as a parent, she answered, "Oh, for me? For me it's okay. It's

not really beneficial for me... I mean because, I feel like even though if I don't see her in the home interview, I'm going to see her anyway at school" (Ms. Rose Interview 2, 5/2/19).

**Teacher Ms. Carney and Ms. Grace, Emma's mother**

Ms. Grace is White and a mother of two. Emma was in Ms. Carney's class and her four-year-old brother Jack was attending 4K. Ms. Grace was also a student majoring in creative writing at a four-year university. She had been living with her boyfriend for almost ten years and they shared responsibility for the children. Her boyfriend worked full-time but the family was eligible to receive free or reduced lunch. It was not easy for Ms. Grace to manage child-rearing and studies at the same time, and she planned to get a job after graduation.

Before Emma entered kindergarten, she went to a daycare for two years. Ms. Grace explained that the cost of five-day, full-time daycare was somewhat overwhelming for the family, so she decided to enroll Emma in an all-day daycare twice a week and added part-time care when she had classes. When Emma turned four years old, Ms. Grace enrolled Emma in 4K at Cruz elementary school, not at Maret elementary school where Emma went to kindergarten. Ms. Grace chose Cruz because it was on the way to the university, making it more convenient to drop off and pick up Emma from 4K.

Although it was hard for her to juggle her class schedule at the university and Emma's part-time 4K program, Ms. Grace believed that the 4K program at Cruz was extremely helpful for Emma's transition to kindergarten. She said 4K was "more of a structured school setting" where Emma became familiar with the structure of kindergarten (although Emma attended kindergarten at Maret) and learned the idea of real schooling with reading and writing activities. Her concerns about Emma entering kindergarten included her short concentration span and basic literacy skills, "Emma could only write her shortened name. She would read quite well but I do not know how well she does in writing" (Ms. Grace Interview 1, 9/24/18).

In late July, Ms. Grace and Emma first met their kindergarten teacher Ms. Carney at a public library. Ms. Grace asked Ms. Carney to meet outside of their home because of the family's energetic dog at home. Ms. Grace did not want their first meeting to be in a place that would be distracting but she wanted to have quality time getting to know each other. She recalled the meeting as a nice introduction and good question-and-answer session, "Ms. Carney asked things [like] what Emma knew and could do, and what I wanted her to learn. Emma does very well when she's confident but if she is shy, she does not do too much or does not try too much" (Ms. Grace Interview 1, 9/24/18). She also added that the first day of kindergarten was a lot less intimidating for both herself and Emma because of this warm-up meeting. Ms. Carney described Ms. Grace's parenting attitude as a bright side in her reflection.

Ms. Grace seems supportive of her boyfriend and of their kids. She is teaching her kids some Spanish and sign language. She seems interested and involved in Emma's education and her further development of academic skills. This is a definite strength. (Ms. Carney HV1 Note, 7/27/18)

Another one of Ms. Carney's home visit reflections focused on students' specific language skills and their parents' support for their children's learning. She noted the alphabet letters students could write and made additional notes if the letters were upside down or in mirror image, which implied her great interest in her students' learning trajectory.

Ms. Carney's second round of home visits took place in her classroom as Ready-Set-Go (RSG) conferences. Ms. Carney again identified RSG conferences as the key transition practice, indicating that it was more intensive and effective because it allowed both parents and teachers to learn from each other. The district provided general guidelines including the purpose and suggested the content, but the teachers mostly had discretion on how to spend the time with the parents. In Ms. Carney's case, she went over a kindergarten orientation packet including



information about school operation, lunch, busing, and other details, and then asked about the parent's concerns and wishes for their children. During the RSG conference, Ms. Grace discussed her concern about Emma's lack of concentration. She noted that Emma's teacher in daycare suggested a particular strategy that worked for Emma (i.e., holding something in her hands during a lesson). Below is a snippet from my field notes showing how Ms. Grace and Ms. Carney arrived at a mutually acceptable strategy for strengthening Emma's attentiveness:

Ms. Carney: Like balls to squeeze?

Ms. Grace: Yes.

Ms. Carney: Did you find that having her sit with fewer kids around was helpful?

Ms. Grace: Yes, maybe. But I think if she is around friends that she knows well, she is likely to get involved in play more deeply.

Ms. Carney: Okay, sitting with new kids will help her concentrate. We will have her interact with other kids. It's good to know because I'm working on seating charts right now. (Ms. Rose, RSG Note, 9/5/2018)

While Ms. Carney imagined that the number of peers sitting around the child could affect the child's concentration, Ms. Grace suggested that familiarity might be a stronger factor. Ms. Grace mentioned that a female classmate had grown up with Emma in the same neighborhood and she was still very close to Emma. This was an important source of information for Ms. Carney when organizing her classroom and, specifically, her classroom's seating arrangement. Ms. Carney told Ms. Grace that kindergarten has a more regimented schedule than daycare centers. She further explained that a day in kindergarten includes activities ranging from subject-based tasks to a short recess, and some of the scheduled activities require significant concentration.

Ms. Grace and Ms. Carney spent the last portion of the meeting establishing social-emotional goals for Emma. Ms. Carney introduced three goals determined by the kindergarten team at Maret: (1) kindergartners should recognize the feelings of others and respond to them, (2) kindergartners should follow simple group rules, and (3) kindergartners should tell others what they need. Then, Ms. Grace identified two areas in which Emma already excelled and the areas in which Emma needed to make improvements.

Ms. Grace: I noticed that solving conflict has been hard for her especially when she plays with others. She often fights but quickly becomes friends again.

Ms. Carney: Then we should work on having her respond to how other kids are feeling?

Ms. Grace: Yes, but Emma is good at the third item.

Ms. Carney: Anything that you are looking for the student to learn this year?

Ms. Grace: I want her to respect others, not pushing, not yelling, those are things we have been telling her a lot. (Ms. Grace, RSG Note, 9/5/2018)

Ms. Carney said that the second meeting was a good opportunity for the parents to understand the goals that students would be working on in school. Directly talking to parents who know their children best saved time for Ms. Carney's in identifying the social-emotional goals that were expected at Maret. This meeting lasted about 30 minutes, which was shorter than the average home visit that was typically 45-60 minutes. Ms. Carney ended the meeting by asking about Ms. Grace's opinion about the frequent check-ins related to Emma's homework and about the classroom newsletters.

After the conference, Ms. Grace communicated with Ms. Carney mostly through text and through a phone application, which she indicated as Ms. Carney's preferred way of communication. One time she got a call from Ms. Carney when Emma had a problem sitting

still. Figuring out ways to help her not move around in the school setting required a deeper conversation. As Ms. Carney had requested, Ms. Grace helped Emma practice sitting for a longer time during dinner and homework time at home. The newsletter was another communication mode Ms. Grace said was helpful to receive information about Emma's school life.

Newsletters were for communication on what they're learning. Ms. Carney sent a weekly email newsletter. It was just like a one-page thing [about] just kind of what we're learning, what we're doing, any new words they learned. She also noted the ways how I can support Emma here at home. (Ms. Grace Interview 2, 5/27/19)

According to Ms. Grace, there were only a few occasions when she contacted Ms. Carney first. Although sending newsletters home was more of a receptive communication method mainly from school to home, Ms. Grace perceived it as one way she communicated with Ms. Carney.

## **Summary**

Ms. Carney participated in the home visit project to strategically support her students' academic learning by partnering with parents. She understood that the main purpose of home visiting was to get to know her students and families, and eventually to use the knowledge she gained about their home environment to facilitate her teaching practices at school. However, her reflection notes demonstrated how much she paid attention to students' literacy and executive-functioning skills, which are often considered to be barometers of a successful kindergarten transition (Little, 2017).

For Diego's mother, Ms. Rose, the home visits felt like being interviewed by Ms. Carney about Diego's areas for growth. Their conversations were mainly about Diego's difficulties in speaking English and identifying strategies to support his struggles in kindergarten. Ms. Rose felt responsible for supporting Diego at home in the way Ms. Carney suggested. While Ms. Rose

appreciated that Ms. Carney frequently informed her about what was happening at school, she expressed little intimacy with Ms. Carney. Ms. Grace played a relatively passive role in her communication with Ms. Carney by only sending notifications about Diego being absent or late.

Emma's mother, Ms. Grace, perceived the home visits in a similar way, focusing on Emma's lack of concentration skills. During the face-to-face meetings, Ms. Grace and Ms. Carney collaborated to identify the best practices for Emma, given the knowledge of her at home and school. This type of collaboration was rarer once school started. By the end of the year, Ms. Grace became accustomed to being notified through newsletters about what Emma learned at school. In-depth discussions were only initiated when Ms. Grace needed to intervene directly to help Emma focus better in class.

In the last interview, Ms. Carney did not see a difference in her relationships with the parents who had had home visits and those who did not have home visits. She said, "partnering with parents is something I do with all parents throughout the year, and it [home visiting] takes more time from my end" (Ms. Carney Interview 2, 6/3/19). She also expressed her disappointment with the limited impact of home visits on her students' academics. This was her rationale for not continuing doing home visits in the future.

### 4.3. Ms. Fried and two families

#### Teacher Ms. Fried at Brighton Elementary School

Ms. Fried is a White teacher with 22 years of teaching experience. She had started her teaching career at a preschool for two years, and then worked the remaining 20 years in the district as a kindergarten teacher. During the 20 years as a kindergarten teacher, she had worked at two elementary schools: at a school located in the central part of town for fifteen years, and five years at Brighton Elementary School (Brighton, hereafter). She grew up in the community where she taught and liked being part of the community and teaching kindergarten.

Ms. Fried said that the school systems increasingly valued academics, and she wanted her students to leave kindergarten with a feeling of accomplishment. Ms. Fried emphasized that she also based her teaching on children's personal and emotional growth. Her goals for teaching and learning in kindergarten were for her students to *enjoy* learning like "don't be afraid of risk and even of some failures," "it is okay to get dirty during hands-on activities," and "feel safe, happy and excited about learning" (Ms. Fried Interview 2, 5/14/19). She endeavored to make academics fun by incorporating academic content in daily activities and interactions with students.

Brighton school is located on the east side of town and is surrounded by a quiet residential area. The school population was composed of 63% White, 15% Black, 11% Hispanic, 8% multiracial, and 3% Asian at the time of the interview. Brighton serves students from two different neighborhoods. One neighborhood is the immediate area around the school where most of the residents are middle-class. The other neighborhood is Holm Oaks with a large apartment complex housing mostly low-income families. Ms. Hanson, the other kindergarten teacher at Brighton who also participated in the project, said that the students from low-income families were relatively stable; they were not likely to transfer, move, and miss school, and faced some

but not necessarily serious problems. Ms. Hanson explained that these families made a living, but it was just not enough to get out of poverty.

Ms. Fried described Brighton as a nice community school with close relationships between teachers and parents because of daily opportunities to meet each other at student drop-off and pick-up times. As Brighton began earlier than other schools, many parents dropped off their children on the way to work. Ms. Fried met eleven of the sixteen parents on a daily basis during that time. Families at Brighton were also close to each other. Birthday parties were held throughout the year and parents sent out invitations to all the parents and students in the class. The parents as well as their children made connections to their peers both in and out of school. Brighton also had volunteers who had lived in the neighborhood for decades and wanted to be involved in the school. The local restaurants and businesses were also great partners, donating items such as address books, healthy snacks, and free printing services. The school maintained a good reputation with the parents and neighborhoods. The principal once copied teachers on an online posting on social media where parents wrote positive comments about Brighton (Ms. Fried Interview 1, 12/14/18).

There were four kindergarten classes at Brighton, which was one additional class from the three in the previous year. The kindergarten teachers at Brighton had weekly meetings as a team to plan teaching and learning activities together. They all brought different expertise including organization skills, creativity, initiative, and tech knowledge. Ms. Fried's mindset as one of the team members was, "your kids are my kids." She hoped that the four classes would be a big kindergarten community where teachers and students cooperated well and cared for each other. As the school year progressed, the teachers also exchanged students during literacy and math classes to provide more individualized instruction. Ms. Fried sometimes sent her students

with high academic skills to other kindergarten classes with more peers with similar academic skills levels so her students could maintain their interest in learning instead of being bored from learning what they already knew.

Ms. Fried participated in the home visit project because she wanted to have opportunities to meet parents and students outside of school. In the previous year, Ms. Fried tried to meet families individually but it was not successful. Not a single student from her class came to the several afterschool or weekend events that took place at school. She said that parents, who were not part of the parent teacher organization or did not show up at school could be easily misunderstood and be perceived as lacking interest in their kids' education. However, she believed that parents respect learning in school but are often busy with their lives and work. Home visits were a good chance for her to reach families at their convenience.

Ms. Fried expected home visits to be conversation times where both teachers and parents could casually talk about their lives and get to know each other. She had done home visits before with social workers when children missed school frequently and noticed that many of the families were at risk or faced financial struggles. These types of visits were rare in her 22 years of teaching and were less than the sixteen home visits she did for this project. In the interview, Ms. Fried differentiated the home visits she had done in the past from the ones she performed for the current project:

When you go to do (traditional) home visits, you ask your standard teacher questions. But I think so much of that is based on what happens here in the school building and the learning that happens here. The (home visit) training was just a good reminder for me that kids learn a lot when they're not here, too. Instead of saying "this is what we do," I asked parents, "What do you do as a family? What does your child like? What are special things you like to do together?" That training had fun questions that you wouldn't necessarily think of like, "What would your child's superpower be if they were?" When I asked that question, parents' faces lit up. (Ms. Fried Interview 1, 12/14/18)

Ms. Fried clearly wanted her home visits to be family-centered meetings. The most important point she kept in mind was to make the meetings comfortable and casual for families. She intentionally avoided bringing her clipboard or notepad because she thought they could get the impression that the meetings were evaluation or judgmental sessions. Instead, after each home visit, she parked her car a block away from the student's home and started writing down all the details she had learned about the families and students while they were fresh in her memory.



**Teacher Ms. Fried and Ms. Howard, Maya's mother**

Ms. Howard was Hispanic in her 40s. She had a master's degree in social work and worked at a hospital as a social worker at the time of the interviews. She and her husband, Mr. Howard, had two children, Nick (10) and Maya (5), who both attended Brighton Elementary School. The family had lived in the same house for three years, which was located one block from the school. Mr. Howard ran a small business and had a more flexible schedule in the morning. He was responsible for getting the children ready for school every morning because Ms. Howard regularly worked the night shift. Mr. Howard used to walk Nick to school before he wanted to do it by himself. When Maya started kindergarten, Mr. Howard was excited to walk Maya to school as well. Ms. Howard said that spending time with family and relatives was very important to the family. They often visited Ms. Howard's parents who lived two hours away, and the children spent a few weeks there during the summer (Ms. Howard Interview 1, 12/4/18).

Before Maya started kindergarten, her regular daily routine was spending mornings at a preschool and afternoons at home. Ms. Howard took care of her after school. The preschool Maya attended was one of the early childhood and education centers in the community, where she had attended for two years when she was three and four years old. Regarding Maya's transition to kindergarten, Ms. Howard was somewhat worried about her reserved personality because Maya did not ask for help from her preschool teacher, even when it was needed. She often came home crying and hurt but did not want to talk to the teacher about it. She had grown up with her brother Nick and his friends and had no problems hanging out and playing with other children on the playground. However, Maya tended to be shy about reaching out to adults. Ms. Howard did not necessarily think that this issue was serious enough for the teacher to intervene as Maya was in school only in the mornings. Ms. Howard said that there were very few

circumstances that needed to be addressed and she thought that two conferences each year provided enough communication with the preschool teacher. However, she acknowledged that kindergarten had more kids in a bigger school building, so Ms. Howard did not want Maya to hesitate to express her emotions and thoughts to adults, especially to teachers at school. By being part of the home visit project, Maya could meet Ms. Fried ahead of time, which alleviated Maya's fear of the unknown and increased her excitement about school. Ms. Howard was also able to see if Maya would be willing to get close to and be open with her kindergarten teacher.

When asked about the benefits of the home visits as a parent, Ms. Howard described her high level of comfort saying, "It's kind of like we've already done the first layer. Usually at school, you have so little interaction with the teachers that I feel like it takes many months to build that first layer" (Ms. Howard Interview 2, 5/2/19). Ms. Howard articulated that having a sense of trust helped her easily initiate conversations with Ms. Fried, especially as a full-time working parent who could not be present at school very often. She referred to "a hard line between home and school" (Ms. Howard Interview 1, 12/4/18), as the norm for the parent-teacher partnership, meaning that teachers do their best at school and parents do their best at home separately. Without a close relationship, it is difficult to talk about behaviors or issues students encountered, what Ms. Fried called "hard conversations" (Ms. Fried Interview 1, 12/14/18). Ms. Howard felt that Ms. Fried was approachable and receptive when Maya had trouble hanging out with her friends. Ms. Howard could easily ask for a meeting because they had already established a positive relationship through home visits.

Ms. Howard said that open communication was essential for close home-school relations, which flourished based on a mutual sense of comfort. She described her relationship with Ms. Fried as warm and supportive, and home visits were a good steppingstone for her

communication with Ms. Fried. During the home visits, Ms. Howard felt that Ms. Fried honored who Maya is, and sincerely tried to get to know the family by asking questions about the family's history, culture, and values. Ms. Howard thought that a teacher like Ms. Fried would be willing to apply that knowledge in a positive way, which would result in powerfully facilitating Maya's transition to a new school. Ms. Howard described the benefits of having home visits by comparing this practice to her past parent-teacher conferences for Maya's brother Nick:

It [a home visit] was more relaxed. We were able to just open up with each other more and feel a bit more comfortable. So, everything wasn't only talking about school. It was talking about our family structure and our lives and she told us about her family. I think you don't always get that chance when it's just parent-teacher conferences because, again, you don't have a lot of time, so it's, like, "Let's get to the stuff that we're here for...to talk about school and my child." I think the teachers don't always get that opportunity to see into the child's life and what the structure of their life is. (Ms. Howard Interview 2, 5/2/19)

Ms. Howard thought that home visits allowed her to create a more personal connection with Ms. Fried through their conversations about Maya's life outside of school. In her past parent-teacher conferences, Ms. Howard claimed that there were few opportunities to talk about the home environment, even though the home experience could significantly influence how children behaved and learned at school. She argued that the more the teachers knew about their families, the better they could find tools to work with the parents to make a child's time at school more successful. Her experiences resonated with Ms. Fried, who reported that the home visits had considerably strengthened her sense of ease when approaching the families of students.

More importantly, during the interviews, Ms. Fried stated that the home visits helped her appreciate the family values in the children's home environments. This learning experience led her to cross the boundary from being strictly professional to being humble after discovering what she could learn from her students' families. She supported this idea by stating, "I think it [initial

home visit] cements the relationship piece of education and trusting families and valuing what families and their children bring to school... the idea that we're all in this together. I'm not the expert" (Ms. Fried Interview 2, 5/14/19).

One of Maya's interest Ms. Fried kept in mind was her love of science. In both home visits, Ms. Fried and the parents talked about science lessons in kindergarten because Maya was interested in electricity and science. Mr. Howard shared his beliefs that Maya would benefit from doing hands-on activities as one of her passions. Ms. Fried agreed with his idea and said that the kindergarten team planned to provide different levels of activities so the students could explore various science topics (RA HV1 Note, 8/2/18). In the second home visit, Mr. Fried invited Maya to share the science experiments she was exploring with the class such as learning about sink-or-float materials and observing the hatching process of butterflies. Maya seemed very excited to share stories that six out of seven caterpillars already hatched, and the class had marked on the calendar when the butterflies would be going outside (RA HV2 Note, 9/27/18).

Ms. Howard believed that home visits paved the way for a closer connection with Ms. Fried, stating that she was "feeling like we had been heard and understood." She compared it to her relationships with other teachers she had met for her son:

It's funny, because even just those short few times, I feel more comfortable with Ms. Fried than any of my son's teachers. I liked them very much, but there's a different sense of closeness with Ms. Fried. She knows a little bit about our family and that helps us feel more known. So, we're not just another face, another number. (Ms. Howard Interview 2, 5/2/19)

The total time they spent on two home visits was less than two hours. However, looking back on the kindergarten year, Ms. Howard thought that the two hours were the best use of her time to help Maya prepare for a bigger school as well as shape her own perspective.

**Teacher Ms. Fried and Ms. Paine, Mia's mother**

Ms. Paine, who self-identified as a Black woman, had four children with her husband Mr. Paine. Mia was the youngest daughter who had three older brothers with a big age gap between them. At the time of the study, the two oldest sons lived and studied in colleges overseas and her third son was in middle school. Ms. Paine was from the Midwest and Mr. Paine was originally from a country in the Balkans. The family moved to the city six years ago when Mia was born. Because her third son went to kindergarten in Michigan, Mia was her first kindergartener in the district. Both Mr. and Ms. Paine had four-year college degrees and were software engineers working full-time. The company Ms. Paine worked for was a stable company with many clients including the school district. Together they earned enough to afford full-day daycare tuition for Mia since the age of two and for their two oldest sons' cost of living and studying abroad.

Ms. Paine shared that the Muslim faith was critical for their family, and the family spent considerable time with their extended Muslim family. In the first interview, she told me that pork and alcohol were forbidden foods for Muslims, but the family kept additional strict rules. Ms. Fried was also told this information during the first home visit. She made a note on this issue by stating, "Ms. Paine shared important information about foods that Mia can't eat. I knew about pork, but she also mentioned other common snacks that would not be allowed. It was helpful because I don't know a lot about the Muslim faith" (Ms. Fried HV1 Note, 8/8/18).

Sharing these religious beliefs meant a lot to Ms. Paine because, to the best of her memory, she had never brought them up in her communication with Mia's teachers at the various daycares. Her interaction with the teachers was similar to other parents: (1) short check-ins when Ms. Paine drops Mia off and picks her up and (2) a parent-teacher conference each semester focused on Mia's knowledge of letters, numbers, and patterns, along with her socio-emotional

skills. The conferences were solely about Mia, not necessarily about her family. Through the home visits, Ms. Paine was able to open up more to Ms. Fried and shared important family customs and traditions. Home visiting enhanced their communication as Ms. Paine stated, “I feel like that piece of it, being in our home, has a huge impact, that comfort level and feeling more relaxed to be able to talk and communicate” (Ms. Paine Interview 1, 12/8/18).

Home visits helped Ms. Fried create a responsive classroom by giving her a deeper understanding of Mia. Ms. Fried not only valued the cultural knowledge she learned from Ms. Paine but also integrated it into her classroom to better connect with her students. She argued that it was an effective strategy in the classroom to support the transition to kindergarten. Ms. Fried illustrated how her teaching practice emerged:

Ms. Paine had told me a story at the visit of how on the first day of something new in your life, before you leave your home, someone in your family throws a cup of water out to clean your path to a great day, whether it's school or college or wedding or new job. So in my class I said, “Mia, do you mind if I tell? Do you want to tell or do you want me to tell?” And she was like, “You tell.” I've also talked to them that we should do that at the end of kindergarten as a celebration to first grade. The kids thought it was cool and fun, but Mia was beaming because it was something special about her family. So, I think doing that in little ways makes a big difference. (Ms. Fried Interview 2, 5/14/19)

In this example, Mia's family culture became a great source for talking as a group about transition. This cultural information may seem like a small issue, but Ms. Fried used it to foster an inclusive school environment where every culture is celebrated. Ms. Fried observed that Mia seemed much more engaged in the classroom community because of this shared cultural experience, and the strengthened engagement would eventually smooth her transition to kindergarten. Moreover, home visits signaled to children that the adults at home and at school worked as a team to support the children's learning and that everyone genuinely cared about the

children's success. It is important to recognize the space current practices create for interactions between parents and teachers, resulting in classrooms that are characterized by freely sharing family dynamics, values, and rituals—all of which help teachers and students understand each other individually.

Home visits also facilitated the relationship after Mia started kindergarten. Ms. Paine reached out by phone to Ms. Fried to discuss Mia's emotional meltdowns during after-school programs. Ms. Paine made several phone calls to Ms. Fried to determine whether or not Mia's meltdowns had also occurred in kindergarten and how she should handle the situation. Ms. Paine eventually changed her work schedule and stayed with Mia at home after school. When recalling this decision-making process, Ms. Paine said she appreciated both the teacher's advice regarding daily routines that might help the child overcome her meltdowns and the teacher's assurance that meltdowns are a typical transition issue.

## **Summary**

For Ms. Fried, home visits helped her understand her students and families, which, in turn, facilitated a more inclusive classroom for the children who were transitioning to kindergarten. Ms. Fried believed that families bring valuable resources to school (Moll et al., 1992) and home visits were an opportunity to acknowledge their funds of knowledge. With this in mind, Ms. Fried tried her best to make her visits not come across as judgmental, but to appreciate the family's values and traditions. Through home visits, Ms. Fried was able to initiate a reciprocal relationship with the parents and create more space for mutual engagement and participation in the child's education.

Maya's mother, Ms. Howard, demonstrated that the home visits were different than the other school events in terms of forming a close parent-teacher relationship. Ms. Howard felt most comfortable approaching Ms. Fried compared to all other teachers with whom she had communicated before. The closeness of this relationship may reflect that the home visits positively mediated their interactions when they focused on the families and their values (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978). Ms. Howard appreciated that Ms. Fried constantly focused on Maya's interests in science and hands-on activities and facilitated those learning opportunities in kindergarten. The invisible wall between home and school—the emotional distance Ms. Howard had had with teachers who were strictly professional—did not emerge with Ms. Fried.

Similarly, Mia's mother, Ms. Paine, developed a warm relationship with Ms. Fried through the home visits, which was the foundation for their open, bi-directional communication throughout the kindergarten year. Ms. Paine perceived that one important benefit of home visiting was sharing the family's Muslim culture, which she had never done before with Mia's preschool teachers. Ms. Paine believed that Ms. Fried created a more welcoming atmosphere for Mia by incorporating her family culture into the classroom. In addition, Ms. Paine and Ms. Fried closely collaborated around the issues when Mia struggled with the longer day, which included the afterschool program. Based on mutual trust and a shared goal to facilitate Mia's transition to kindergarten, they came up with practices to help Mia adjust better to the new environment.



#### **4.4. Ms. Hanson and two families**

##### **Teacher Ms. Hanson at Brighton Elementary School**

Ms. Hanson had taught for eighteen years in the school district teaching kindergarten for eight of those years. Including Brighton, she had taught in four schools in the district. It was her fourth year at Brighton at the time of the study, and all four years were teaching kindergarten. She usually taught lower grades including kindergarteners, first, and second grade students and spent a some of her time teaching advanced learners. She usually worked as a substitute teacher or as a tutor for students in all grades in the summer. Along with Ms. Fried, Ms. Hanson was one of the two teachers from Brighton who participated in the project.

What Ms. Hanson most liked about Brighton was that teachers had more autonomy in their teaching. At her previous school, she was under considerable pressure from the principal who micromanaged decisions about which curriculum to teach and how to teach it. The principal even designated books to read weekly, but Ms. Hanson believed that they did not match the seasons or students' interests. While at Brighton, the professional independence of teachers came first with more freedom to choose their own curriculum and teaching methods. Ms. Hanson said that the four kindergarten teachers at Brighton met every year before school to discuss how to make teaching creative, fun, and student-centered. This positively affected Ms. Hanson's job satisfaction with increased capacity to match her beliefs that students benefit from thematic teaching based on their interests in society and nature. She believed that English language learners and students who had received little education would benefit more from thematic teaching, which deeply explores a few topics for three or four weeks to build background knowledge.

At the district level, Ms. Hanson felt that the creative side of teaching kindergarten had been progressively taken away in the past few years. By having kindergarten instruction increasingly specified for teachers, she noticed more pressure on early childhood teachers to improve students' academic achievement. Her goals for teaching kindergarten were "to learn how to do school, and then to just grow socially, emotionally, and academically" (Ms. Hanson Interview 1, 11/11/18). However, it was becoming difficult for her to balance those three goals while following strict kindergarten standards. She drew from her experience teaching other grade levels to provide developmentally appropriate instruction for students in need. For instance, she provided more advanced work designed for first graders for some of her kindergarten students who excelled in reading and math skills. For students with little previous school experience, she focused on helping them "do school." When asked about what she meant by doing school, she listed behavioral skills such as sitting long enough for a story and lining up.

Ms. Hanson admitted that monetary compensation was her motivation to participate in the home visit project. That year she applied for a summer substitute teacher position but was not hired. Instead, she tutored several students which left her extra time that she could spend on home visits. Another plus was that she lived near the school where approximately half of her students lived. She said that she would have reconsidered her participation if her travel time to home visits was longer. She thought that spending time on home visits would be a good investment to meet her students and families in her extra time when she was not tutoring.

Ms. Hanson believed that home visiting helped to build initial connections with students and families and to ease the first day of school, but nothing else. She did not perceive that home visits influenced her teaching nor her relationships with parents. She explained that the knowledge she gained from home visits was not specific enough for her to use in school;

therefore, her home visiting experience had little effect on how she taught students in the classroom. She said, “Academically, I knew maybe students could write their names, but kindergarteners grow and change so fast. I didn’t really understand how many letters they knew at the home visit. We did that assessment at school” (Ms. Hanson Interview 2, 5/9/19).

Moreover, she thought that home visiting did not give her a good indication of what students would be like in school because they acted different at home than at school.

I think it [home visiting] was a good introduction. It was nice for me to be at their house, and sometimes kids still refer to that. Like, “Oh, when you came to my house, or I want you to come to my house again.” I think it was fun for them. But in terms of what I saw at the house and their behavior, it’s so different at school. One of my students threw a fit with her sister and started screaming at her house. Never would she do that at school. (Ms. Hanson Interview 1, 11/11/18)

From Ms. Hanson’s perspective, home visiting was beneficial only when it provided information to help predict students’ behavior in school. Ms. Hanson did not find her visits helpful because what she learned about students at home visits turned out to be different at school or changed during the summer.

Ms. Hanson generally agreed that there was a positive impact of summer home visits in that they eased her tensions about meeting new students and families, at least for the short-term. However, she did not see the long-term positive impact of doing home visits on her relationships with students and families. With years of teaching experience, Ms. Hanson was confident that she would eventually get to know her students well over the year without home visits. She said, “I learn about all the kids. I don’t feel closer to the kids and the families that I had home visits with and others I didn’t have home visits with because kindergarteners share so much” (Ms. Hanson Interview 2, 5/9/19). From the standpoint of students, she doubted if a one-time meeting before school could really help students’ transition to kindergarten. She recalled that one of the

home visit students cried on the first day, which made her wonder about the usefulness of home visits.

In addition, Ms. Hanson said what she learned from the home visit served as useful background information to understand students' personality, behaviors, and language proficiency. However, when asked how she used the information as funds of knowledge in the classroom, Ms. Hanson responded that she was quite uncertain. Ms. Hanson casually mentioned students' interest like Legos and dinosaurs when speaking with them, but more work was required to systematically bring those topics into her lessons. Given that academic work dominated most of the time in kindergarten, Ms. Hanson did not think about integrating funds of knowledge into her classroom activities.

**Ms. Hanson and Ms. Mandell, Aria's mother**

Ms. Mandell is a Black mother of five children ages 5 to 15. Aria was the youngest daughter who had four older brothers. Ms. Mandell and her husband Mr. Mandell worked full time and had moved to the city six years ago for their work. They had moved around the city before settling in the neighborhood in the district. The family was familiar with Brighton Elementary School because Aria's three older brothers had attended the school for two years at the time of the study. None of her children had started kindergarten at the school, so having Aria's transition to kindergarten was her first experience. Ms. Mandell had great faith and confidence in the teachers at Brighton. The teacher was attentive to the fact that Ms. Mandell had four children at the school, which meant that she would have to visit the school four different times for parent-teacher conferences each semester. Ms. Mandell was impressed and thankful when the teachers including Aria's kindergarten teacher, Ms. Hanson, offered to set up consecutive parent-teacher conferences, which made Ms. Mandell's job much easier.

Ms. Mandell had no doubt that Aria would take the transition to kindergarten well because she had attended Head Start since she was three until kindergarten. She stayed in the program and then moved to a daycare for an after-school program. With both parents working, keeping her at the daycare in the afternoon was better for them as a family. Ms. Mandell introduced her family as a big Head Start family. Aria's brothers also attended the Head Start program at least one or two years before they entered kindergarten. Ms. Mandell believed that going into kindergarten was not a huge transition for them because of their experiences in Head Start programs. She also believed Aria would transition well because she was already accustomed to going to school every day, following daily schedules, and meeting new teachers every year. In addition, she had once transferred from one Head Start program to another due to

their moving to the area. Thus, Ms. Mandell and Aria did not worry about transferring to kindergarten but were excited about a bigger school with her older brothers.

Ms. Mandell was one of the few mothers who had experienced home visits prior to the study. She had met the Head Start teachers and family outreach workers at her home as part of Head Start program's comprehensive services to support students and parents. Ms. Mandell explained that what she experienced with Ms. Hanson was similar to her past experiences except that a family outreach worker did not accompany the teacher this time. The primary purpose of doing home visits, according to Ms. Mandell, was goal setting for the children. Some of the questions they addressed were similar to what Ms. Mandell and Ms. Hanson also talked about, including "What do I want to see Aria to learn? What are her strengths? and What do I think Aria would benefit from the Head Start program?" One thing Ms. Mandell liked about the home visits in the past was the ongoing nature of the visits, meaning that there were additional checkpoint meetings in the middle of the year and once again at the end of the year. Ms. Mandell appreciated that the Head Start teachers remembered Aria's personal goals they had set together, and followed up on her progress and individualized strategies for further steps.

One difference between the home visits with Head Start staff and Ms. Hanson was the physical place they met. While Ms. Mandell met the Head Start teachers and family outreach workers in her home, she preferred to meet Ms. Hanson at a public library. I also conducted interviews with Ms. Mandell at the library as she requested. Unlike the Head Start teachers she had known for several years, both Ms. Hanson and I were total strangers. Ms. Mandell mentioned the uncomfortable feelings other families might have toward home visits including herself.

If there's a family that maybe is not as comfortable having people come to the home, you could meet teachers in the community, and I think that's a plus. We live just down the street and around the corner. So, it's [public library] not far for us. I don't know – we're a little leery about having guests in the home. It's easier for us to come, and the kids know the library, they come here all the time. So, it's a place where they're comfortable, and we feel a little more comfortable. (Ms. Mandell Interview 2, 4/30/19)

Ms. Mandell did not articulate specific reasons other than her personal feelings for meeting Ms. Hanson at the library. However, Ms. Hanson connected the reasons with families' racial and financial differences. Being a White teacher, she wondered if families of color or low income families might think that they were being evaluated during home visits.

I also think that some families just aren't comfortable with home visits. I think it puts pressure on them. And I felt like if Aria's mom maybe didn't like [home visits], meeting at a library was fine with me, but I think that especially low-income families don't want to be judged for what they have or they don't have or their place. Maybe it's not just low-income, maybe it's families of color. African American families maybe don't want a White teacher coming in their house and judging them. Even though we're not judging them, they might feel that way. (Ms. Hanson Interview 2, 5/9/19)

Ms. Hanson also mentioned that another family of color who was eligible for free/reduced lunch also seemed to quickly clean up their house for her visit as she noticed a drawer filled with cleaners, and miscellaneous items looked like they had been thrown in. This led her to think that home visiting could be an imposition on families as they might not feel comfortable to refuse the offer from their teachers. Ms. Hanson was well aware that our intention of doing home visits should not be judgmental, but she frequently referred to visual cues (e.g., home location, environment) and socio-demographic information (e.g., race/ethnicity, income) to make sense of her home visiting experiences. These characteristics often became barometers to distinguish families who, from her perspectives, would be in favor of her visiting from those who were would be less receptive.

Once the kindergarten year started, Ms. Mandell had little contact with Ms. Hanson except for receiving a class newsletter once a month and emails. She perceived less communication as good signals that Aria was doing well at school and was not having any problems or issues. She stated the reasons for no communication with Ms. Hanson as follows, “If there is some special negative occasion that we need to know about, Ms. Hanson will get in contact with us. Luckily, there haven't been bad things that she had to call about” (Ms. Mandell Interview 2, 4/30/19). When asked about how Ms. Mandell collaborated with Ms. Hanson around Aria’s learning, she explained how she had supported Aria based on the information from Ms. Hanson.

Ms. Hanson tells us the upcoming lessons and we tried to supplement that at home. I think the emails are more like on a case-by-case basis. So, if something happens, we'll get an email. It's not like we're emailing on a regular basis. We're getting that update via newsletters. That's what the newsletter I guess is for. Ms. Hanson was always like, “If you have any questions, feel free to call me, respond to the email.” So, it's two ways, but it's usually just an update. Information about where they are, what they are doing, where they are going. (Ms. Mandell Interview 2, 4/30/19)

While Ms. Mandell perceived that email was a bidirectional mode of communication, exchanging emails seldom happened and conveying information from the teacher to the mother was most of their interactions. In terms of collaboration between Ms. Mandell and Ms. Hanson, it centered around what Aria learned at school with supplementary support from home. For Ms. Mandell, being a parent of a kindergartner meant receiving more detailed information about Aria’s learning progress at the parent-teacher conferences. She felt much more relaxed at the library with Ms. Hanson than the conferences at school with children running around and other parents lined up for their turns.



Both Ms. Mandell and Ms. Hanson believed that the benefits of summer meetings lasted for a relatively short time during the first few days of school. Ms. Mandell thought that Aria was the one who benefited most from the meetings because of the comfort level she created with her teacher. The comfort could serve as a foundation for learning as Aria was more open to her teacher in the classroom. However, Ms. Mandell did not see that the meetings had much influence on her relationship with Ms. Manson. Ms. Hanson had the same idea by saying, “I think there was no difference. Maybe the families might have felt more comfortable since they’d seen me more, but I don’t think it was different for me” (Ms. Hanson Interview 2, 5/9/19). In this case, Ms. Mandell and Ms. Hanson’s summer meetings were no more than ice breakers with little to no connection to Aria’s schooling throughout the year.

**Ms. Hanson and Mr./Ms. Lopez, Dylan's parents**

Mr. Lopez is a Latino father of four children. Dylan was his youngest son who had two older siblings in middle school and high school. Mr. Lopez and Ms. Lopez, also a Latina, had lived in the area since their marriage, knew the area very well, and had longstanding connections with friends in the neighborhood. Mr. Lopez worked at a factory and Ms. Lopez stayed at home. They both had not graduated from high school and their children were eligible to receive free/reduced lunch at schools. The parents were familiar with Brighton Elementary School because Dylan's siblings and relatives also attended the same school. However, having Dylan attend kindergarten felt completely new to the parents because of the huge age gaps between Dylan and his older siblings. In addition, Mr. Lopez explained that Dylan had a more energetic personality than his siblings who were quiet and shy. He hoped that Dylan's personality would have a positive influence on his transition to kindergarten.

Mr. Lopez was one of only three fathers who were present at home visits and with whom I conducted follow-up interviews. The primary reason for his deep involvement in the project was his English proficiency. Spanish was the main language the family used at home, but Mr. Lopez felt more comfortable having conversations in English than his wife, Ms. Lopez. Mr. Lopez spoke most of the time and he translated Ms. Lopez's words from time to time at the meetings with the teacher, Ms. Hanson. An English language learner (ELL) teacher and I accompanied Ms. Hanson's on first visit to Dylan's house, but we all noticed the need for a translator especially when Mr. Lopez seemed to find it difficult to convey information about his children's language and health issues. Thus, a Spanish translator joined us for the second meeting. Although it would have been ideal to set up the second visit at Dylan's home as well, the only time and location both the translator and Ms. Hanson could meet was right after school

in the classroom. Both Mr. and Ms. Lopez came for the second meeting while Dylan stayed at home. Ms. Lopez played a more active role in this meeting compared to the role she took at the first home visit.

At the first home visit, Ms. Lopez spent a fair amount of time sharing the family's values of Spanish culture and language: how important it was to have family dinnertime every day, to live close to relatives and extended family members, and to speak their native language fluently. Mr. Lopez was worried about the increasing gap between his own English skills and those of Dylan's older siblings. Mr. Lopez admitted that he understood English more than he produced, and this occasionally became a language barrier when communicating with Dylan's older siblings who had preferred to use English at home since they were teenagers. Mr. Lopez did not intervene on which language they used at home, but she started to worry about Dylan when he primarily spoke in English while playing with his siblings. Both Ms. Hanson and the ELL teacher agreed with his idea that keeping bilingual skills would be a great asset to Dylan and said that Brighton school and teachers value every culture and language students bring to school.

The first concern Mr. and Ms. Lopez had regarding Dylan's transition to kindergarten was separation from teachers and friends at the Head Start program he had attended for two years. During the interview, when Mr. Lopez was talking about the program, Dylan brought a picture of him with his classmates and teachers at the Head Start program. He pointed to his four Head Start teachers and told me their names. This showed how he enjoyed his time there, but transitioning from home to the Head Start program was challenging at first. Mr. and Ms. Lopez remembered how tough the first few weeks were because Dylan was attached to his mother and refused to stay in the program. Ms. Lopez was worried if he would do the same when transitioning to kindergarten.

However, Dylan moved to kindergarten smoothly, which surprised Ms. and Ms. Lopez. They believed the summer home visit helped give Dylan an idea of who his teacher would be. In addition, by watching his parents and the teacher treating each other with respect, Dylan quickly built trust with Ms. Hanson. Mr. Lopez recalled the first day of kindergarten when Dylan noticed Ms. Hanson and said, “Oh, that’s my teacher!” (Mr. Lopez Interview 1, 12/10/18). Unlike his transition to the Head Start program, the first day of kindergarten was filled with excitement rather than shyness and reluctance. Ms. Lopez claimed that knowing even one person, especially when the person was his teacher, could have a positive influence on how five-year-old children anticipate new experiences and it could set up a great starting point for further schooling.

The challenge Mr. and Ms. Lopez had as parents was how to support Dylan’s academic learning at home and have him do his homework. Doing homework was new to Dylan because he had not had any homework in the Head Start program. As a parent of kindergartner, Mr. Lopez perceived that the primary difference was to “help Dylan to move forward, to learn a little more” (Mr. Lopez Interview 1, 12/10/18). He was worried that Dylan was not interested in letters or numbers and refused to do homework by saying “I already worked at school.” Supporting Dylan’s learning at home was also new to the parents.

Given this concern, most of the second meeting at school between Ms. Hanson and Mr. and Ms. Lopez centered around Dylan’s academic progress. Ms. Hanson sat in the middle of a half-round table and Mr. and Ms. Lopez, and a translator sat across from her. Ms. Hanson introduced the translator to the parents and the purpose of the meeting, which was 1) to get to know each other and 2) to see how the student was doing at school (RA RSG Note, 9/14/18). When Ms. Hanson asked about learning goals for Dylan, Mr. Lopez responded.

Ms. Hanson: What do you want Dylan to learn this year?

Mr. Lopez: Letters and numbers. He skipped a lot of numbers.

Ms. Hanson: We will continue to practice that. We will do math problems later.

Mr. Lopez: We practiced at home, but he kept skipping a lot.

Ms. Hanson: That's pretty common, especially when they count 13, 14, 15. Those numbers are very tricky. We will work on that. Those numbers sound very similar in English. 13 and 30 sound a lot alike and 14 and 40 as well. In November, when we meet again, I can show you his progress from the beginning of the year to November. I'll let you know specific things to do at home.

Mr. Lopez: He has recently become interested in that. He was not into any letters or numbers before.

Ms. Hanson: We do one letter a day. We worked on "H" today. Dylan did a much better job than last week, and he was very careful about writing his full name. He tried to write a friend's name Henry. [The teacher showed the student's journal to the parents.] He is doing a nice job and making progress. For example, I helped him write a letter but today he did it all by himself.

Mr. Lopez came to the meeting with concerns that Dylan was not interested in working with numbers and letters. Ms. Hanson reassured Mr. and Ms. Lopez that Dylan was making slow progress, and he was going on the right path. Mr. Lopez said that he was relieved to hear that Dylan paid more attention in academic work than he had done in the Head Start program. Ms. Lopez was more interested in Dylan's behaviors in the classroom, and Ms. Hanson again reassured her with a few examples.

Ms. Lopez: How is he behaving in the classroom?

Ms. Hanson: He was getting a bit silly with another student on the carpet today and wanting to tickle. So, I said "That's not okay. You need to pay attention. Please keep your hands to yourself." But that's very typical in kindergarten. He doesn't stand out and the whole class will be working on it.

Ms. Lopez: In preschool, he rarely raised his hand (meaning he tended not to participate).

Ms. Hanson: He did participate really well. We played a game called Hedbanz – a student puts a card on his forehead and others give clues about the card. The student had a turn and he did a great job. And he also raised his hand to give clues to other kids. (RA RSG Note, 9/14/18)

Overall, the main topic of the second meeting was Dylan’s learning and behaviors at school. This was quite different from their conversation on family culture and values during the home visit. Most of the time, Mr. and Ms. Lopez were told how Dylan was doing in school. They seemed worried about Dylan if he was behind or did not meet the increased academic expectations in kindergarten.

After the parent-teacher conference toward the beginning of the year, Mr. Lopez and Ms. Hanson communicated through text messages which rarely happened. Mr. Lopez thought that initiating conversations with Ms. Hanson was only necessary when problems occurred. Ms. Hanson also had a similar idea. She said, “I haven’t really seen them since that second home visit because their kid takes the bus. I sent things home, but they haven’t had any questions or concerns. So, I haven’t really talked to them” (Ms. Hanson Int 1, 11/11/18).

## **Summary**

Monetary compensation motivated Ms. Hanson to participate in the project. She thought that home visits were only necessary for students and families who were economically and socially marginalized. This deficit-based view shaped her approach to what she could learn during home visits. The knowledge generated through her interactions with families was not incorporated into her teaching practices but was only helpful information to determine whether the students needed extra support in school. The benefits of home visits in the parent-teacher

partnership were not apparent given her thoughts that learning mostly occurred at school with limited supplementary help at home.

Aria's mother, Ms. Mandell, had benefited from home visiting with the Head Start teachers, but she did not see the same advantages from the meetings with Ms. Hanson. Ms. Mandell demonstrated how home visiting facilitated her dynamic process of building a relationship with the Head Start teachers. Ms. Mandell most appreciated the ongoing check-ups during the visits and working toward Aria's personalized goals. However, there was little communication with Ms. Hanson throughout the year, as she believed that communication was only to resolve problems and issues at school. Instead, Ms. Mandell supported Aria's transition to kindergarten by carefully reviewing the newsletters Ms. Hanson sent home to inform parents about what students were learning at school and how the parents could provide supplementary support at home.

Dylan's parents, Mr. and Ms. Lopez, perceived that the goal of the home visits was simply to get acquainted with Ms. Hanson. They had minimal contact with Ms. Hanson throughout the year except for the two parent-teacher conferences they attended. Even when they met, most of their discussion involved Ms. Hanson informing the parents how Dylan was adapting to the school, given their concerns about Dylan's adjusting to more rigorous academic content in kindergarten. An asset-based view of Dylan was absent in their conversation, which hindered them from initiating a deeper parent-teacher partnership.

#### **4.5. Ms. Halverson and two families**

##### **Teacher Ms. Halverson at Ridgewood Elementary School**

Ms. Halverson is a White teacher working in the dual-language immersion (DLI) program at Ridgewood Elementary School. At the time of the study, she was in her fourth year of teaching, and the second year of teaching kindergarten. She majored in Spanish and earned her teaching certificate through a teacher training program that was designed to support racially and culturally diverse students. Ms. Halverson applied for the teacher-training program noting that she hoped to become a DLI teacher and help English language learners. Thanks to the program, she completed the program with a full scholarship, and started her teaching career in the district.

Ridgewood Elementary School is well-known for its racial and ethnic diversity. According to 2016-2017 Data Profile, 42% of the school population was English language learners. Hispanic or Latino(a) made up the largest proportion of students with 39%, followed by 23% White and 26% Black. Ms. Halverson mentioned that the majority of the families needed some type of school support. Most notably, 70% of the students were eligible to receive free or reduced lunch. Some of her students were from migrant families from South America who were less likely to come to school. For these reasons, Ms. Halverson approached her students and families very discreetly and wanted to examine their basic needs first. Many families could not afford school materials. Thus, getting school supplies such as book bags, rest mats, and lunch boxes was an important task that she repeated on a yearly basis. She often sought out community support and charity services to keep up with the family needs, and even spent her own money to purchase extra school supplies for those who did not have access.



Including Ms. Halverson, teachers at Ridgewood were mostly White and this racial mismatch between families and teachers appeared to be a challenge in school. Ridgewood experienced a high turnover rate especially among young teachers, but Ms. Halverson felt that she had gained more trust from parents because of her Spanish language ability.

I speak the native language of all of my parents, and I think that's really crucial. Even within this home visit project, some of my parents were hesitant to talk to me until they could see what I was doing. I had a parent who didn't want to meet with me until they saw me at the open house or in the class and figured "Okay, she's understanding. She's been here four years and gets where we're coming from." (Ms. Halverson Interview 2, 7/22/19)

At the school level, Ridgewood had a separate office to support families with frequent communication, resources, and services to better connect with racially diverse families. The school further expanded its outreach work by hiring Black and Latino parents whose job was to reach out exclusively to their racial community.

One challenge Ms. Halverson had as a kindergarten teacher was the large class size and making a connection with each family. Due to the DLI programming where lessons were held in both English and Spanish, Ms. Halverson had a class of 30 students with a co-teacher. Depending on the language instruction mode, 30 students were either in a whole group or two separate groups in English and Spanish, and the instruction mode switched every 45 minutes. Having 30 students made it even more challenging for Ms. Halverson to build relationships with the families of her students. Ms. Halverson and her co-teacher thought that having one person designated as the contact person would be better for clear communication. Since the co-teacher had just begun her teaching career, Ms. Halverson volunteered to be the contact person but found the work overwhelming. She explained the reason as follows, "They [parents] all want to have a really good relationship with their kindergarten teacher. You're their first teacher" (Ms.

Halverson Interview 1, 2/13/19). Some of the families even personally invited Ms. Halverson for dinner when they found out that they were not randomly selected for the home visit project.

Ms. Halverson believed that home visiting opened up a channel of communication with families based on mutual trust and respect. To make the best of home visits, Ms. Halverson conducted one home visit per day and stayed as long as the families wanted. She ended up spending more than an hour in some of her visits and thought that it was a good investment of her time because the more time she spent, the more families shared sensitive issues. For example, she had parents who revealed their illegal immigration status and asked for help. There was an incident where personnel from Immigration and Customs Enforcement sat outside of the school so Ms. Halverson walked the child home. As a White teacher, Ms. Halverson had had her moments in the past when she had to *earn* families' trust by proving that she was someone they could count on. That year with home visits, however, she felt that the process of building trustworthy relationships with her families had already begun even before the school year started, especially with families with special circumstances.

As a teacher of the DLI program, the most useful information Ms. Halverson learned from home visits was students' proficiency in Spanish and parents' perspectives on language learning. She said that having a Latino last name did not necessarily mean that the student was a Spanish speaker. In the school year before the home visit project was conducted, she expected that approximately half of her class would be Spanish speakers, but it turned out that barely half were fluent in that language. The lack of information about how much Spanish students understood and produced made it difficult for Ms. Halverson to better prepare her classroom instruction. In one visit, Ms. Halverson figured out that the student spoke different languages depending on who she was talking to and what she did: Spanish was preferred for social

interaction and English was preferred for academic work. This information was only discovered when Ms. Halverson met her students face to face and had conversations with them. In addition, some Latino parents shared their mixed feelings about the DLI program indicating that they wanted their children to learn English, but their bigger fear was the loss of heritage language. These parents tended to have their children write and read in English for Ms. Halverson, so she had to explain that was not the point of the visit. Learning about these parental concerns was a great asset for Ms. Halverson when preparing for parent-teacher conference because Ms. Halverson felt responsible for updating parents on the students' progress of learning languages.

Although Ms. Halverson had the confidence of knowing her students and families better through the home visiting program, it did not last long without support from Ridgewood. The school made a last-minute decision to have 30 students in a co-teaching classroom, which almost doubled the number of families for Ms. Halverson to connect with. This was problematic when she held teacher-parent conferences in the Fall semester. Given a full day off, Ms. Halverson set all their meetings in one day but the tight schedule prevented her from going into detail about students' individual needs. She said, "We got feedback from the first one that the parents didn't get a chance to speak during the 15-minute conference. It was just us explaining the same thing over and over" (Ms. Halverson Interview 2, 7/22/19). The time allowed for Spring conferences was even shorter with a half day off. Ms. Halverson and her co-teacher decided to hold a group meeting including a Q&A session at the end. Two-thirds of families showed up for the meeting but only a few remained after the meeting for additional questions. The lack of support from the school caused Ms. Halverson to choose a more realistic and efficient way to communicate with parents. There was a tacit agreement between the two that communication was necessary only when there were issues that needed to be discussed with the parents.

**Teacher Ms. Halverson and Mr./Ms. Wilson, Nelly's parents**

Mr. and Ms. Wilson are White with professional jobs in science. They had two children taking a school bus to Ridgewood Elementary School: William in third grade and Nelly in kindergarten. The family was familiar with Ridgewood because William also attended kindergarten at the school three years ago. Nelly started attending a full-day daycare center at age two until she entered kindergarten. The daycare center did not follow the district's 4K program but ran their own developmentally appropriate learning curriculum. Mr. and Ms. Wilson believed that Nelly was academically prepared for kindergarten because she could read and write letters and count to a hundred. The parents also thought that Nelly was ready to follow the daily schedule in kindergarten because she was used to the daycare center program.

Regarding Nelly's transition to kindergarten, Mr. and Ms. Wilson wondered how Nelly would experience moving from a private daycare center to a public school with considerable diversity. The cost of the daycare center Nelly attended was relatively high; thus, most of the children were from middle-class families or higher. Mr. and Ms. Wilson anticipated that Nelly would learn about and experience cultural and racial diversity at Ridgewood which they highly valued. Ms. Wilson shared her thoughts:

I think Ridgewood is the second most diverse in the district and has the second highest poverty level of students at the elementary school. We think that experience brings a lot of value to our kids. Not everybody shares those same opinions and feelings, but we collectively made decisions ... that was something we valued and wanted our kids to be experienced with ... like having to learn how to interact with a whole new set of peers that maybe didn't look like her or didn't even talk like her. (Mr./Ms. Wilson Interview 2, 5/7/19)

Ms. Wilson believed that the multicultural population at Ridgewood brings diversity and enriches their children's lives. The school was supportive of coordinating multiple parent groups

such as an African American advocacy group and Latino mother group. As a member of Parent Teacher Organization (PTO), Ms. Wilson had seen and appreciated the effort school staff put into cross-cultural communication. Ridgewood faced some challenges working with families from different backgrounds and children with significant behavioral problems, but all things considered, Mr. and Ms. Wilson thought that the advantages outweighed the disadvantages and Ridgewood did a good job of accepting and bringing the diversity into harmony.

In addition, adjusting to the Dual Language Immersion (DLI) program at Ridgewood was a huge transition for Nelly because almost everyone around her, including Mr. and Ms. Wilson, were native English speakers. The parents perceived that the DLI program was a huge asset to the family because teaching Spanish was not something they could offer at home. At the time of the study, Nelly's brother William spoke fluent Spanish from his three years of experience in the DLI program. Mr. and Ms. Wilson were interested in how Nelly would interact with her non-English speaking classmates but had no concerns because of her easy-going personality. However, unlike William, Nelly was in a class of 30 students, and the parents wondered how Ms. Halverson would deliver dual language instruction in such a large class. In fact, Ms. Wilson and Ms. Halverson spent a fair amount of time talking about DLI instructions in the first home visit.

Ms. Halverson (to William): Are you going to help Nelly with her Spanish this year?

Ms. Wilson: Nelly really likes learning it, more than William does I think ... so when she has English lessons she'll go into the English classroom?

Ms. Halverson: Yes, and there are breaks between each academic block. The times when we'll be all together are the morning meeting, which will alternate between Spanish and English, and number corner. We're also trying to figure out how to do play at the end of the day, because we want them to play in both languages.

Ms. Halverson (to Nelly): This is really important – at school, I’m only going to talk to you in Spanish, but you can ask for help and tell me what you need in English.

Ms. Halverson (to Ms. Wilson): The first few weeks are a little tough, but we’ll practice all our routines a lot. You can also really reinforce that at home. (RA HV1 Note, 8/21/18)

After the school year started, Nelly had some struggles, favoring half of her school day in English over the other half in Spanish. But in the end, Nelly found common ground and became close friends with a few Spanish-speaking girls. Mr. Wilson volunteered in the classroom once a week and often saw Nelly teach English to her friends and vice versa when they were in the Spanish-speaking portion of the day. Mr. Wilson was impressed with one of the goals of DLI program: “It’s impressive to see these kids have cross-cultural relationships and to be exposed to diversity so young and understand how to talk and interact with a wide group of people in their lives” (Mr./Ms. Wilson Interview 2, 5/7/19).

However, when asked about their own transition as parents, Mr. and Ms. Wilson said that they had to navigate their own way through newsletters and parent involvement. Mr. Wilson regularly volunteered in the classroom and Ms. Wilson was an active member of the PTO. They tried their best to show up in school by occasionally picking Nelly up instead of having her take the school bus. Mr. Wilson explained his motivation: “I think anything that you can do to try to learn more about the school and the environment and the needs is super helpful because you can help and coach your own child or work with the teacher that much easier” (Mr./Ms. Wilson Interview 2, 5/7/19). Ms. Wilson’s said that these efforts were to make “little touch points with Ms. Halverson” who had 30 different families to deal with. Ms. Wilson thought that meeting Ms. Halverson in the summer through the home visiting project was a great opportunity for Nelly and themselves because a similar opportunity was not available once the school year started. While it

was understandable that sending newsletters home was the best teachers could do, Mr. Wilson thought that advice related to individual needs would be more appreciated than generic information. For example, he mentioned that he did not have adequate information to determine if Nelly had a smooth transition to kindergarten. However, no news from Ms. Halverson was considered good news, speculating that Nelly was doing a great job in class.

Overall, communication with Ms. Halverson left much to be desired that year as Mr. and Ms. Wilson stated that they did not have shared goals working with Ms. Halverson. They got in touch with Ms. Halverson only once via emails regarding a student who kept taking Nelly's seat in the classroom. Furthermore, they were disappointed with their last parent-teacher conference, which was in a group setting with other parents. Ms. Halverson and her co-teacher presented an anonymous graph with student numbers 1 to 30 to show their proficiency in Spanish and English. They offered two sessions, one in the late morning and the other in the early evening, to encourage attendance. It was an effective way to give an update on the whole class; however, Ms. Wilson wished to gain information that was more focused on Nelly. Given the 30 students and their parents, Ms. Wilson respected the teachers' decision to have a group conference instead of individual meeting, but she left the meeting feeling uninformed. She said, "those parent-teacher conferences are the only time unless you make a pointed effort to have a one-on-one meeting with your teacher, which I don't know that a lot of people do unless there's major issues" (Mr./Ms. Wilson Interview 2, 5/7/19).

**Teacher Ms. Halverson and Mr. Dante, Nancy's father**

Mr. and Ms. Dante are a Hispanic couple with four children. Nancy was their third child and was in Ms. Halverson's kindergarten class. There was a big age gap between Nancy and her brothers: the oldest was in high school, the second oldest in middle school, and the youngest was a toddler. Nancy received free or reduced lunch at school and was more comfortable speaking in Spanish - the home language. Mr. Dante did not reveal his job but said that he worked full time in a flexible schedule. Ms. Dante worked as a preschool teacher on a much less flexible schedule than Mr. Dante's work. The family lived very close to Ridgewood Elementary School and close to their extended family. Since Mr./Ms. Dante worked past the end of the kindergarten day, their extended family members usually walked Nancy home after school. Mr. Dante's relatively flexible schedule allowed him to be involved in the children's schooling. He was present at the home visit and the Ready-Set-Go conference and participated in both interviews in the study. A native Spanish speaker accompanied me on both interviews with him and transcribed the audio files.

Mr. Dante put social development above all other goals in early childhood. From his perspective, a good transition to kindergarten meant that Nancy made friends with her classmates and enjoyed going to school. Having good relationships with the people around her was something Mr. Dante valued greatly. Knowing that class and racial diversity was an integral part of Ridgewood, he hoped Nancy would be able to get along with children from different family backgrounds. This had led Mr. Dante to enroll Nancy in a preschool at age two even though her grandparents could provide full-time care. Mr. Dante believed that two years of experience in the preschool had contributed to Nancy's adequate social skills to relate to other children she did not know.



When asked about expectations for Nancy's learning in kindergarten, Mr. Dante did not articulate a clear idea about what he hoped for. He said, "We did not have a lot of goals set at the beginning of the year. Nancy should continue connecting with new kids that she would get to know others" (Mr. Dante Interview 2, 6/3/19). However, once the school year started, Mr. Dante realized that kindergarten had undergone great changes since Nancy's older brothers were in kindergarten. He was surprised by the rigorous academic content and benchmarks for math and reading. Seeing that Nancy had a hard time especially during English lessons, Mr. Dante set the end goal for the year as Nancy being able to learn letters and numbers. It was not until the middle of Fall semester that Nancy received tutoring services after school.

Mr. Dante thought that the summer home visit was a great advantage for Nancy and Ms. Halverson, but he did not indicate that it was also helpful for himself as a parent.

It is very beneficial, perhaps more than anything for the parents, because teachers receive a lot of information about how the transition is going to be. Also, for the children, because I think it helps them to know their teacher a little bit before the school year. In the case of my daughter, Nancy was very excited and really wanted to go to school. My other children were not as excited, but she was, and she was very happy the time that her teacher came. (Mr. Dante Interview 2, 6/3/19)

During the visit, Nancy and Ms. Halverson had quality time reading books together and giving a tour of the house. However, Mr. Dante remained a step behind when Nancy and Ms. Halverson had conversations and only became involved when Nancy referred to him to answer questions from Ms. Halverson. In part, this was because Mr. Dante perceived his role as a coordinator for the meeting between the two. From his perspective, he helped Nancy's transition to kindergarten at home and Ms. Halverson helped her at school, separately, instead of through a home-school partnership. He said, "I think parents need to talk to their children to prepare them like how the process will be different in kindergarten, how the change is going to be" (Mr. Dante

Interview 2, 6/3/19). Mr. Dante thought that his role as a parent was to discuss more about school at home with Nancy and left the rest to Ms. Halverson and trusted her to handle it. He felt that having the teacher's contact information was enough for open communication but had little contact with the teacher throughout the year.

Mr. Dante's second meeting with Ms. Halverson was the Ready-Set-Go conference, which appeared to be an information session. Their meeting lasted for 25 minutes from 4:15pm to 4:40pm and the last ten minutes were spent on filling out a form for family information. The progression of the conference was as follows:

4:20pm: Ms. Halverson confirmed that Mr. Dante hadn't been able to make it to their orientation and talked about the materials they provided such as information about the structure of the classroom and the ways that the students would move between the two classrooms. She also provided contact information for both teachers and asked him if he had any questions.

4:30pm: Ms. Halverson gave Mr. Dante a sheet to fill out with some contact information, including who would be the primary and secondary emergency contacts and information about preferred names, allergies, holidays, etc. They spent time filling out the form together (which was provided in Spanish) and Ms. Halverson answered questions along the way.

4:40pm: In closing, the teacher mentioned that they were having an open house on Wednesday and addressed preferred modes of communication, as well as asking Mr. Dante if he had any additional questions. He said that it was a lot of information but that he didn't have any more questions right now and thanked her for her time. (RA HV2 Note, 8/27/18)

Mr. Dante said that this was the only time he met Ms. Halverson individually during the school year. With the next person in line, there was no time for additional questions and concerns and for setting shared goals for Nancy's learning. Furthermore, he did not attend the group parent-teacher conference in the Spring semester because of his work schedule.

Mr. Dante thought that he would need to show up more often in school events for better collaboration with Ms. Halverson. When asked about how he worked with Ms. Halverson for

Nancy's learning in kindergarten, Mr. Dante talked about limited opportunities, that he was partly to blame for not being able to be more engaged. He explained, "Ms. Halverson did ask the parents if we wanted to come into the class to read a book or participate in a few group activities. But I couldn't really go because my schedule didn't permit me the time" (Mr. Dante Interview 2, 6/3/19). He repeatedly indicated that school was at the heart of the dynamic relationship between parents and teachers. He believed that active parent engagement was essential for a good home-school partnership.

### **Summary**

Ms. Halverson, a DLI teacher, participated in the project with the expectation that she could better work with families whose primary language was not English and those who were in vulnerable situations. When visiting Spanish-speaking families, Ms. Halverson spoke in their language and spent one hour, on average, interacting with the student and family. With sufficient time, Ms. Halverson was able to present herself as a trustworthy person who could communicate fluently in the same language even around sensitive issues. Once the school year started, however, time efficiency came first when communicating with families because of the large number of students in the class. Unfortunately, this lack of time hindered the ability to develop close parent-teacher partnerships to facilitate students' transition to kindergarten.

Nelly's parents, Mr. and Ms. Wilson, committed to spending quality time together with Ms. Halverson during home visits and believed that their relationship started out great. Since Nelly was moving to a DLI program, Mr. and Ms. Wilson were concerned about how Nelly, as a native English speaker, would experience the dual language instruction. Ms. Halverson responded to many of their questions and provided detailed information on how the program

operated. Mr. and Ms. Wilson hoped to maintain a meaningful connection with Ms. Halverson; however, the amount of face-to-face time with the teacher was not adequate to know if Nelly was adjusting well to kindergarten. They ended up taking regular time out of their busy schedules to show up at school as much as they could to better communicate with Ms. Halverson.

While Mr. and Ms. Wilson found their own ways to connect with Ms. Halverson, Nancy's father, Mr. Dante, had minimal contact with the teacher. A close parent-teacher partnership would have been beneficial for Nancy who struggled with the rigorous academic work in kindergarten. However, working with Ms. Halverson was not something Mr. Dante thought was an option to support Nancy's new school year because he believed that a parent-teacher partnership is only successful when parents are deeply engaged in their children's schooling. In his case, his work schedule could not be adjusted to spare time for school engagement such as volunteering as a classroom aide or accompanying students on field trips.

#### **4.6. Ms. McDougal and two families**

##### **Teacher Ms. McDougal at Frost Elementary School**

Ms. McDougal is a White woman who majored in early childhood education. She had taught 4K at a daycare in the district for a year and then she was hired four years ago as part of the kindergarten team at Frost Elementary School (Frost, hereafter). Before working in the district, she had volunteered as a first-grade teacher in a country in North Africa where home visits were very common. Ms. McDougal explained that home visits felt like they were embedded in the culture in that school community. Parents casually invited her to come over for dinner two or three times a week. Ms. McDougal perceived those invitations as the parents' way to show their gratitude and to show what they value: close parent-teacher relationships. Due to her previous experience, Ms. McDougal was interested in the relational aspects of doing home visits and participated in the project with the hope that she could get to know the parents and students at a more personal level.

Ms. McDougal had both academic and non-academic goals for her kindergarten students. Aligned with the district's curriculum and assessment, she wanted her students to sound out words and understand basic math concepts. She was proud of her students when they tried physical and audio strategies to successfully get a beginning, middle, and end sound of words. First and foremost, however, Ms. McDougal emphasized the importance of a great aptitude to learn without fear of being wrong. She was most proud of her students when she saw them grow after trial and error. Fostering students' confidence and independence was big goal in her mind, which she believed was a foundation for lifetime learning.

According to Ms. McDougal, the student population at Frost Elementary School was genuinely diverse. The school neighborhood is small, so it pulls students in from other groups

with different socioeconomic and racial backgrounds. The areas outside the school were very busy with school buses and parents who drove to pick their children. The school population was 53% White, 14% Black, and 22% Hispanic, and 45% of students received free or reduced lunch. Given that 31% of students were English language learners, school newsletters and letters sent home were translated into six different languages.

Ms. McDougal enjoyed working at Frost because of the diverse student population and efforts to promote family engagement. She thought that the stakeholders in the school—the principal, teachers, and PTO—tried their best to embrace families regardless of their social and racial backgrounds. PTO members were actively involved in extracurricular activities that the school offered, which created more opportunities to meet teachers and parents outside of class. Ms. McDougal also appreciated how supportive the principal was of the teachers doing home visits, since the principal suggested that kindergarten teachers participate in the home visit project. The principal even provided extra funding for Ms. McDougal to buy books called “First Day Jitters” and the little packets of Jitter Glitter, which she gave every student she met in her first home visits.

In terms of facilitating the transition to kindergarten, Ms. McDougal identified a lack of information about incoming kindergarteners and their families. She thought that this barrier was what her kindergarten team had most struggled with. Frost had a 4K program and approximately 30% of the students had attended that program and continued to attend kindergarten the following year. Not knowing about the remaining 70% was a challenge in terms of placing students in four different kindergarten classes. Ms. McDougal described it as “the luck of the draw” which often ended up with, in her words, “unevenly balanced classrooms” (Ms. McDougal Interview 2, 5/9/19). Although she never directly referred to what should be balanced,

she implied that it was balancing students' academic knowledge of letters and numbers because later she talked about how the kindergarten screener was a helpful tool for student placement.

Participation in the home visiting project helped Ms. McDougal start the school year better prepared and she felt that it helped her have a more inclusive classroom. At the time of the study, two-thirds of her students were first-borns and their parents had a greater desire to communicate with her. Meeting half of her students and families through home visits made a huge difference, especially in the beginning of the year. Ms. McDougal approached the home visits with a humble mindset thinking that parents are the best source of information about their children. She said,

There were like a few kids that I got to do home visits with where parents expressed right away certain concerns about learning. I felt like that really gave me a head start on knowing how to approach that child right away. (Ms. McDougal Interview 1, 12/18/18)

Ms. McDougal believed that she gained adequate knowledge from parents to prepare for and optimize her curriculum from day one. In addition, as the year went on, she drew on students' interests and culture in classroom projects and activities. One of the examples was the Asian-American culture week. She had a hard time finding good resources because the literature she had access to in the school was somewhat outdated and portrayed Asian characters in a stereotypical manner. By being fully immersed in the students' home environments, Ms. McDougal knew which families and students she could pull from and asked them to present their traditional objects used in real life. Ms. McDougal was confident that home visits helped to create a classroom that was more relatable to her students.

More importantly, Ms. McDougal believed that home visits strengthened her relationship with the parents, which eventually facilitated communication around the children's issues. Ms.

McDougal thought that talking about non-school topics during home visits was the key to becoming intimate with the parents rather quickly.

I feel like I've successfully transitioned into more of a warm demeanor with parents, and a more friendly demeanor. I feel like we've crossed that boundary of being strictly professional, which usually happens in mid-year. (Ms. McDougal Interview 2, 5/9/19)

She compared her home visit experiences to parent-teacher conferences, which typically were the only chances to meet some parents. When discussing students' learning and progress in school, Ms. McDougal realized that her tone unconsciously became more professional, whereas during home visits, her interaction with the parents was much warmer and more personal. She believed that the good rapport she built through home visits was the foundation for their later communication in the school year. All home visit families signed up for the mobile application Ms. McDougal used for communication, and then they were more likely to send messages later regarding their questions and concerns. Ms. McDougal took those messages as a positive sign, proving that parents were comfortable approaching her. Ms. McDougal also felt more comfortable making specific suggestions for a few students who struggled academically. With the initial connection with parents, Ms. McDougal believed that the parents were more inclined to take her suggestions seriously and help their children at home. Ms. McDougal ended the closing interview with a very positive reflection saying, "I'm glad that I got to do it. I think that it proved to be, you know, to come to the end of the year and to see some of those relationships more, or see them stronger, to see them more comfortable, and more personal. I think that that was huge" (Ms. McDougal Int 2, 5/9/19).



**Teacher Ms. McDougal and Ms. Miller, Tom's mother**

Ms. Miller is a White woman who worked as a health care professional and her husband, Mr. Miller, was a scientist. They had two children: Tom was in Ms. McDougal's kindergarten class and his older sister was in fifth grade in the same school. Mr. and Ms. Miller both had graduate degrees and worked full-time. Tom started attending a full day daycare at five months old until he was four when he was enrolled in the 4K program at Frost. Ms. Miller had to cobble together babysitters and her mother to take care of Tom after school because the 4K program was only a half-day program. Nonetheless, Ms. Miller transferred Tom from the daycare to the 4K program at Frost because she wanted Tom to be in the same school with his sister, and knew that Tom was going to attend kindergarten at Frost.

Ms. Miller believed that academic readiness was important when entering kindergarten. To better help Tom have a smooth transition to kindergarten, she had Tom repeat 4K once: the first year at the daycare and the second year at Frost. Ms. Miller wanted to give Tom more time to gain a little more academic skills after noticing that he had some trouble with his handwriting. Tom was not officially enrolled in 4K in the daycare but followed the 4K curriculum with his classmates. Then he did the second year in the 4K program at Frost. Ms. Miller said, "We made the right decision by waiting a year to start kindergarten" (Ms. Miller Interview 1, 12/7/18), because she received good reassurance from the 4K teacher about Tom's writing skills.

Tom's transition to kindergarten was not a concern for Ms. Miller's because of his years of experience in the half-day 4K program. She said, "Tom understands school well and is well-prepared for kindergarten" (Ms. Miller Interview 2, 7/19/19). According to Ms. Miller, Tom was used to staying in an organized care environment and following a regular routine. In addition, he was used to being in a group care setting with his classmates and keeping up with his teacher

well. These compliance skills were what Ms. Miller believed were important to help Tom adjust to kindergarten and Tom already gained such skills at the private daycare center.

Home visits were convenient and family-centered opportunities for Ms. Miller to shape her initial connection with Ms. McDougal. As a busy working mother, Ms. Miller had limited time to get involved in school. She had communicated with Tom's previous teachers only when legitimate concerns and questions had arisen. Ms. Miller thought that teachers had too many responsibilities, so she tried not to ask questions and add more to the teacher's plate. However, with home visits, Ms. Miller liked the idea that Ms. McDougal could see Tom in the context of a supportive family environment. To make the most of the home visits, Ms. Miller arranged both visits when the whole family could be around so Ms. McDougal could meet every family member Tom interacted with on a daily basis. Above all, Ms. Miller appreciated the time and effort Ms. McDougal took to come to their home and she enjoyed the informal and relaxed conversations they had in both visits.

Connecting individually with Ms. McDougal and discussing an individual plan for Tom were additional advantages of the home visits. Ms. Miller thought that she had productive conversations with Ms. McDougal, which allowed her to better understand Tom's perfectionism and his reactions to failure. Ms. McDougal also noted this in her reflection as follows:

Ms. Miller asked if I have noticed any break downs in class. I shared that there were no break downs, but I did notice that he would get frustrated sometimes. I then reminded Tom of the book called "Ish" we had read and assured Ms. Miller that he had taken this message well. The lesson from the book is that we might not draw or write perfect – but that *ish* is okay. Knowing her concern for Tom's perfectionism, I want to make sure that Tom feels confident in making mistakes. I also want him to know that practice at anything is important, and that as we keep trying, things get better. (Ms. McDougal HV2 Note, 9/19/18)

Both Ms. McDougal and Ms. Miller found this conversation around Tom's characteristic helpful. Ms. McDougal made a special note on the individualized goal for Tom and was able to pay more attention to Ms. Miller's concerns. Ms. Miller learned Ms. McDougal's teaching philosophy on the matter and was able to make reference to the book "Ish," if necessary. The whole point of home visits was for teachers to understand that each child was an individual coming from a different place. This was in contrast to the parent-teacher conference in groups, which Ms. Miller had experienced with Tom's sister for several years. Ms. Miller described her experience in the following way.

Teachers handed out a sheet with the statistics of where your child fell in relation to every other children in the class on standardized testing. The teachers gave a PowerPoint and talked about it. That was an ineffective way to build relationships in conferences. It did not help a child as an individual. We had a couple of years of that for conferencing. I really, really did not like the team meetings. Um... my children do very well in school, but I also think that it was not effective for children who were struggling. It's a quicker way to use their time. (Ms. Miller Interview 2, 7/19/19)

Ms. Miller thought that parent-teacher conferences should be designed to give both parents and teachers strategies and individualized attention for how to help their children. This was especially important for children moving to kindergarten where standardized assessment was widely used and became a big part of education. In contrast to home visits, Ms. Miller felt that group meetings were dismissive of personal concerns and the children as individuals.

From the teacher's side, home visits provided opportunities for Ms. McDougal to closely observe their parenting styles and Tom's interactions with his parents and siblings. Each member of the family actively engaged in both visits and Ms. McDougal learned that the family was an asset to Tom with their calm and kind demeanor. She noted in her reflection that the "parents allow him to be independent and let him act out his own interests and ideas. The sister is very

articulate and matter of fact. She often encourages Tom to do better and is a great role model as a reader and all-around learner” (Ms. McDougal HV1 Note, 8/21/18). During the first visit, Tom especially became comfortable and vocal as he shared, and there were a few times when Mr. and Ms. Miller gave gentle reminders to reign in some silliness or to lower his volume. The following conversation was an example of the parenting dynamic.

Mr. Miller: Tom rolls with changes well.

Ms. Miller: Yes, he is really easy going. He is very verbal - it’s a double-edged sword. He will ask for what he needs and expresses how he’s feeling. He doesn’t keep it inside.

Tom: I like to talk (in a loud voice).

Ms. Miller (corrected Tom): I like to sit and talk to people.

Mr. Miller: We are working on him controlling the level of his voice.

Ms. Miller: He is learning. (RA HV1 Note, 8/21/18)

Ms. McDougal noticed that mostly Ms. Miller, and sometimes Mr. Miller, had some anxiety about how Tom presented himself and they tried to reign him in. Ms. McDougal also acknowledged Ms. Miller’s interest in how Tom would fit into the kindergarten standards given that his sister had been strong in her school work. Throughout the kindergarten year, Ms. McDougal paid special attention to Tom’s aptitude and strengths for math and recommended that he be evaluated for advanced learning services. Ms. Miller gave credit to Ms. McDougal that the advanced learning services would be in place for Tom in the first grade because Tom’s sister was not evaluated until she was several years older.

**Teacher Ms. McDougal and Ms. Sherr, Taylor's mother**

Ms. Sherr is a White single mother running a small business at home. She was divorced and raising two children who attended Frost Elementary School: Ethan in third grade and Taylor in kindergarten. Kindergarten was Taylor's first school because she grew up with Ms. Sherr who worked from home. It was easier for her to take care of Taylor at home given that she could organize her own schedule and wanted to avoid the financial burden of daycare. Ms. Sherr and Ms. McDougal already knew each other because Taylor's older brother, Ethan, also had Ms. McDougal in kindergarten. Taylor had also seen Ms. McDougal since she often accompanied her mother when picking up Ethan.

Before the school year started, Ms. Sherr was a little worried about Taylor's transition to kindergarten because of her lack of experience in a large peer group. Taylor enjoyed socializing with her brother Ethan and friends in the neighborhood, but Taylor had never experienced a larger group in a school setting. To introduce Taylor to her potential peers and teachers, Ms. Sherr attended all summer play dates with Taylor. The play dates were one of the school transition events where both incoming students and families gathered with school staff at a playground or a park. Ms. Sherr did not find the play dates helpful since she did not know who would be Taylor's teacher and classmates. She suggested that the play dates would be more beneficial if the schools released the list of teachers and classmates earlier. She reasoned that individual connections were better resources than generic information when facilitating children's and parents' transition to kindergarten.

In the final interview, Ms. Sherr gladly shared that Taylor thrived in kindergarten and noted a few factors contributed to her positive experience. First, Ms. Sherr gave credit to Taylor whose personality was adaptable and resilient to new circumstances. Although following

structured routines and meeting behavior expectations such as sitting down, raising hands, and lining up were all new to Taylor, it was not an issue. Taylor was good at following new rules, which was an advantage during the transition. Second, Taylor was ready as far as meeting the kindergarten benchmarks in reading. Ms. Sherr was confident that Taylor had adequate early literacy support at home from various reading activities. Taylor had no problems following the reading chart and doing homework, which Ms. Sherr was proud of. Lastly, she felt that home visiting definitely contributed to a great start of the year. In the first visit, Ms. McDougal read a book titled “First Day Jitters” with Taylor and gave it to her as a gift, a tangible thing to remind her of her kindergarten teacher. The story depicted a person who felt nervous about starting school. There was a twist at the end that the main character was a teacher, not a student. Ms. Sherr thought that it was a thoughtful way to develop a bond of sympathy between Taylor and Ms. McDougal.

Home visiting effectively complemented school transition practices by building an individual connection with Ms. McDougal and thus personally helped Ms. Sherr’s own transition to the new school year as a parent. In her words, home visiting “humanizes the family” in contrast to an open house event at school. From Ms. Sherr’s perspective, the open house was a “must-go-to” event as it enabled her children to see the school and classroom, to drop off school supplies, and to meet their teachers. Frost Elementary School organized the event to accomplish multiple goals simultaneously including welcoming the families, having parents fill out paperwork, providing general information about the school, and introducing clubs and extracurricular activities. To efficiently provide this information, the school set up stations so parents could visit each station within a tight schedule. In this fast-paced delivery of information, Ms. Sherr felt that it was impossible for families to build rapport with Ms. McDougal as they did

during the home visit. Ms. Sherr described the open house as an overwhelming experience. She explained,

That's [open house] madness. Especially if you've got more than one kid, they're both kind of anxious. It's crazy. It's from something like 5:30 to 6:00 and then at 6 you're outside having a picnic. You essentially have 30 minutes to go to both classrooms, meet the teacher, drop stuff off—the kindergarten things—have a station set up.... There's no time for it. So that was stressful. I would recommend that there should be like a two-hour open house event where you drop off your supplies because you're so stressed and that's a time you don't want to feel...you want to be peaceful. Yes. it's not humanly possible if you have more than one kid to do both rooms. (Ms. Sherr Interview 2, 7/22/19)

Some schools held a separate open house just for kindergarten students but not at Frost Elementary school. Ms. Sherr felt rushed at the event because of the time constraints. She saw Ms. McDougal with a line of children and decided to pass because Taylor had already built an initial connection with Ms. McDougal at the first home visit.

Ms. McDougal was also aware that the open house does not create a family-friendly atmosphere. In describing a typical open-house event, she stated that it is not a "...very chill-out social time; [it] isn't like a big enough period. Usually, when parents come to school for school events, it's like very [snaps fingers] busy and fast-paced" (Ms. McDougal Int 1, 12/18/18). For this reason, Ms. McDougal believed that play dates in the summer were generally better opportunities to build rapport with prospective families and children. However, the fact that the class roster was not finalized until the start of the school year appeared to be problematic. Ms. Sherr indicated that the play dates still did not necessarily promote meaningful connections with children's specific teacher.

The one-on-one time through home visits enabled Ms. Sherr and Ms. McDougal to make their existing relationships even stronger, allowing Ms. Sherr to share more about the family. Ms.

Sherr said that their previous communication was somewhat intense with a focus on Ethan's behavioral struggles and special needs. Due to a time constraint during parent-teacher conferences, they had been busy setting up strategies and goals for Ethan's challenges in school. In contrast, Ms. Sherr found home visiting meaningful as she got to share personal issues and their family culture in a more relaxed environment. Ms. Sherr also had an opportunity to talk about her relationship with her ex-husband and how often he saw Taylor and Ethan. She had not shared this sensitive issue when Ms. McDougal had Ethan in her class a few years ago, but it helped Ms. McDougal recognize a subtle difference in Taylor's mood, feelings, and behavior this year.

Home visits were great opportunities where all key stakeholders including parents, teachers, and children in the relationship building process. Taylor sat around the table with Ms. Sherr and Ms. McDougal the entire time in the second visit and watched their conversation. Her involvement was minimal but, importantly, she was present.

Ms. McDougal (to Ms. Sherr): I wanted to tell you how Taylor is doing. Absolutely wonderful. She has been such a good helper, with her jobs, she's always wanting to help me.

Taylor beams and looks alternately at Ms. Sherr and Ms. McDougal.

Ms. Sherr (to Taylor): I am so proud of you (RA HV2 Note, 9/20/18).

Ms. Sherr believed that Taylor's comfort level toward Ms. McDougal increased by watching this friendly mother-teacher conversation. By doing so, Taylor learned that Ms. McDougal was someone she could count on in school.

In addition, both Ms. Sherr and Ms. McDougal pointed out that reading "Twas the Night Before Thanksgiving" with Taylor was one of the memorable moments of the second visit. It occurred while talking about allergy guidelines and figuring out which food Taylor could and



could not bring to school. In the conversation, Ms. McDougal learned that the family was vegetarian, and Ms. Sherr introduced the book with a vegetarian message, which was about a school group saving a farm of turkeys on Thanksgiving. While Ms. Sherr was reading the book, Taylor was next to her and listened to the story even though she had read the book before (RA HV2 Note, 9/20/18). Ms. Sherr believed that this kind of interaction showed Ms. McDougal the family values and eventually helped her better understand Taylor in a family context.

### **Summary**

Ms. McDougal's experiences demonstrated how home visiting encouraged her collaboration with parents based on mutual respect for one another. Believing that family culture and dynamics are critical aspects of understanding students' home context, Ms. McDougal focused on learning from parents rather than informing them about what they should expect for the new school year. Focusing on parents' expertise of their children's skills and challenges helped Ms. McDougal optimize her classroom for incoming students. Moreover, Ms. McDougal had frequent parent-initiated contact with the parents she met through home visits, which indicated their high level of comfort with her. Even when addressing students' academic struggles, Ms. McDougal could initiate a friendly conversation knowing that the parents trusted her expertise, and vice versa.

Tom's mother, Ms. Miller, perceived that the home visits were a unique opportunity for the teacher to explore students' home context. She coordinated the visits with Ms. McDougal when the whole family was available so every family member could be directly involved in the interactions with the teacher. Ms. Miller felt privileged to build a relationship with the teacher with the whole family because she was disappointed by the lack of individualized attention from

the parent-teacher conferences in groups she had attended before. More importantly, Ms. Miller and Ms. McDougal worked as a team to best meet Tom's needs when transitioning to kindergarten. They especially shared strategies around Tom's quest for perfection, which hindered him from learning through trial and error. Having support from Ms. McDougal at the school in conjunction with Ms. Miller's care at home, Tom made progress and excelled in math by the end of the year.

Taylor's mother, Ms. Sherr, claimed that mutual respect was necessary for a parent-teacher partnership to work; however, she felt that the school did not create that environment. Mr. Sherr attended two transition practices at school: play dates and open house event. At both events, Ms. Sherr was disappointed with a lack of opportunities to initiate meaningful connections with Ms. McDougal. The goal of the event was for students and families to freely explore the classroom environment and get acquainted with their teachers. However, having two children at the same school, Ms. Sherr felt pressed for time and left the events without being satisfied. Thankfully, Ms. Sherr strengthened her relationship with Ms. McDougal through the home visits based on positive personal regard. Without time constraints, Ms. Sherr was able to share her personal stories in a more authentic and genuine way with Ms. McDougal. In addition, having Taylor observe their friendly interaction was another benefit of the home visits. Introducing Ms. McDougal as a trustworthy person contributed to Taylor's smooth transition to kindergarten.

#### **4.7 Summary**

In this chapter, I showcased how parents and teachers made sense of their experiences with home visits in support of the transition to kindergarten. In general, the data from interviews

and observations revealed that initiating and building home-school relations was an important benefit of home visiting. This advantage stood out when parents compared their experiences with other commonly used transition practices including orientation, school-wide play dates, THE open house event, and Ready-Set-Go conferences. Teachers also mostly reported that the head start meetings with students and families were informative in preparation for the new school year.

The level of closeness, however, varied among parent-teacher dyads. In the next chapter, I summarize my interpretations of the findings through the PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). This analytic framework helped me understand the distinctions among parent-teacher relationships, and how both person and context factors relate to their experiences of home visits and the transition.

## Chapter 5. Discussion and Conclusion

In this academic journey of dissertation writing, my primary inquiry has been, “What constitutes the transition to kindergarten, and how should I approach and explore it?” The journey starts with the keyword, *process*. Although most transition studies have conceptualized measurable outcomes as the determinants of the success of transitions, my interest lies in understanding transition as a process of learning (Boyle et al., 2018; Crafter & Maunder, 2012; Hviid & Zittoun, 2008; Patton & Wang, 2012). By drawing on ecological frameworks for this dissertation, my understanding of the transition to kindergarten is multifaceted. For parents, transition is a process of becoming a parent of a kindergartner. For teachers, it is a process of getting to know new families and children and helping them have positive school experiences. For children, it is a process of adapting to a new, deeply educational environment. In these three respects, transition involves establishing and sustaining working relationships among parents, teachers, and children to support the children’s learning.

With this conceptualization in mind, the purpose of this dissertation is to understand transition from the perspective of home–school relations, guided by two research questions: 1) How do teachers and parents experience home visits to facilitate the transition to kindergarten? 2) How are teachers’ and parents’ experiences contingent on contextual and individual factors? I am to understand not only participants’ experiences but also understand the beliefs and perceptions that shape their lives.

In this chapter, I summarize the findings by incorporating Bronfenbrenner’s PPCT model with a focus on ongoing interactions that are socially and culturally constructed (Graue & Reineke, 2014). Then I discuss the implications for research and practice, the limitations of this study, and the conclusion.

## 5.1. Discussion

Bronfenbrenner's PPCT model of human development is best suited to the context of this dissertation. It provides a comprehensive approach to examine how individual characteristics interact with broader systemic factors throughout the transition process. This approach has guided me to prioritize the significance of relationships (proximal processes), which have been identified as crucial dynamics in supporting transitions (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). From this bioecological perspective, both parents and teachers are active participants in this transition process and the research focus moves beyond only focusing on the school environment.

Of note, my analysis heavily relied on the interview data because of my interest in what parents and teachers thought about their experiences. Consistent with Seidman's (2006) explanation of what interviews could afford, I believe parents' and teachers' stories best help me answer my research inquiry:

The purpose of in-depth interviewing is not to test hypotheses, and not to "evaluate" as the term is normally used. At the root of in-depth interviewing is an interest in understanding the lived experience of other people and the meaning they make of that experience. (p. 9)

I acknowledge that parents and teachers make sense of their life events and relationships as they verbally share their stories. It is especially important for me as a researcher because lived experiences of transitions and home-school relations are highly personal and often involve underlying situations, feelings, and emotions. The findings reveal that individuals who expressed trust and found support in their parent-teacher relationships during home visits tended to have more favorable transition experiences. Feeling a sense of being valued played a significant role in easing the adjustment for their children who were new to kindergarten. Notably, the level of connection and emotional warmth reported by parents and teachers varied as their experiences

were significantly shaped by their engagement across overlapping contexts, alongside their personal attributes. Figure 1 provides a schematic representation of the PPCT model with the types of contextual and individual characteristics that emerged from the findings. In the next three sections, I discuss how these characteristics are differently interrelated in building and sustaining home-school relations.

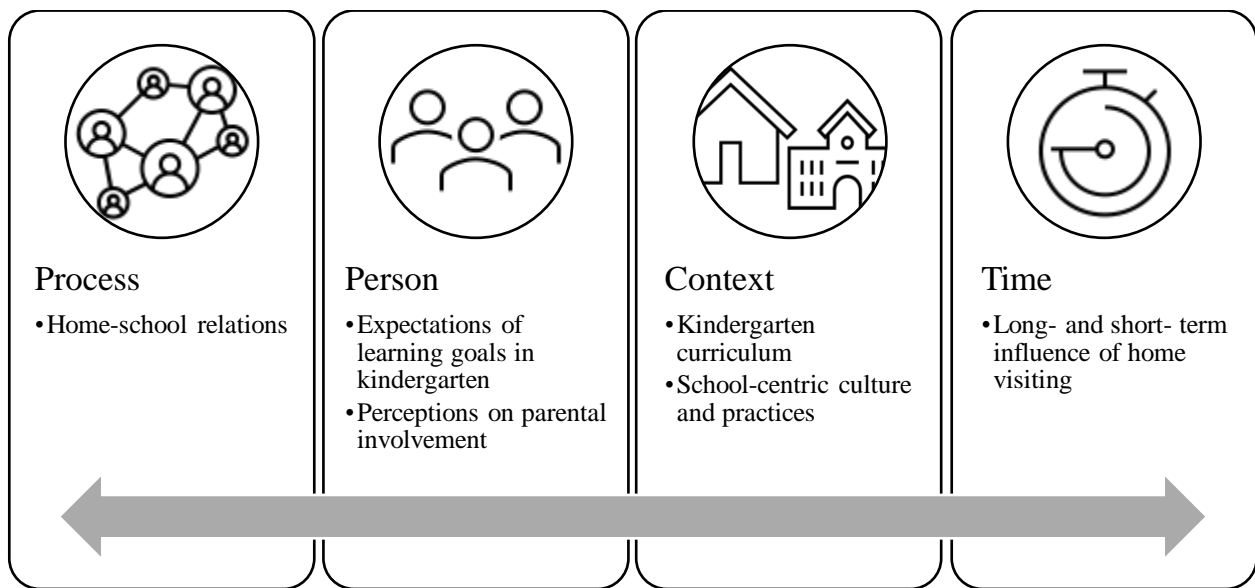


Figure 1. Schematic representation of the PPCT model in the findings

### ***5.1.1 Bridging Home and School through Home Visits***

An overarching context across the findings is the increasing academic expectations placed on kindergartners compared to preschool. Kindergarten is perceived as a time for play-based learning and socialization, but there has been a gradual shift towards a more academically focused curriculum (Costantino-Lane, 2019; Engel et al., 2021). All teachers who participated in the project acknowledged that the kindergarten curriculum has become academically demanding (Bassok, Latham, & Rorem, 2016). When it is combined with teachers' process-focused beliefs regarding the goals for learning in kindergarten, some teachers used home visiting as a valuable

tool to inform the parents of the teacher's teaching practices and to establish meaningful connections with the students and their families.

Ms. Fried and Ms. McDougal were the two teachers who described learning in kindergarten from a process-oriented perspective. For example, they both indicated that their goals for learning in kindergarten were for their students to learn through trial and error, to learn without fear of being wrong, to truly enjoy the learning process, and to find their aptitude in that process. During the interviews, these teachers' concern about students' personal growth and development frequently stood out given the academic standards in kindergarten.

In this case, the home visiting appeared to be a good stepping stone for close home-school relationships, which is essential for supporting their children's smooth transition to kindergarten. Interestingly, all parents paired with Ms. Fried and Ms. McDougal maintained mutual contact throughout the kindergarten year. Through the summer home visits, the teachers said that they were able to reflect more on the home resources to support their teaching and to solidify their relationships with the children and families.

Parents also acknowledged the positive influence of the home visits on their relationships with teachers and appreciated how it further enhanced the transition to kindergarten. For example, Ms. Howard said that her relationship with Teacher Ms. Fried was the most comfortable one compared to her previous parent-teacher relationships in early childhood programs. Ms. Paine felt that her family's Muslim culture was respected and she was able to work on her daughter's difficulties in adjusting to longer hours in kindergarten based on mutual trust with Teacher Ms. Fried. Both Ms. Miller and Ms. Sherr, who were paired with Teacher Ms. McDougal, felt privileged to meet their teacher before the school year and did not question their participation in the home visit project.

### *5.1.2 Evaluating the Effectiveness of Home Visits from Teachers' Perceptions*

When combining the rigorous kindergarten curriculum with a school-oriented culture, home visiting was likely to remain a supplementary transition practice after this study. Teachers who displayed greater authority during home visits and leading roles in their conversations with families reported that they did not find benefits in conducting home visits. In addition, parents were less likely to be perceived as the experts in their children's lives or seen as resources from whom teachers could learn from to inform their teaching practices (Whyte & Karabon, 2016).

Teacher Ms. Carney and Teacher Ms. Hanson perceived home visits as opportunities to understand children's capacity to follow kindergarten instructions and routines over the course of the day. From this perspective, home visiting should be informative so that students' learning and behaviors are foreseeable. Their goals for teaching were to meet the academic standards at the end of the kindergarten year. Ms. Carney especially facilitated her students' learning by using achievement charts that were publicly visible on the walls of the classroom. Sending app notifications about homework was an important daily task for her because it informed parents about how they could effectively support their children at home to support or catch up with the educational goals of kindergarten. In a related vein, Teacher Ms. Hanson emphasized multiple times in her interviews that school is where learning mainly takes place; thus, she believed that home visiting may not be a useful teaching tool to help her understand how her students would behave in school.

Given their school-oriented perspective, these teachers did not strongly agree that home visiting made a difference in the relationship with the families, and vice versa. Ms. Rose and Ms. Grace showed minimal affinity with their teacher Ms. Carney, and made no distinction between general transition practices (e.g., orientation) and home visiting. When conversations between



the parents and teachers mostly focused on students' areas for improvement and logistical issues, there seemed to be little room for discussion concerning family beliefs, values, and previous experiences. Without recognizing these types of funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992), integrating resources from families into teaching practices appeared to be a challenge.

Comparing the first round of interviews in the Fall semester, Ms. Carney and Ms. Hanson seemed to be less supportive of the benefits of home visiting at the end of the kindergarten year. Ms. Hanson agreed to continue home visits only upon the family's request (which was unlikely), and Ms. Carney declined because she did not see a difference between the kindergarten transition of children with and without home visits.

### ***5.1.3 Perceptions of Parent Involvement and Home-School Connections***

The findings reveal that the benefits of home visiting heavily depend on the personal attributes of the teachers and parents. For example, teachers' perceptions of crucial role of family engagement varied. If the teachers approached home visits with a genuine interest in building relationships, their relationships with the parents evolved into sustained partnerships. Conversely, if they viewed these visits as mere social meetings, functioning more as icebreakers than as foundations for long-term engagement, the potential benefits diminished (Korfmacher et al, 2008).

Teacher Ms. Halverson and Teacher Ms. Schmidt illustrated the complex interplay of individual and contextual factors in shaping parent-teacher relationships. Both teachers began their relationships with parents through home visits, which initially seemed promising. These visits effectively created a welcoming atmosphere and established preliminary rapport. However, their perceptions of parent involvement somewhat limited their efforts to sustain these

relationships. Both Ms. Halverson and Ms. Schmidt believed that parent involvement was primarily demonstrated through participation in school events and physical presence at school settings. This school-centric view likely influenced their interactions and expectations, ultimately hindering deeper connections.

Despite a positive start, Mr./Ms. Wilson and Mr. Dante, the parents who were paired with Ms. Halverson, did not express a sense of closeness or continued engagement with their teacher. This suggests that while initial contact was positive, it did not necessarily translate into a sustained relationship. The lack of enduring closeness indicates that follow-up is critical for maintaining and deepening the initial connection formed during home visits. Without ongoing efforts, the initial benefits of home visiting remain superficial and transient.

Another significant contextual factor for Ms. Halverson was her large class size, which limited her capacity to build personal relationships with each family. This contextual constraint highlights how external factors can impact the relationship building processes. In large classes, the sheer number of students and parents makes it challenging for teachers to engage meaningfully with each family.

## **5.2 Implications**

The findings from this project offer several implications for educators, policymakers, and researchers who are focused on early childhood education and the transition to kindergarten. Despite the potential benefits of home visiting in the summer before kindergarten starts, the study reveals that the influence on strengthening home-school relationships can be superficial without specific strategies and interventions. I present the following suggestions considering that

addressing parent-teacher dynamic relationships is critical for creating a supportive and inclusive process of transitioning to kindergarten.

### ***5.2.1 Implications for Research***

Future research on the transition to kindergarten should adopt a bioecological perspective that emphasizes contextual factors. This approach allows for a nuanced understanding of how diverse elements such as parental engagement, teacher support, and school resources collectively shape children's experiences (Pianta, Cox, & Snow, 2007). By focusing on the interplay between these contexts, research can more accurately capture the power dynamics between home, preschool, and kindergarten, which significantly influence communication and expectations regarding school readiness (Graue, 2006). Future studies should extend beyond assessing children's academic performance as a measure of successful transition. Instead, they should integrate this ecological framework to explore how contextual elements and power relations interact and contribute to developmental trajectories (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000).

Future research would also benefit from prioritizing parents' and families' experiences. This approach acknowledges the dynamic interactions between multiple environmental systems and their influence on child development (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006). By examining how parents perceive and navigate the transition process, researchers can gain deeper insights into the microsystem and mesosystem interactions that shape children's adjustment to kindergarten. Understanding these experiences can inform the development of targeted interventions that support parents in fostering positive home-school relationships and, consequently, smoother transitions for their children (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003). Studies following families through the

transition period can illuminate the evolving nature of these interactions and their long-term effects on children's academic and socio-emotional outcomes (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000).

Lastly, emphasizing children's voices in research on the transition to kindergarten can provide a deeper understanding of their experiences (Dockett & Perry, 2007). In the US context, there is a noticeable lack of literature on children's perspectives during this transition. Much existing research has primarily examined the associations with academic performance, socioeconomic status, and racial/ethnic backgrounds. By focusing on children's perspectives, researchers can gain valuable insights into how they perceive and cope with the transition, thereby highlighting the significance of individual agency within the microsystem and mesosystem contexts (Cronin, Kervin, & Mantei, 2022; Mirkhil, 2010). This approach can further inform the development of supportive transition initiatives that are attuned to children's needs and preferences, fostering a more child-centered transition process.

### ***5.2.2 Implications for Practice***

The findings of this study have implications for practice, particularly in relation to the implementation of home visiting and teachers' professional development (PD) to facilitate smoother transitions for children entering kindergarten. First, the current school-centric approach to transition practices can be reevaluated to better accommodate the needs of both teachers and families. Ensuring that such practices, including home visiting, are family-friendly is vital for their success. Schools must consider the logistical challenges families face, such as adjusting work schedules or managing other commitments to accommodate school events. Schools should actively seek feedback from families to understand their needs and preferences, fostering a more collaborative and supportive approach to home visiting.

Secondly, home visiting requires a significant shift in teachers' perspectives, moving from a solely school-based view to a more holistic understanding of children's lives that includes their home environments (Moll et al., 2006; Whyte & Karabon, 2016). This study underscores the need for PD to explicitly address this shift, helping teachers to develop a more inclusive and empathetic approach to their work. Evaluating the extent to which teachers have internalized this perspective shift is crucial for the long-term success of home visiting. Without sufficient support and PD, teachers may revert to their previous views and practices, undermining the potential benefits of home visiting.

### **5.3 Limitations**

While this study offers insights into the transition to kindergarten and the role of parent-teacher relationships, several methodological limitations exist. First, this dissertation project is embedded within a larger home visit project, and it involved selecting participants from relatively well-off families. The research team faced difficulties recruiting under-resourced families to participate in this voluntary research project. As a result, families who were more available or willing to participate in home visiting might have been overrepresented, while those who faced socio-economic challenges or language barriers could have been underrepresented. In similar studies, inviting minority populations and communities to participate in educational research has proven challenging, often due to differences in cultural norms and values, and historical experiences of exploitation and misrepresentation (Lopez, Figueroa, Conner, & Maliski, 2008; Tillman, 2002). These barriers can significantly impact the validity of the study's findings, as the experiences and outcomes of underrepresented groups might differ from those of the participants included in this study.

This dissertation is also limited by the small number of parents of children with disabilities and the lack of interview data concerning their experiences. An Individualized Education Program (IEP) requires collaboration between parents, teachers, and specialists to ensure that the child's needs are adequately addressed in the kindergarten setting (IDEA, 2004). However, it remains unclear whether the families in this project received IEP support, or if their experiences with IEP were simply not mentioned during the interviews. Future research should prioritize examining the unique experiences and support systems of families raising children with disabilities to ensure that their needs are adequately considered during the transition process.

#### **5.4 Conclusion**

The findings of this study underscore the multifaceted nature of home visits in facilitating the transition to kindergarten. The findings revealed that both teachers and parents perceived home visits as crucial in building trust-based relationships that benefited children's early educational experiences. Teachers often reported that home visits provided invaluable insights into each child's home environment, family dynamics, and cultural background, which enabled the teachers to develop a more holistic understanding of their students. This comprehensive perspective allowed teachers to tailor their transition strategies to better align with each child's unique needs and strengths, thereby fostering an inclusive and supportive educational setting. Additionally, home visits empowered parents by validating their role as collaborators in their child's learning journey. Parents appreciated the opportunity to share insights about their child's interests, routines, and developmental milestones, which could inform and enrich the teacher's approach. This reciprocal exchange of information and the establishment of a strong,

communicative partnership between parents and teachers contributed significantly to creating a positive and seamless transition for children entering kindergarten.

Despite the benefits, the experiences of both teachers and parents were highly contingent on a variety of contextual and individual factors. Contextual factors, such as the emphasis on rigorous academics in kindergarten and school-centered transition practices, played significant roles. Schools that prioritized the efficiency of transition practices may have inadvertently limited the empowerment of families, often expecting heightened parental involvement without fostering authentic engagement. These school-centered strategies did not always align with the needs of families, such as varying work schedules, language and cultural barriers, and opportunities to build rapport with teachers. Individual factors included the differing academic expectations of teachers and parents' prior interactions with educational institutions, which significantly influenced their perceptions and overall experiences of home visits. Addressing these factors seem to be a crucial factor in optimizing the benefits of home visits in the kindergarten transition process. By accommodating the diverse needs of families, schools could foster enhanced home-school partnerships to ultimately support smoother transitions for children entering kindergarten.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A. Invitation Letters and Consent Forms to Parents and Teachers

#### A.1 Invitation Letters

##### A.1.1 Invitation Letter to Parents

Dear [Parent's last name],

First off, we hope this year in kindergarten has been great for you and your child. We at Madison Education Partnership want to thank you for your participation in the home visit project with [Teacher's last name]. Last fall, you shared about your experiences with the home visits and your child's transition to kindergarten during an one-on-one interview. We have gotten so much important information and really appreciate your thoughts.

Moving to the end of the school year, we are back again to invite you to participate in a closing interview. This time we would like to learn about your and your child's experiences throughout the year with the home visits in the beginning. Your voices are incredibly important to the project and the district's planning moving forward.

All the procedures remain the same, except that we are not conducting interviews with your child this time. If you are willing to participate in the closing interview, a research assistant will schedule a meeting with you for a time and location that is best convenient for you. The interview is expected to take between 30 to 45 minutes. None of your family information will be identifiable as we will use pseudonyms in our publications. As a small thank you for your participation, you will receive a \$15 Amazon gift card.

Please feel free to contact Eric Grodsky at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (grodsky@wisc.edu; 608 262-4896) or Beth Vaade at the Madison Metropolitan School District (envaade@madison.k12.wi.us; 608 204-7801) for any questions about this study. Thanks for your time and consideration!

### **A.1.2 Invitation Letter to Teachers**

Dear [Teacher's last name],

First off, we hope this year has been great for you with the home visits in the beginning. Moving to the end of the school year, we are back again to invite you to participate in a closing interview. This is the very last component of the project where we would like to comprehensively learn about your experiences throughout the year. This interview will be different from the past ones where we mainly focused on your initial thoughts on your home visit experiences and relationship building with your students and families. Your participation will be really appreciated as your voices are incredibly important to the project and the district's planning moving forward.

All the procedures remain the same. If you are willing to participate in the closing interview, a research assistant will schedule a meeting with you for a time and location that is best convenient for you. The interview is expected to take between 30 to 45 minutes. None of your and your school information will be identifiable as we will use pseudonyms in our publications. Your time will be compensated at the same rate, 25 dollars an hour.

Please feel free to contact Eric Grodsky at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (grodsky@wisc.edu; 608 262-4896) or Beth Vaade at the Madison Metropolitan School District (envaade@madison.k12.wi.us; 608 204-7801) for any questions about this study. Thanks for your time and consideration!

## **A.2 Consent Forms**

### **A.2.1 Consent Form for Parents**

#### **UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON**

#### **Research Participant Information and Consent Form**

**Title of the Study:** STUDY 2 of Improving the Transition to Kindergarten for Students and Families Teacher

**Principal Investigator:** Eric Grodsky (phone: 608-263-4812) (email: egrodsky@ssc.wisc.edu)

#### **DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH**

You are invited to participate in a study about how home visits in the summer before kindergarten affect transitions into kindergarten for teachers, parents, and children.

You have been asked to participate because you have a child entering kindergarten in MMSD and participated in the home visit project in the past year. The last phase of the project asks parents to reflect on how the school year went with home visits in the beginning and what could be improved.

#### **WHAT WILL MY PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?**

You are invited to participate in a follow-up interview to talk about your home visit experiences and the transition to kindergarten. The interview will last between 30 to 45 minutes and will take place at a location most convenient to you. The interview will be audio recorded. Audio recordings are for research purposes only and will not be shared outside of the group of researched engaged in this study. The recordings will be destroyed after transcription and transcripts will be stored on secure servers at the Wisconsin Center for Education Research.

#### **ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO ME?**

The only risk to you is a possible breach of confidentiality. All data collected will be secured on a password-protected computer file and pseudonyms will be used to protect anonymity.

#### **ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO ME?**

We don't expect any direct benefits to you from participation in this study.

#### **WILL I BE COMPENSATED FOR MY PARTICIPATION?**

You will receive a \$15 Amazon gift card in compensation for your participation in this study.

#### **HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?**

Neither your name nor your child's name will be used in publications as a result of this study. Instead, pseudonyms for setting and individuals will be used in all documentation of the research. If you participate in this study, we would like to be able to quote you in publications. Please initial the statement at the bottom of this form.

#### **WHOM SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?**

You may ask any questions about the research at any time. If you have questions about the research after you leave today you should contact the Principal Investigator Eric Grodsky at 608-263-4812. If you are not satisfied with response of research team, have more questions, or want to talk with someone about your rights as a research participant, you should contact the

Education and Social/Behavioral Science IRB Office at 608-263-2320.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You may decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time.

Your signature indicates that you have read this consent form, had an opportunity to ask any questions about your participation in this research and voluntarily consent to participate. You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Name of Participant (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Parent

\_\_\_\_ (initials) I agree to audiotaped interviews.

\_\_\_\_ (initials) I give my permission to be quoted directly in publications without using my name.

## **A.2.2 Consent Form for Teachers**

### **UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN-MADISON**

#### **Research Participant Information and Consent Form**

**Title of the Study:** STUDY 2 of Improving the Transition to Kindergarten for Students and Families Teacher

**Principal Investigator:** Eric Grodsky (phone: 608-263-4812) (email: egrodsky@ssc.wisc.edu)

#### **DESCRIPTION OF THE RESEARCH**

You are invited to participate in a study about how home visits in the summer before kindergarten affect transitions into kindergarten for teachers, parents, and children.

You have been asked to participate because you are a teacher in MMSD and have worked with the Madison Education Partnership doing home visits. The last phase of the project asks teachers to reflect on how the school year went with home visits in the beginning and what could be improved.

#### **WHAT WILL MY PARTICIPATION INVOLVE?**

You are invited to participate in a follow-up interview to talk about your home visit experiences and the transition to kindergarten. The interview will last between 30 to 45 minutes and will take place at a location most convenient to you. The interview will be audio recorded. Audio recordings are for research purposes only and will not be shared outside of the group of researched engaged in this study. The recordings will be destroyed after transcription and transcripts will be stored on secure servers at the Wisconsin Center for Education Research.

#### **ARE THERE ANY RISKS TO ME?**

The only risk to you is a possible breach of confidentiality. All data collected will be secured on a password-protected computer file and pseudonyms will be used to protect anonymity.

#### **ARE THERE ANY BENEFITS TO ME?**

We don't expect any direct benefits to you from participation in this study.

#### **WILL I BE COMPENSATED FOR MY PARTICIPATION?**

You will receive \$25 per hour for the follow up interview. If you withdraw prior to the end of the study, you will receive a prorated amount based on the time that you withdrew from the study.

#### **HOW WILL MY CONFIDENTIALITY BE PROTECTED?**

Neither your name nor your school's name will be used in publications as a result of this study. Instead, pseudonyms for setting and individuals will be used in all documentation of the research. If you participate in this study, we would like to be able to quote you in publications. Please initial the statement at the bottom of this form.

#### **WHOM SHOULD I CONTACT IF I HAVE QUESTIONS?**

You may ask any questions about the research at any time. If you have questions about the research after you leave today you should contact the Principal Investigator Eric Grodsky at 608-263-4812. If you are not satisfied with response of research team, have more questions, or want to talk with someone about your rights as a research participant, you should contact the

Education and Social/Behavioral Science IRB Office at 608-263-2320.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You may decide not to participate or to withdraw at any time.

Your signature indicates that you have read this consent form, had an opportunity to ask any questions about your participation in this research and voluntarily consent to participate. You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Name of Participant (please print): \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

Teacher

\_\_\_\_ (initials) I agree to audiotaped interviews.

\_\_\_\_ (initials) I give my permission to be quoted directly in publications without using my name.



**Appendix B. Interview Protocols**  
**B.1 Interview Protocols for Parents**  
**B.1.1 Initial Interview Protocol for Parents**

Home Visit Parent Interview 1

Thanks for being willing to talk with me today. We are so excited about this project and the opportunity to learn from parents and teachers about home visiting. You've gotten information about the research project generally. What I'd like to do today is to find out about how you see your role in your child's education in and out of school, what you thought about the home visits this summer, and how things are going with (child's name) in kindergarten this year.

1. Let's start generally. Tell me a little bit about yourself and your family
  - a. Description of people in the family, work, experience with schooling
  - b. Is (child's name) your first kindergartner?
2. Tell me about (child's name). What are some of (his/her) strengths and what are some things (he/she) is working on?
  - a. Probe: interests, passions
3. How have you communicated with your child's teachers/caregivers in the past?
4. How did you like having (child's name)'s kindergarten teacher visit this past summer?
  - a. Probe: Are there things you wish he or she had done differently? Other things he or she could have done to make the experience better for you or your child?
5. What do you think your child thought about having his/her kindergarten teacher visit this past summer?
  - a. Comfort, relationship building, learning
  - b. Were there any positive experiences, outcomes and/or challenges to being a part of this for you or your child?
6. How has this transition to kindergarten been for (child's name)?
  - a. Describe, surprises, exciting things, challenges
7. Sometimes a child's transition to kindergarten is also a challenge for parents. How has this transition to kindergarten been for you?
  - a. How is being a parent different for a kindergartner than for a child in four-year-old kindergarten?
8. How would you describe your relationship with (child's name) teacher?
  - a. Communication, information sharing, goal setting, comparison to other relationships with educators
  - b. How do you think that the home visits shaped that relationship?
9. If the school district were considering bringing home visits to all kindergarten families next year, what advice would you have?
10. I have peppered you with many questions – are things I haven't asked you that you think I should know about (child's name) transition to kindergarten and home visits?

## B.1.2 Follow-up Interview Protocol for Parents

### Home Visit Parent Interview 2

Thanks for meeting with me again for this follow-up interview. We learned a lot from you last time when we talked about your home visit experiences and how your child had been doing in kindergarten. With the school year quickly moving to a close, we would like to hear from you again to deepen our understanding of your and your child's experiences throughout the year. First, I'll ask you some questions about (child's name)'s experiences in school this year. Then I'd like to learn more about the school and your relationship with the teacher.

1. Let's start by talking about (child's name). Where did he/she spend his/her time during the day before attending kindergarten this year?
2. How do you think your child's previous experiences influenced his/her transition to kindergarten?
3. When your child entered kindergarten, what did you hope he/she would achieve by the end of the year?
4. How would you describe (child's name)'s overall kindergarten experiences?
  - a. How do you think home visits shaped his/her kindergarten experiences?
5. If you could imagine a perfect kindergarten transition for your child, what would it be?
  - a. What would need to happen in order for that to take place?
6. If you were to talk to the parents of next year's kindergartners, what advice would you give to them?
7. Now I'd like to ask you a few questions about the school your child goes to. In general, how would you describe the school?
8. How do you think your school works with its families?
9. Schools hold various transition to kindergarten events including orientation, play dates, and open house before the school year started. Did your school do any of these events?
  - a. If any, which of these did you participate in?
  - b. In what ways did you or your child find it helpful?
10. It is often said that teachers and parents team up for student success. What have you and your teacher done together to achieve the goals in kindergarten for your child?
11. If given the opportunity, would you participate in home visits again? How would want it to be the same or different?
12. Is there anything that I didn't ask but I should have asked about your and your child's experiences this year?

## B.2 Interview Protocols for Teachers

### B.2.1 Initial Interview Protocol for Teachers

#### Home Visit Teacher Interview 1

Thanks for meeting with me. We are very excited to be working with kindergarten teachers to explore ways to better connect home and school. We've gone over all the elements of the study in the informed consent and you've learned more about the project as we've worked through the training and planning visits. What I'd like to do today is to talk with you a bit about your professional experience, your orientation to working with families and generally what you're hoping to get out of this experience. We'll end with time for you to ask questions about the study or to clarify anything you'd think its important for us to understand about your work as a kindergarten teacher.

1. Let's start with a general overview about you. What can you tell me about how you came to be a kindergarten teacher at [school name]?
  - a. Professional background, ed preparation, how came to MMSD, personal tidbits
  - b. What is it like to be a kindergarten teacher at [school name]?
    - i. Curriculum, team, students
  - c. More broadly, how would you describe [school name] and the community it serves?
2. What drew you to the Home Visit project?
  - a. Intentions for participation, what hope to learn
  - b. Education is a challenging effort – and collaborating with families can make it more challenging or it can create relationships that are really powerful. What have you done in the past to connect with your students families? How will home visiting add to your practice?
  - c. What are you excited about?
  - d. What about home visits make you a little nervous? How will you work through those things?
3. One of the big puzzles as a teacher is getting to know each child. For some it's like a jack in the box and for others its like peeling an onion. How do you work to get to know your students typically?
  - a. Some people think that the relationship building in home visits is important but that the real juice for children is in the knowledge that teachers can bring into the classroom to micro-target instruction. How are you thinking about bringing children's funds of knowledge into the classroom? In a context where Kindergarten curriculum is increasingly specified for teachers, how will you weave this knowledge into the curriculum?
4. From a funds of knowledge perspective teachers can gain a lot from home visiting even if they don't visit all families. How are you thinking about that in your work?
5. If this home visit project was 100% effective, what will be its effects?
  - a. For families, you, the school, the child, the district
  - b. What things might get in the way of this success and what things will facilitate the work?
6. What questions didn't I ask you that I should have?
7. What questions do you have for me?

## B.2.2 Follow-up Interview Protocol for Teachers

### Home Visit Teacher Interview 2

Thanks for meeting with me again for this follow-up interview. Last time we talked about your home visit experiences, how you used the knowledge gained from home visiting, and your relationship building with students and families. With the school year quickly moving to a close, we would like to hear from you again hoping to deepen our understanding of your experience throughout the year as well as any particular moments you wish to highlight and share with us. Some of the questions might sound familiar but they relate to the core of the project so please bear with me.

1. I'd like to start by talking about your school. How does your school support the transition to kindergarten for students and families?
  - a. How do these transition practices address students/families' needs?
  - b. What changes would make an even better experience for them?
2. In general, how would you describe the relationship between families and teachers at your school?
  - a. How would you describe what a good relationship might look like?

Now I'd like to focus on your experience and practice.

3. How long have you taught in kindergarten?
4. How would you describe your goals for your students in kindergarten?
  - a. Did home visits assist you in reaching those goals? If so, how?
5. We introduced Funds of Knowledge during the home visit training last summer, pointing to the students' at-home resources. The idea was to capitalize on the resources to make your teaching more efficient to your students. How do you think home visiting provided a window on Funds of Knowledge?
  - a. How were you able to use this knowledge in your teaching?
6. How would you describe YOUR relationship with the families of your students this year?
  - a. Throughout the year, how have you worked with the families who received the home visits?
  - b. How was it different with the families you didn't visit?
7. What do you think the long term effects of doing home visits might be for you?
  - a. For your students?
  - b. For their families?
8. What do you know now about your students and families that you didn't know as you were doing home visits?
9. If you could do home visits again, what are the things that you would continue to do the same?
  - a. What are some things that you would like to see modified or improved?
10. Will you do home visits in the future? Why/not?
11. Anything else I should know?

**Appendix C. Home Visit Reflections Forms**  
**C.1 Reflection Forms for First Home Visit**  
**C.1.1 Reflection Form Template**

<b>Home Visit Reflection: Visit 1</b>			
Student ID (not name)		Date	
Location (home, library, park, etc.)		Time	
1. Who was present? Please list relationships, not names.			
2. Write a two-paragraph summary of your visit that describes the physical setting, the participants, interactions, and knowledge shared in a descriptive form that you would be comfortable sharing with others.			
3. How would you describe the child? Include impressions about his/her likes and dislikes, assets and challenges, and at least one thing you will find memorable about him/her.			
4. What did you learn about the child's <u>family</u> while you were there? Who lives there and what are they like? What strengths do they bring to support the student?			
5. Write a note to this student that describes your first meeting and what you hope for him/her this year. Put it away and refer to it in the Spring of 2019.			

## C.1.2 Sample Completed Reflection Form

<b>Home Visit Reflection: Visit 1</b>			
Student ID (not name)	#602	Date	July 26th
Location (home, library, park, etc.)	Family home	Time	9:30-10:45
1. Who was present? Please list relationships, not names.			
Mom, Dad, Child and older sister			
2. Write a two-paragraph summary of your visit that describes the physical setting, the participants, interactions, and knowledge shared in a descriptive form that you would be comfortable sharing with others.			
<p>The family home was on a quiet tree lined street. The neighborhood is a tightly built one. The homes are likely 50-100 years old with deep yards, but the homes are close to each other. We sat in the living room for much of our visit. The family was welcoming. They offered me water. Mom, dad, big sister and child were all home. They also have 2 cats and 5 chickens. We also went outside to watch the child ride her bike and everybody joined us. They family likes to go camping and ride bikes. They also mentioned that the girls help watch the neighbor's baby and get paid in veggies! As she rode her bike I asked mom and dad more questions. They talked about how she's learned so much because she wants to be like her big sister. They mentioned her love of books. They spend time at the library. She especially likes Piggie and Elephant and chapter books at bedtime. The child likes to cook and often bakes with eggs from their chickens. The family was warm. They smile and hug each other a lot. The sisters got along well. The older sister cuddled the little sister on the couch and helped her get her bike and helmet out when we were outside. It was a comfortable meeting. They were easy to talk to and happy to share family information with me. They are excited for kindergarten and happy to be part of the study</p>			
3. How would you describe the child? Include impressions about his/her likes and dislikes, assets and challenges, and at least one thing you will find memorable about him/her.			
<p>The child was quiet at first. I tried to direct my questions more to mom and dad to give her a chance to just get used to me. They answered me and often tried to get the child to answer too! When I learned that she just learned how to ride her bike I asked her if she wanted to show me and she jumped at the chance to do that. She also gave me a tour of her backyard and introduced me to her 5 chickens! As she became more comfortable she spoke more. I know that she loves her little friends and playing dress up! She seems like a kids that really enjoys doing stuff. She answered the super power question...she would be able to shoot ice like Elsa! Mom also answered that question and said that her imagination is her super power!</p>			

4. What did you learn about the child's family while you were there? Who lives there and what are they like? What strengths do they bring to support the student?

The family is active. They like to bike and garden. I could see that they also like to do home/yard /craft projects. I learned that the family has a strong [school name] community/family connection. The child also has a set of grandparents about 2 hours away. Dad's mom is also close by. It sounds like one of the grandma's is about to retire and plans to spend even more time with the kids starting this fall. They all seemed very excited to see her more. They are active in many school based groups. Mom does a lot for the school garden and even teaches an afterschool gardening club each spring. The girls are in Girl Scouts and the family helps out when they can.

This is a family that I've seen a lot around school. I know them better now - after our visit. Mom is very out-going and did most of the talking. Dad was more quiet, but nodded his head and answered questions that I directed to him. The child was quiet at first, but as time went on she was changing in and out of dress up clothing and showing me all she could do! Big sister was there too. She helped break the ice- I've known big sister for many years (4<sup>th</sup> grader at [school name]) and so she helped little sister feel comfortable.

The family has given the child jobs. She cleans her room, feeds the cats and waters/checks her own garden plot in their yard! The girls had a playroom on the enclosed front porch and you could tell that they love to have fun. There was talk of getting lumber to build doll beds and evidence of kids art and painting throughout the yard and house.

The visit went by fast and the family was very welcoming to me. They are excited about future (fall) visits.

5. Write a note to this student that describes your first meeting and what you hope for him/her this year. Put it away and refer to it in the Spring of 2019.

Hi \_\_\_\_\_,

I remember when we met this summer. It was such a beautiful day. You had just learned how to ride your bike and I got to see you ride in front of your house. You were great! I learned so many things about you. I know that you love Piggie and Elephant books, dress-up and animals. I got to meet your 5 chickens and see your own personal garden plot! You are growing watermelon and brussel sprouts. You are excited to go to [school name] and see your friends. I learned that you love to read and "snip" stuff. During our visit I saw you practice your cartwheel and somersault. It was fun to see you smile so much.

## C.2 Reflection Forms for Second Home Visit

### C.2.1 Reflection Form Template

<b>Home Visit Reflection: Visit 2</b>			
Student ID (not name)		Date	
Location (home, library, park, etc.)		Time	
1. Who was present? Please list relationships, not names.			
2. Write a two-paragraph summary of your visit that describes the physical setting, the participants, interactions, and knowledge shared in a descriptive form that you would be comfortable sharing with others.			
3. Take a moment to think about what you would like to help your student accomplish this year. What are the most important funds of knowledge you can build on to ensure success in school? How can you use these funds of knowledge to address challenges you think he or she will face?			
4. Review the note your wrote after your first visit. Make any changes or additions you would like to make.			



### C.2.2 Sample Completed Reflection Form

Home Visit Reflection: Visit 2			
Student ID (not name)	#602	Date	9/18
Location (home, library, park, etc.)	Family home	Time	3:15-4:15
1. Who was present? Please list relationships, not names.			
Mom, older sister and student			
2. Write a two-paragraph summary of your visit that describes the physical setting, the participants, interactions, and knowledge shared in a descriptive form that you would be comfortable sharing with others.			
<p>The visit happened after school so when I arrived the girls were eating a snack and having hot tea. We sat at the kitchen table for most of the visit. Older sister was eating and reading. My student was eating and talking with us. My first question was about how the child shows emotions. I like this question because the parent can describe for me the way their child expresses feelings. This student is quiet at school so this information helps me understand her better. The visit was more relaxed than our first. We've know each other for a few weeks and I could share my observations with mom too! The family is very active outside. They spend a great deal of time gardening, biking and playing in and around the community. Mom was coming the following day to work with the class in the garden so we talked about the activities mom had planned. My student has her own garden so we discussed what she likes to eat and cook from her garden.</p> <p>This visit had a different feel. We were less formal and more talkative. At my first visit, the child was so excited to have me in her home that she ran around showing me her fun stuff and giving me a tour of her yard etc. This time we just chatted. It is nice to be able to talk about feelings related to school and what the child enjoys about kindergarten. The student is making new friends and having lots of fun at school. She loves to participate in whole group times. She is welcoming to other kids, she solves problems with words and is great at sharing tools and spaces with other kids. She may be quiet, but she makes an impact in the classroom.</p>			

3. Take a moment to think about what you would like to help your student accomplish this year. What are the most important funds of knowledge you can build on to ensure success in school? How can you use these funds of knowledge to address challenges you think he or she will face?

I would like to see this student be a little more vocal. Many people are quiet and that is totally okay, but I would like to hear her use her voice more in the classroom. This child is the kind of student who is quiet and does her work. She will join in group discussions, when asked, but for the most part is more on the quiet side. I think one way I can bring out her knowledge is through the school garden. This is an area where she's comfortable and an expert. I also think garden related projects would get her talking! Things like cooking and art with natural items.

4. Review the note you wrote after your first visit. Make any changes or additions you would like to make.

I would add that I hope you will help us learn in our school garden. Teach us the things you know about plans and growing food. You are an expert and I can see how much you love the outdoors.

## Appendix D. Home Visit Observations

### D.1 Sample Completed Observation for First Home Visit

Home Visit Observation: Visit 1			
Student ID (not name)	611	Date	Thursday, August 2 <sup>nd</sup>
Participants	Dad, mom, student, teacher, research assistant	Time	9-9:50am
Notes			
<p>The house was located one block away from the school. Teacher and I met in front of the house and knocked on the door. The teacher hadn't met this family before and had no information about them. Both parents greeted us with friendly smiles and the student was right next to the parents. She wore a blue one piece outfit and wore her hair in pigtails. We passed the living room and sat in the dining area. There were lots of board games, puzzles, and Legos both on the floor and the dining table. Dad offered me a cup of espresso and the teacher had water. Even though it was a bit of chilly and cloudy day, a lot of lightning (including Christmas lights) in the house created a very cozy and welcoming climate.</p> <p>9:00am –The student was excited to show us Harry Potter Legos that were on the table and said she built those with her brother. The teacher asked if her brother was also at home and the parents said he had a sleepover. Her brother is ten years old and also goes to the same school where the student will attend kindergarten. There were two fish tanks in the dining area with one fish in each tank– one for the student and the other for her brother. The student showed us how to feed them and the teacher complimented her saying that she pinched just the right amount of food. The teacher asked the student if she went to 4K and she said the name of the center. The teacher noted that she knew other girls who also went to the same center.</p> <p>The teacher initiated the conversation with the parents by asking “What’s she like?” The parents said she is such a curious girl, gets so excited about projects, likes Girl Scout badges, likes hands-on activities, and especially gets excited about bugs – thy had a dish of worms. The teacher talked about how kids in school play with bugs in the garden. The student said she had picked vegetables in the garden and the teacher said she pulled out weeds.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teacher: What would you like to do when it’s raining outside?</li> <li>- Student: Splashing, I would to play!</li> <li>- Teacher: What would you like to do when you play? Do you like games?</li> <li>- Student: Airplanes.</li> <li>- Teacher: How do you play with the airplanes?</li> <li>- Student: I’m just playing with the game.</li> <li>- Teacher: Do you like to play by yourself or play together?</li> <li>- Student: Together.</li> </ul> <p>The teacher asked the student, “If you were a super hero, what would you like to have?” She</p>			

smiled right after the question, seemed excited, but ran to the living room and said “No.” The dad answered instead – she wishes to have a power to make things grow and the teacher wishes she could fly.

9:10am – The teacher asked the parents about their hopes for what the student will learn in kindergarten. The student sat right next to the teacher and started to eat a piece of bread.

- Dad’s hopes for the student: having good traits and improving her resilience skills. He believes that being successful is being happy and those people have resilience.
- Mom’s hopes: being kind to people that she doesn’t know, being a welcoming and inclusive person, treating people with kindness and respect

Dad used to walk her older brother to school and planned to do that for her as well.

- Teacher (to student): Are you excited to go to the same school as your brother? I could talk to your brother’s teacher and ask him to visit and play with us. He will love that.

Then the teacher talked about a new lunch room and said kids will eat breakfast & lunch together. The student was looking at her eyes the whole time when she was talking.

- Teacher: What would you put into your lunch?
- Student: Brownies, chocolate chips, strawberries, water to drink (Dad said those are her choices, not the parents’ and everyone laughed).
- Teacher (to parents): What other things you would like her to learn from me?
- Student: Rainbows!

Mom wanted her daughter to ask for help from her teachers because she did not reach out to teachers in 4K when it was needed. She often came home crying and hurt, but did not want to talk to the teachers about it.

- Student: I was scared.
- Mom: Teachers at school are there to help you.
- Teacher: I know it’s kind of scary. If you tell your parents, they can always tell me too!

The teacher also noted that the kids will learn problem-solving skills and how to express their emotions and thoughts.

- Dad: How many students are in your class?
- Teacher: 15 this year.
- Student: I wanted it to be 16!

The school recently hired one more kindergarten teacher so the kindergarten team consists of four teachers.

9:20am – When the teacher asked about the family, the parents shared how they met and came to live in Madison. The dad had worked with the mom’s brother and they met each other at the brother’s wedding. They had been in the house for three years. Mom went to school in Madison and her brother’s family and parents lived close so they meet often. The teacher said she also went to school in Madison and loved this community/neighborhood.

- Teacher (to parents): Do you have any questions about kindergarten?

The dad wondered about STEM education and science lessons because the student was interested in electricity and science concepts. He also believed that girls need to learn more science by doing hands-on activities. The teacher agreed with his idea and said the kindergarten team planned together to provide different levels of activities so the kids could be

challenged. All kindergarten classrooms follow the same daily routines but sometimes the teachers switched their students with other classrooms to have various levels of reading activities. Thus, the kids have opportunities to get to know other teachers.

9:30am – The mom is a social worker and works 3am-3pm twice a week. Her work schedule days change, but the dad is available to take care of the kids when she is at work. The student went to summer school on and off this year. The teacher noticed that the student had bare feet.

- Teacher: Do you like to wear socks and shoes?
- Student: No.
- Teacher: I don't like socks either. You said you like rainbows. We could put rainbows on your locker. I saw a rainbow Monday night.
- Student: I missed it!

9:35am – The family missed the kindergarten visitation day so they didn't know where the classroom was located in the building. The teacher said it was right next to the library and the room had a giant window. She also noted that they could visit school on the day when families drop off their kids' school supplies. The mom said they might not be able to make it but the teacher said she would be at school so she could accommodate that. If they could make it, the student could see the room, the toys, and the puppet theater.

- Mom: She likes to play with her stuffed animals.
- Teacher: Do you like to sing? You could teach me.
- Student: I like to make up songs.
- Teacher: We will get to share that a lot.

The teacher talked about a mystery box in the classroom – families take turns to a stuff in the box, give three hints, and the students guess what it is. The teacher gave the booklet/markers – the booklet was decorated with stickers and the student's name was written on the cover.

- Teacher: What do you want to do with this?
- Student: Don't know.
- Teacher: It's all yours.
- Mom: She loves things like this.

9:40am – The teacher started to talk about books – she has lots of books in her classroom and Mo Willems' Elephant and the Piggie book series are her favorites. The family also had the series and the student went upstairs to grab the books. She brought three books to the table and started to read one of them to the research assistant while the parents and the teacher talked about school. She explained that breakfast starts at 7:30am but the student could come later if the parents didn't want her to have breakfast at school. The parents noted that her daughter was comfortable using lower case letters and working on writing skills. The teacher said lots of choices in the classroom would improve her writing skills. The dad left for work.

- Teacher (looking at the student): Are you reading? Keep reading it. They are great stories. [The student read two books. She could read short sentences.]
- Research assistant: You are such a great story teller.
- Teacher: She even acted when she read.

9:50am – The teacher asked the mom about the plans for the day. The mom said they were going to play with the student's best friend and catch frogs/toads.

- Student: Do you know what? I saw frogs hopping by a little pond nearby and I caught it.
- Teacher: What did it feel like?
- Student: Sticky.
- Teacher: Warm or cold?
- Student: It was warm.
- Teacher: Did it stay in your hand?
- Student: Yes. It felt good.
- Teacher: You are a person who likes to try new things.

The teacher had to leave for her doctor's appointment and they walked us to the front door.

**D.2 Sample Completed Observation for Second Home Visit**

<b>Home Visit Observation: Visit 2</b>			
Student ID (not name)	611	Date	Thursday, September 27th
Participants	mother, student, teacher, research assistant	Time	3:15-4:05pm
Notes			
<p>The research assistant met the teacher in front of the student's house. She knocked on the door and the mother came out to greet us. The student was hanging out next door so we went there to pick her up. The mother said they were really close so she often went there to play after school. The teacher asked the student whether they should have the meeting inside or outside, and the student said, "Inside!"</p> <p>The teacher brought a game "Hoot! Out! Hoot!" but noticed that they already had the game in the living room. The student said they were missing a couple of pieces. The teacher said if they didn't get to play, they could play at school the next day.</p> <p>The student's brother and his three friends were hanging out together. The teacher had a short conversation with him. The mother asked them to do their homework in the dining area so they could meet in the living room. The student sat on one of the couches, and the research assistant and teacher took the other. The mother sat on the carpet. It was not a big living room but it felt cozy and welcoming. There was a medium-size TV, lots of board games on the side table, and numerous books on a vertical bookshelf.</p> <p>3:20pm</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teacher: What do you usually do with your mother?</li> <li>- Student: Play games.</li> </ul> <p>The mother said they did some baking yesterday because the student wanted to make her own recipe. They ended up making some squishy cookies.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Mother: Do you remember what ingredients we put in?</li> <li>- Student: Banana, sugar, chocolate chips, milk, and we added an egg and flour; then they baked.</li> <li>- Teacher: Did you eat it? How did they taste?</li> <li>- Student: Good!</li> <li>- Teacher: What do you do with your daddy?</li> <li>- Student: I don't know.</li> </ul> <p>The mother reminded the student of their occasional Saturday events taking a bus to go to a coffee shop (the student mentioned the coffee shop named "Collective") and the Children's Museum. The student said the museum was closed down for a year. The mother corrected this as they were closed for a shorter period of time for cleaning.</p>			

- Teacher: What do you like to do at the museum?

The student said, “I don’t know” again. She seemed excited so her mother had to calm her down by saying, “Hey honey, let’s take some time and think a little bit.”

- Student: I like to go down the slide and play in a circle area.

The teacher was also familiar with the slide at the museum and agreed with her about how much fun it was to play at the museum.

- Teacher: I saw you bringing in the mail. Is bringing the mail your job? Do you have other jobs?
- Student: I don’t know.
- Teacher: Do you make your bed?
- Student: Yes.
- Teacher: That’s a great job.

The student asked what the teacher was writing down noticing she took notes during the meeting. The teacher said she didn’t want to forget the great things about the student and was excited to get to know her better.

- Teacher: How does the student show her emotions? Because you know her much better than me.
- Mother: When proud- telling, smiling, some taping; when upset- burying herself right behind the pillow, crying; when excited- jumping up and down, using her voice.
- Teacher: There is a purple fluffy chair in the classroom where the students can sit and take some time when they get emotional. I’ll bring a tent later this year to make space for them to feel comforted.
- Student: What tent?
- Teacher: I have one at home.

The student showed her interest in the teacher’s phone case by saying “It’s pink and glittery!”

The teacher asked about the family’s morning routine. The mother usually wakes the student up by rubbing her back and chooses clothes for her. The family finishes breakfast at 7:20am and then the student brushes her teeth. The student’s job is to get her lunch box, and her father walks her to school.

- Mother: Some mornings are different. How are they different?
- Student: I don’t know. (Note: she seemed to use this phrase habitually. She didn’t seem to be bothered by this question or to not being interest in the conversation.)

When the mother worked late night, she would sleep in the morning and the father would take care of the two kids to get to school.

- Teacher: Any family traditions?
- Student: Watching science movies and going to science Saturday events.
- Mother: Going to the cabin with relatives and going to church on Saturday night.

The teacher said knowing family traditions helped her especially during large group sharing time. She could easily prompt their thinking by saying, “I remember when you talked about xxx. Could you share your experience?”

3:35pm



The teacher said the student received a bud award and she was good at sharing the toys and leadership. She was also good at using words and had been kind to her classmates whose English was not their first language. She seemed happy, cheerful and joyful.

The mother's goal for the student was to encourage her social, emotional skills. The student seemed so tired after school so they had to move the bed time earlier. The teacher said it might be overwhelming to be in a classroom with more peers than before. Following the classroom rules and sharing classroom materials might not be an easy task at first. It would take time. The mother was trying to maintain some quiet time for the student so she could calm down and rest.

- Teacher: Did the student talk about any of her new friends at school?

The mother mentioned a couple of names and the teacher said one of them had a few things in common with the student like living right across from the school and having an older brother.

The teacher asked about other jobs that the student did at home other than bringing in the mail and making her bed. The family tried to keep Sunday mornings for cleaning time. The main job for the two kids was to clean their own rooms starting with putting books away.

- Mother: What other things are you supposed to put away? Those are usually all over the floor.

- Student: Stuffies.

The classroom earned an award and the students picked a pajama day for the reward.

- Student: We wanted to have stuffies.

- Teacher: Some wanted to have stuffies and others wanted a jammy day. A pajama day won but next time we will do stuffies.

- Student: It will be a long time from now.

- Teacher: I don't think so. We earned the pajama day really fast by helping each other, traveling safely, and cleaning up.

- Mother: You will be so comfy in your PJs.

The teacher asked about the family's night routine.

- Mother: What's after bath?

- Student: Books, songs and bed.

- Teacher: What's your favorite stuffy. Does it have a name?

- Student: I have so many.

- Teacher: Do you like to have lights on when you go to bed or (do you) like it to be all dark?

- Student: I like to have a night light.

The teacher talked about two different types of homework for the upcoming week. One was to find something in nature and bring it into the classroom to share, and the other was traditional paper-pencil work to write numbers and letters. Both of them were choices and not required.

3:45pm

The mother said that the student loved the salsa day when one of the parents came to school and led a cooking activity. The teacher said the students were split into groups and took

different responsibilities including chopping, adding, and mixing things.

- Teacher: What else did we add to salsa?
- Student: Onions, pepper, salt, tomato.
- Teacher: Do you remember the pepper mill that we twisted?
- Student: Yes!

The teacher reminded the student of a science experiment exploring materials that sink or float. They were planning to let their one butterfly that was left go this week. The class had marked on the calendar when the butterflies would be going outside. Six out of seven caterpillars already made it and they had come earlier than the expected date.

The mother shared a little accident that happened to the student last summer. She had picked up a white fuzzy caterpillar in the park and it turned out that the caterpillar was poisonous. Somehow the student didn't want the story to be shared and seemed shy.

- Student: Don't tell.
- Teacher: It's okay. I remember when your mother told me that you were bitten by something but you were okay.

The student's brother came into the living room and started to play a card game all by himself. The mother went to the kitchen to get some snacks for the student. The teacher asked the brother if his friends came over often, and he answered, "Yeah."

3:52pm

The teacher talked about a book box that belonged to the student. Whenever she made a book, it would go into the book box and eventually would be sent to home. They had been practicing saying, "I'm a reader!" (The student laughed out loud.)

- Teacher: You like to do everything in school. Do you have questions about school?

The mother asked if the teacher needed any help as they were willing to support her. The teacher would send a note home in the near future with specific dates and times that would be great to have parents' support including preparing snacks for the class.

The class would also go on a field trip to a farm named Tina Hinchley in two weeks and the teacher noted that the parents were welcomed to join, but there was no pressure.

- Teacher: Have you ever been to an animal farm before?
- Student: No.. oh, yeah! ... I want to milk a cow.
- Teacher: We will go on a hayride and will pick pumpkins. Kitty cats will be everywhere.
- Student: Kitty cats? (Excited)
- Teacher: But they have claws so we should be careful.
- Student: They are alive?
- Teacher: They are alive. They have 20 of them.
- Student: (Jumping)
- Teacher: They work in the barn.
- Student: What do they do?
- Teacher: They chase mice. You will get to feed the cats. Farmer Tina will give you big giant bottles to feed the cows too.

- Student: I've done that before!
- Teacher: Then you could help other kids.

The mother said the student went to a farm with her two friends last year and she loved it.

3:55pm

The teacher noted that the class was still learning classroom routines, and asked if the student ate a lot of lunch since 20 minutes of lunch time is not enough for some kids. The teacher didn't throw any leftovers away so the parents could know how much the students had at school.

- Teacher: Is there anything you like? Do you like your friends?
- Student: (I) play with Baba (a classmate's nick name)

The mother asked if there was an email list for the student's classmates. She wanted to connect with other parents so the student could hang out with her close friends from time to time. In the past with the student's older brother, his teacher let the parents know a couple of friends who might be good to connect with outside of school. The teacher said she would share the email list soon.

- Mother (to student): Are there any friends that you want to get together with someday?
- Student: (mentioned a couple of names)
- Teacher: I will send their contacts soon.
- Mother: That would be awesome.
- Student: When are we going to play the game? (indicating "Hoot! Out! Hoot!" the teacher brought)
- Teacher: We could play the game tomorrow during choice time. Thanks for having us.
- Mother: She's been very happy about going to school.
- Teacher: That's good. I'll see you tomorrow!
- Student: See you tomorrow morning!

The student and the mother walked us to the front door.