

A CASE STUDY OF HOME VISITS CONDUCTED BY KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS
IN A LOW-INCOME ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

by

Sheena Brannock Green

Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment

Of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this single case study was to develop an in-depth description of the practice of home visits conducted by kindergarten teachers with students at the beginning of the school year in a suburban, low-income elementary school in North Carolina. The theory guiding this study was Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory of human development, as it states that important child development occurs in all environments where children interact. Data were collected via face-to-face interviews, mock letters of advice, and a focus group. The purposive sample included kindergarten teachers who conducted home visits, parents of kindergarteners who had a home visit conducted by their child's kindergarten teacher, and Early Childhood Leaders in the district who have a vested interest in kindergarten teachers conducting home visits. I analyzed the data through coding and discovering themes. I sought to better understand the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits that are used with kindergarteners by answering the following research questions: How do stakeholders describe the practices of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits in a suburban, low-income North Carolina elementary school? How is the building of relationships described when kindergarten teachers conduct home visits with students starting kindergarten? How is the home environment described when kindergarten teachers conduct home visits with students starting kindergarten? Results showed that the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits is an enjoyable experience for all stakeholders, helps build genuine relationships, is a learning experience for the kindergarten teacher, and is impactful in different ways for each stakeholder.

Keywords: kindergarten, elementary teachers, home visits, transition practices, suburban elementary schools

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Dedication

This is dedicated to the thousands of kindergarten teachers who continually strive to do what is in the best interest of kindergarteners, regardless of the many local and state initiatives that make it more challenging to be child centered. I have nothing but the utmost respect for those of you who always put kids first.

Acknowledgments

The culmination of my graduate studies, which includes this dissertation, was no quick and easy feat. I truly believe that God planted the seed of my wanting to obtain my doctorate while sitting in my advanced biology high school class twenty years ago. I have been asked over and over again what I want to do once I get my doctorate. My response has remained consistent over the years; this is not a “means to an end” for me, as I have always wanted to get my doctorate. I will continue to glorify God and honor Him regardless of my job title and position. There have been many verses that I have clung to during this journey. Psalm 62:2 says, “Truly He is my rock and my salvation; He is my fortress, I will never be shaken.” Over and over again, He has sustained me so that I would not be shaken regardless of outside circumstances. I also love knowing that “God is within her, she will not fail” (Psalm 46:5).

God has provided me an amazing family that has sacrificed and encouraged me along the way. Granny was always so proud of me and told everyone that “Sheena’s a school teacher.” Her love of my job as a teacher was rare during my early years as an educator, and I am forever thankful for her pride in my profession. I have spent an endless amount of time at Mamaw’s house working on assignments for my graduate classes. I am thankful for her love of me and her love of God. Mom beams when she talks about me getting my doctorate. Dad always checks in on me to see how it is going. Julie has understood the amount of time necessary and has advocated for me to set aside sufficient time to complete assignments. Michael has always been interested in the random facts and has listened regularly as I shared new things that I have learned. Alexis and Maia, you were part of this journey at the very beginning, and my love for you is everlasting. Leeann is my APA, paper-writing buddy. I love you so much, and I cannot wait to recreate the picture of us at the completion of my third degree from Liberty University

(#withmyfave). Thank you for your attention to detail and humor while editing my manuscript. I cannot go without mentioning my two nephews, Zechariah and Riley. Love you both! Justin came into this process at just the right time. You have been a constant source of encouragement and support. I am forever thankful for you. We are better together. I love you.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Starting kindergarten is a difficult transition for many students (Ahtola et al., 2011; Little, Cohen-Vogel, & Curran, 2016; Nelson, 2004). When students do not have a successful transition to kindergarten, they perform lower on academic tasks, have below average independence skills, and have a hard time following directions at school (Smythe-Leistico et al., 2012). Kindergarten teachers can conduct transition activities such as home visits with students who are entering kindergarten to help improve the transition to formal schooling (Friedman, Gill, & Winters, 2006; Green, Kothari, & Malsch, 2011; Little et al., 2016; Schulting, Malone, & Dodge, 2005). When kindergarten teachers conduct home visits, they are acknowledging that important child development occurs in the home and in school as Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory of human development states. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to examine these research questions: "How do stakeholders describe the practices of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits in a suburban, low-income North Carolina elementary school?" "How is the building of relationships described when kindergarten teachers conduct home visits with students starting kindergarten?" and "How is the home environment described when kindergarten teachers conduct home visits with students starting kindergarten?"

Chapter One synthesizes relevant background information about kindergarten, the transition to kindergarten, and transition practices that are used with kindergarten students such as kindergarten teachers conducting home visits. This chapter summarizes the historical background and the social context of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits with their students. The theoretical perspective of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory is presented. In Chapter One, I detail my investment in this research through the "Situation to Self"

section. I unveil the assumptions and educational perspectives that I have as a constructivist. The purpose of Chapter One is not only to discuss the need for this study through the problem statement but also to provide a purpose for this research. The significance of the study is presented as well as the research questions and corresponding definitions.

Background

More than 3.7 million students attended a public kindergarten class in the United States during the 2015–2016 school year (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2016a). Of these students, 48.8% were classified as White or Caucasian, 15.5% as Black or African American, 26.4% as Hispanic, 5.4% as Asian/Pacific Islander, 1% as American Indian/Alaska Native, and 2.9% as two or more races (NCES, 2016a). In 2024, it is predicted that 46% of students who attend a public school will be White, 29% Hispanic, 15% Black, 6% Asian/Pacific Islander, 4% multi-racial, and 1% American Indian/Alaska Native (NCES, 2016b). More than one fourth of kindergarteners live in a home that is below the federal poverty threshold (39% Black or African American, 30% Hispanic, 10% White, 10% Asian, and 11% another ethnicity or multiple ethnicities; NCES, 2016a). Six percent of kindergarteners not only live in poverty but also do not have a parent who completed high school (NCES, 2018b).

In the public schools in the United States, nearly one fourth of the students speak a language other than English at home (Hartman, Winsler, & Manfra, 2017), and there are nearly five million students who are classified as English Learners (NCES, 2018a). More than three fourths of the students classified as being an English Learner speak Spanish at home (NCES, 2018a). One thing that is common with all students entering kindergarten, regardless of their race, home language, and/or socioeconomic status, is that they are going through a rite of

passage by starting formal schooling (Eisenhower, Baker, & Taylor, 2016; Friedman et al., 2006).

Transitioning into kindergarten is considered a major milestone in the lives of all children and is even considered “one of the most important events in the lives of children and their families” (Dail & McGee, 2008, p. 305). Unfortunately, starting kindergarten is a challenging transition for many students (Ahtola et al., 2011; Little et al., 2016; Nelson, 2004). While any type of student may struggle with the transition to formal schooling, students with disabilities and students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are the most likely to experience a challenging transition (Conger et al., 1992; Entwisle & Alexander, 1993; Entwisle, Alexander, & Olson, 2007; Iruka, Gardner-Neblett, Matthews, & Winn, 2014; McLoyd, 1998; Quintero & McIntyre, 2010).

When students are successful in kindergarten, they are more likely to be successful in higher grade levels (Clark & Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2008; LoCasale-Crouch, Mashburn, Downer, & Pianta, 2008), have stronger social skills (Santo & Berman, 2012), and have better behavior in school (Racz, O’Brennan, Bradshaw, & Leaf, 2016). Schools, communities, and kindergarten teachers can conduct transition activities to aid in a smoother transition (Friedman et al., 2006; Little et al., 2016). While conducting home visits is the least frequently used transition activity by kindergarten teachers (Friedman et al., 2006), numerous positive benefits of home visits have been shown including better social skills, more academic motivation, higher academic achievement, and increased work habits (Schulting, 2009). “When teachers enter their students’ homes as learners, they are able to cross the threshold of socioeconomic, ethnic, and racial divides that often exist between classrooms and living rooms” (Johnson, 2014, p. 364). When teachers visit students’ homes, teachers become learners, while students and families become

teachers. Home visits provide a more relaxed environment for parents to talk to teachers, which equalizes the power balance between families and teachers (Bhavnagri & Krolikowski, 2000).

Historical Background

In 1837, kindergarten was created by Frederick Froebel in Germany (Dhuey, 2011). He was inspired by the teachings of Rousseau, Pestalozzi, and Comenius (Dombkowski, 2010). Kindergarten was designed as a play-based classroom to help develop young children's character (Weber, 1970). The first English kindergarten classroom in the United States was created in 1860 (Allen, 2006), and by 1986, kindergarten was part of the public-school system in every state in the United States (Dhuey, 2011). While most students successfully transition into kindergarten, there are some students who have a difficult transition into kindergarten (Ahtola et al., 2011; Little et al., 2016; Nelson, 2004). Schools, communities, families, and educators have used a plethora of transition activities and strategies to help rising kindergarten students have a more successful start to formal schooling including the kindergarten teacher conducting home visits with students prior to the beginning of the school year (Friedman et al., 2006; Little et al., 2016; Schulting et al., 2005).

Home visits have taken place since they were endorsed by Florence Nightingale during the Elizabethan times in England (Gomby, Culross, & Behrman, 1999). Home visiting programs have taken place in the United States since the mid 1800s (Gomby et al., 1999). Early childhood educators in the United States have been conducting home visits since at least the 1880s (Bhavnagri & Krolikowski, 2000; Sweet & Appelbaum, 2004), and early educators conduct nearly 500,000 home visits a year (Gomby et al., 1999). Home visits have been conducted by preschool and elementary teachers to educate parents, link families and communities, improve parent attitudes towards school, provide social support, promote better health, and improve the

transition to preschool and kindergarten (Bierman, Welsh, Heinrichs, Mix, & Mathis, 2015; Gomby et al., 1999; Harden, Chazan-Cohen, Raikes, & Vogel, 2012; Roggman, Boyce, Cook, & Jump, 2001).

Social Context

Almost half of all kindergarten students have a hard time transitioning to kindergarten (Schulting et al., 2005). Of these students, “approximately one third (32%) of children were reported to have ‘some problems’ during the transition, and 16% of children were identified as having a ‘difficult or very difficult’ entry into kindergarten characterized by ‘serious concerns or many problems’” (Schulting et al., 2005, p. 860). These difficulties are more prevalent in students from low socio-economic backgrounds than students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds (Cole, Gutman, & Sameroff, 2003; Conger et al., 1992; Entwisle & Alexander, 1993; Entwisle et al., 2007; Iruka et al., 2014; McLoyd, 1998). Furthermore, students with disabilities are more likely to experience a difficult transition into formal schooling than typically developing students (Quintero & McIntyre, 2010).

More than one in three kindergarten teachers said that at least half of the students in their class had specific problems transitioning into kindergarten (Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011). The transition to kindergarten can be difficult for many reasons such as the academic demands of kindergarten and the very nature of kindergarten itself, which includes the philosophical differences between kindergarten and preschool (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000; Santo & Berman, 2012). Students are expected to be more independent in kindergarten, as they are given more responsibilities (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). Specific issues of students transitioning to kindergarten include having a hard time completing tasks independently, not following directions, disorganization, and low pre-academic skills (Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011).

Teachers, parents, and children can all have anxiety about starting kindergarten (Johnston & Mermin, 1994). Parents of students starting kindergarten indicated that the transition to kindergarten is ongoing and, in most cases, extended throughout the kindergarten year (Miller, 2015). Parents also stated that the transition to kindergarten is the most difficult for the oldest child in a family (Miller, 2015). There are more parental concerns about the transition to kindergarten for children with disabilities than for typically developing children (Quintero & McIntyre, 2010). Parents of kindergarteners have discussed feeling less connected with the school once students enroll in kindergarten as compared to when the students were in preschool (Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011). There is also less parent involvement in kindergarten than in preschool (Jung & Han, 2013).

A successful transition into kindergarten is important for many reasons, one of which is that research has shown success in kindergarten is predicative of success in higher grades (Clark & Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2008; Schulting et al., 2005). Furthermore, difficulties in kindergarten are related to students dropping out of school before completing high school (Clark & Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2008; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008). Students who successfully transition into kindergarten are more likely to enjoy school, have less absences, and have better behavior (Cook & Coley, 2016; Racz et al., 2016). The kindergarten year sets the tone for students' attitudes about formal schooling, student behavior, and student coping skills (Friedman et al., 2006), and a student's reputation which is created in kindergarten follows the student throughout higher grades (Ladd & Price, 1987).

Schools can conduct transition activities to help ensure a more successful transition into kindergarten (Friedman et al., 2006; Little et al., 2016). Effective transition activities can serve as a bridge into kindergarten (Cook & Coley, 2016). Benefits of transition activities include

higher academic performance and better social skills (Ahtola et al., 2011; Little et al., 2016; Schulting et al., 2005). Most schools conduct at least one transition activity such as sending home information about kindergarten, inviting families to the school to tour the school, and/or conducting screenings on students entering kindergarten (McIntyre, Eckert, Arbolino, Reed, & Fiese, 2014). The most frequently used transition activity is sending home a generic flier, and the least common transition activity is visiting the homes of kindergarteners (Friedman et al., 2006).

Home visits are customized for each family and have shown many positive benefits including better work habits in school, higher social skills, more academic motivation, and increased academic achievement (Schulting, 2009). The least commonly used transition practice, home visits by the kindergarten teacher, has the potential to yield the most positive results. Home visits are “an ideal way to understand families’ unique circumstances and interests and to individualize services to maximize available resources” (Korfmacher et al., 2008, p. 172). Prior research on home visits has not detailed the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits. This case study will add needed research to the field by providing qualitative insight from kindergarten teachers, Early Childhood Leaders, and parents of kindergarteners that describes the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits with kindergarten students. Few studies provide in-depth understandings of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits, and there are no case studies on the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits. There is also very limited research on the perspectives of kindergarten teachers, Early Childhood Leaders, parents of kindergartners, and kindergartners on the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits (Ahtola et al., 2011; Bohan-Baker & Little, 2002; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008; Reglin, 2002; Schulting, 2009; Schulting et al., 2005).

Theoretical Perspectives

The framework of this study is based on Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, which says that young children can be viewed similarly to Russian nested dolls. All layers of children's environment influence them, and all environments are important to the development of youth. "Children develop as a result of a series of reciprocal interactions with their environments in general and their families" (Ferretti & Bub, 2016, p. 60).

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) model encourages scholars to view the impact of the relationships between schools and communities on children's development (Collins, Frels, & Onwuegbuzie, 2013; Leonard, 2011). To help alleviate the difficulties transitioning into kindergarten, schools and communities can use transition activities with students, which cause layers of student development to overlap. When viewing the transition to kindergarten through Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological system theory,

the transition to kindergarten is not only a product of the interactions between the child and the school, but a series of different interactions between: child and school, family and school, family and child, community and family and other interactions. (Knaus, Warren, & Blaxell, 2016, p. 59)

Situation to Self

I started kindergarten in a small, mountainous town in North Carolina 30 years ago. I still vividly remember my mom walking me into my kindergarten class on the first day of school. While I remember my teacher's name, I do not remember anything else that happened that day other than burying my face in the back of my mom's leg and sobbing. I was scared and unsure what it meant to start formal schooling even though my brother started kindergarten two years earlier. Fast forward three decades later to a suburban school district in North Carolina. As a

current kindergarten teacher, I see students struggle making a successful transition into kindergarten every August. I watch some students struggle for days and even weeks as they start formal schooling. Some students cry as I did when I started kindergarten, while others struggle in other ways such as hyperactivity, inattention, and/or noncompliance. I have taught special education and regular education classes for 14 years in three different public school systems. As an elementary teacher, I have seen numerous students struggle making the transition into kindergarten.

I have conducted many transition practices to help aid in this transition and have helped other teachers throughout the district do so as well. At my current school, we conduct a kindergarten screening, have a three-day summer camp for kindergarteners, have an ice cream social, hold an Open House, and send home a plethora of information about starting kindergarten and ways that parents can help children have a more successful transition to kindergarten. I have not conducted home visits with my kindergarten students. However, I know several teachers throughout our district and state that conduct home visits with their students and have heard many positive comments about these experiences. My motivation for conducting this study was to understand the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits as a transition practice. I am a kindergarten teacher in the school district where I conducted my research. However, I was not in a mentoring or other supervisory role with any of the teacher participants. Furthermore, I do not teach at the school where the research took place. I have not had any previous relationships with the parent participants.

It was important for me to examine the ontological assumption in my research. This assumption acknowledged that reality is viewed in many ways (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I presented the different realities and summarized multiple perspectives of kindergarten teachers

conducting home visits as a transition practice to help students successfully transition into kindergarten. The epistemological assumption was equally important to consider in this study, as the reality of home visits conducted by kindergarten teachers is shaped by the individual experiences of kindergarten teachers and “will be co-constructed between the researcher and the researched” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 35). In this study, I tried to get very close to the participants via interviews, letter of advice, and a focus group. I relied on quotes from participants in this study to help construct the answer to my research questions.

Constructivism helped shape this study, as I am a constructivist by nature. This theory is student centered and is based on students constructing meaning through active experiences (Brader-Araje & Jones, 2002; Brooks & Brooks, 1999). “Learning is an active process whereby the student must be actively involved in the creation of his or her own knowledge through active interaction with the phenomenon” (Marcum-Dietrich, 2008, p. 83). Constructivism views learning as a process as opposed to a product (O’Loughlin, 1992). Kindergarten transition practices including kindergarten teachers conducting home visits should be student-centered and help rising kindergarten students construct meaning about what it means to begin formal schooling (Little et al., 2016).

While I was personally invested in this research as a current kindergarten teacher who has watched students struggle making the transition into kindergarten, numerous research studies across several decades have pointed to the benefit of using transition practices with kindergarten students (Ahtola et al., 2011; Friedman et al., 2006; Little et al., 2016; Schulting et al., 2005). Starting kindergarten is difficult for many students because of the qualitative differences between kindergarten and previous childcare settings (Cook & Coley, 2016; Santo & Berman, 2012) and because of physiological changes in environments (Iruka et al., 2014). The kindergarten year

sets the tone, as it is the first year of formal schooling (Friedman et al., 2006). When students are successful in kindergarten, they are more likely to be successful in upper grades (Bierman et al., 2015; Clark & Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2008; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008).

Schools can use transition activities such as home visits to help aid in a more successful transition to kindergarten (Friedman et al., 2006; Little et al., 2016). Schools that conduct more transition activities tend to have higher student performance at the end of kindergarten (Ahtola et al., 2011; Little et al., 2016; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008; Munz, 2013; Schulting et al., 2005). One descriptive, quantitative research study suggested that when kindergarten teachers conduct home visits, students perform higher on academic tasks, have better social skills, and are more motivated to learn new things (Schulting, 2009). Demographic data, Home Visit Record Form, Parent Involvement: Teacher Version, Ratings of School Performance: Teacher Version, Home Visit Feedback Form, Teacher Feedback Interview, Teacher Attitude Survey, Parent Involvement Survey: Parent Version, and Ratings of School Performance: Parent Version were used as data collection methods to examine the effects of home visits of 478 kindergarten students in this randomized, controlled study (Schulting, 2009).

Problem Statement

Almost half of all kindergarten students in the United States have a hard time transitioning into kindergarten (Little et al., 2016; McIntyre & Welchons, 2015), and 16% of all kindergarten students have serious adjustment problems when starting kindergarten (Clark & McGann, 2007). The transition to kindergarten is more challenging for students with disabilities and for students who are at risk for being classified as having a disability than for typically developing children (Iruka et al., 2014; McIntyre & Welchons, 2015). Students from low-income families are more at-risk to struggle with the transition to kindergarten than students

from higher socioeconomic backgrounds (Cole et al., 2003; Conger et al., 1992; Entwisle & Alexander, 1993; Entwisle et al., 2007; Iruka et al., 2014; McLoyd, 1998; Schulting, 2009).

A successful kindergarten year is predicative of success in higher grades (Clark & Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2008; Cook & Coley, 2016; Galindo & Sheldon, 2011; McIntyre & Welchons, 2015). Students who have a smooth transition to kindergarten have fewer absences and indicate liking school more than peers who struggle with the transition to kindergarten (Cook & Coley, 2016). Kindergarteners who easily transition into school have better behavior than students who have a difficult entry into formal schooling (Racz et al., 2016). Schools can use transition activities such as conducting home visits to help make transitioning into kindergarten a more positive experience (Friedman et al., 2006; Little et al., 2016). In the United States, kindergarten readiness has been noted as a “national priority” (McIntyre, Eckert, Fiese, DiGennaro, & Wildenger, 2007), and most schools use some type of kindergarten transition activity (McIntyre et al., 2014). However, less than 20% of elementary schools in the United States ($N = 3,600$) have transition teams and transition plans for students entering kindergarten (Clark & McGann, 2007), and fewer than 5% of kindergarten teachers conduct home visits with their students (Nelson, 2004). The transition to kindergarten is multifaceted and is a complex transition. The problem is that many students struggle transitioning into kindergarten for a variety of reasons (Clark & McGann, 2007; Little et al., 2016; McIntyre & Welchons, 2015), and a student’s performance in kindergarten is indicative of success in higher grades (Galindo & Sheldon, 2011; McIntyre & Welchons, 2015); kindergarten teachers can conduct home visits to help make the transition into kindergarten more successful (Little et al., 2016; Schulting, 2009).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this single case study was to develop an in-depth description of the practice of home visits conducted by kindergarten teachers in a low-income, suburban North Carolina elementary school. A single case study was used, as a single case study can examine one program, activity, or person (Yin, 2018). My study looked at the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits at one elementary school. The participants were kindergarten teachers who conducted home visits, parents of kindergarteners who received a home visit, and Early Childhood Leaders in the district who have a vested interest in kindergarten teachers conducting home visits. A purposeful, convenience sampling method was used to obtain 10 total participants. Of these participants, there was five kindergarten teachers, two parents of kindergarteners who received a home visit, and three Early Childhood Leaders in the district who have a vested interest in kindergarten teachers conducting home visits. Home visits are generally defined as a kindergarten teacher visiting the home of the kindergarten students at the beginning of the school year.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory guided this study, as it states that children and their environment are much like nested Russian dolls. Children have a bi-directional relationship with their environments (Lin & Bates, 2010). When a kindergarten teacher visits the home of a student, the teacher is crossing into a different layer where child development occurs. Connecting these two layers can help smooth the transition between the two environments. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory guided this research to help develop an in-depth description of the practice of home visits conducted by kindergarten teachers with students in a low-income, suburban North Carolina elementary school.

Significance of Study

This qualitative study was a single case study. I examined the practice of home visits conducted by kindergarten teachers with students in a low-income, suburban North Carolina elementary school. This study has theoretical and empirical contributions. This study added theoretical contributions as Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory was used to guide the study, and it provides qualitative insight on kindergarten teachers conducting home visits. Early childhood educators, elementary administrators, and educational researchers will benefit from the theoretical contributions. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory has previously been used to look at the impact of Head Start teachers conducting home visits (Lin & Bates, 2010), the impact of family/school partnerships in an urban high school (Leonard, 2011), the impact of multiple environments on children with significant disabilities (Ruppar, Allcock, & Gonsier-Gerdin, 2017), and the influence of school-family relationships on academic achievement (Hampden-Thompson & Galindo, 2016).

My research study identified common themes that describe the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits with students and added to the existing research on using home visits as a transition activity. Previous research studies have indicated future research on kindergarten teachers conducting home visits provide additional teacher and parent perspectives on kindergarten teachers conducting home visits (Schulting, 2009; Sweet & Appelbaum, 2004). This research is important to kindergarten teachers, elementary administrators, and educational researchers, as home visits have been shown as one way to help ease the transition into kindergarten (Friedman et al., 2006; Green et al., 2011; Little et al., 2016; Schulting et al., 2005), and a successful transition into kindergarten is predictive of successful experiences in upper grades (Clark & Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2008; Galindo & Sheldon, 2011; McIntyre & Welchons,

2015; Schulting, 2009). Since there are no case studies that describe the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits that have been cited in research studies on kindergarten teachers conducting home visits, this study added to the existing research on transition practices for kindergarten students. My research study addressed a gap in the research on kindergarten teachers conducting home visits by supplementing the quantitative studies on kindergarten teachers conducting home visits. This case study provided qualitative insight on the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits (Schulting, 2009).

There is significant practical significance of this study. First and foremost, this research study will help kindergarteners. It provides a description of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits, which has been shown to help kindergarteners successfully transition into kindergarten (Schulting, 2009). The insight obtained about the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits will give kindergarten teachers a thorough description of this phenomenon. This could potentially encourage other kindergarten teachers to conduct home visits in low-income suburban schools, thus helping create a smoother transition into kindergarten. This study will also help kindergarten teachers by providing past and current research on transition activities including home visits. Additionally, this study will help administrators and other leaders in early education by encouraging them to promote home visits by kindergarten teachers and providing the necessary resources to help kindergarten teachers conduct home visits. The results of this study will be especially applicable to staff members of other low-income suburban schools.

Research Questions

This single case study sought to develop an in-depth description of the practice of home visits conducted by kindergarten teachers with students in a low-income, suburban North

Carolina elementary school. Data collection methods included a focus group, mock letters of advice to other kindergarten teachers about home visits, and interviews with kindergarten teachers who conducted home visits, Early Childhood Leaders in the district, and parents of kindergarteners who received a home visit. Participants were asked to write a mock letter of advice to other kindergarten teachers who do not currently conduct home visits but are interested in potentially conducting home visits with kindergarteners, which yielded authentic thoughts about home visits.

The first research question for this case study was the following: How do stakeholders describe the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits in a suburban, low-income North Carolina elementary school? Research indicates that schools and communities can use transition activities such as conducting home visits to aid in a more successful transition into kindergarten (Friedman et al., 2006; Little et al., 2016) and that kindergarten transition activities can be linked with increased academic performance, fewer behavior problems, and higher social skills (Ahtola et al., 2011; Little et al., 2016; Schulting, 2009).

The second research question was as follows: How is the building of relationships described when kindergarten teachers conduct home visits with students starting kindergarten? Transition activities, including home visits, have been shown not only to link homes and schools (Gomby et al., 1999) but also to improve relationships between the home and school (Cook & Coley, 2016; Eisenhower et al., 2015).

The third research question was as follows: How is the home environment described when kindergarten teachers conduct home visits with students starting kindergarten? When teachers conduct home visits, they are acknowledging that child development not only occurs at school but also at home (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Kindergarten teachers who have conducted

home visits have indicated that home visits are a way to see how a child's home environment impacts behavior and academic performance (Lin & Bates, 2010; Meyer, Mann, & Becker, 2011).

Definitions

1. *Home visiting* – “An umbrella term that implies a strategy for delivering a service, rather than a type of intervention. . . . Programs differ along many dimensions, including the types of families served (e.g., single, teenage mothers; families of particular ethnicities; socioeconomic backgrounds; or social risk factors), targeted behaviors or outcomes (e.g., child abuse, school readiness, or mothers' employment), type of service delivery staff (e.g., nurses, or mothers from the community), ages of children targeted (e.g., enrolling pregnant mothers, or families with preschool children), length and intensity of services, types of services provided, and methods of recruitment” (Sweet & Appelbaum, 2004, p. 1436).
2. *Kindergarten* – The class students attend “before entering the first grade of primary school” (Dombkowski, 2010, p. 528).
3. *Transition* – “A change of contexts, the move from one institutional setting or phase to another in the education continuum” (Lam & Pollard, 2006, p. 124).
4. *Transition activity* – “Steps taken by the school or teacher such as hosting an orientation night, sending home information about kindergarten, or visiting students' homes to help ease children's transition into kindergarten” (Little et al., 2016, p. 2).

Summary

Transitioning into kindergarten is a major milestone for students (Dail & McGee, 2008), and a plethora of students have trouble with this transition (Clark & McGann, 2007; Little et al.,

2016; McIntyre & Welchons, 2015). Previous research has pointed to the importance of a successful kindergarten transition as indicated by higher academic levels, increased social skills, and better behavior (Clark & Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2008; Diamond & Robinson, 2014; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008; Meyer et al., 2011). Additional research has discussed types of current activities to help with transitioning into kindergarten (Green et al., 2011) as well as the numerous benefits of transition activities (Friedman et al., 2006; Little et al., 2016). Limited research has shared the parents' perspectives of transition activities used with students starting kindergarten (Miller, 2015; Schulting, 2009; Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011). Qualitative research has not examined the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits. This research helped address this gap in literature by describing the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits. The purpose of this single case study was to develop an in-depth description of the practice of home visits conducted by kindergarten teachers with students in a low-income, suburban North Carolina elementary school.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

Every year millions of students start kindergarten (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016a), which is one of the most challenging milestones in young children's lives (Friedman et al., 2006). Starting kindergarten is a difficult transition for many of these students (Ahtola et al., 2011; Little et al., 2016; Nelson, 2004). A challenging transition for students starting kindergarten can manifest itself in many ways including students performing low on academic tasks, having inappropriate behavior, having difficulty paying attention, and/or a general dislike of school (Cook & Coley, 2016; Smythe-Leistico et al., 2012; Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011). The transition to kindergarten can be difficult because of increased expectations in academics and independence as well as the qualitative differences between preschool settings and kindergarten (Cook & Coley, 2016; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000; Santo & Berman, 2012).

Elementary schools can conduct transition activities such as kindergarten teachers visiting the homes of students to help ensure a more successful transition into kindergarten (Green et al., 2011). When kindergarten teachers visit the homes of their students, they are acknowledging that crucial development occurs in homes as well as in classrooms, thus connecting different systems of children's lives. Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological system theory of human development shows the interconnectedness of homes and schools; important child development occurs in both systems (Collins et al., 2013). The purpose of this single case study was to answer the following research questions: How do stakeholders describe the practices of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits in a suburban, low-income North Carolina elementary school? How is the building of relationships described when kindergarten

teachers conduct home visits with students starting kindergarten? and How is the home environment described when kindergarten teachers conduct home visits with students starting kindergarten?

The purpose of Chapter Two is to provide detailed information about the theoretical framework guiding this study, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological system theory of human development. Another purpose of Chapter Two is to provide readers with related research on the history of kindergarten, the transition to kindergarten, and the importance of a successful transition to kindergarten. This section also discusses types of transition activities, benefits of transition activities, and a plethora of information about home visits. This chapter gives readers a thorough background about transitioning into kindergarten.

Literature Review Search Strategy

The literature and research studies used in this dissertation were obtained by various yet thorough search methods. I first conducted a search to get an overview of articles on transition practices used with students starting kindergarten. Of the 4,133 scholarly, peer-reviewed articles, 1,147 of them were in the field of education. I hand-searched these articles to see which ones were about transition practices used by teachers as opposed to other facets of the transition to kindergarten, such as the use of developmentally appropriate tasks with young children. This search yielded 387 articles. After this search, I sorted the articles in two groups: research articles and other articles about transition practices. These articles gave an overview of the existing information on transition practices in general and on home visits. I completed a search of current dissertations at the university level. This search yielded two dissertations that were relevant to my research topic. I also searched several key words and phrases including the terms: *begin kindergarten*, *home visits by kindergarten teachers*, *home visits starting school*, and *starting*

school transition activities, and kindergarten. A range of journals were examined and provided relevant information. The most common journals included: *Child Development, Developmental Psychology, Early Childhood Education Journal, Early Childhood Research and Practice, Early Childhood Research Quarterly, Educational Researcher, Journal of Early Childhood, Journal of Research in Childhood Education,* and *Young Children.* Throughout this search for relevant research, several authors appeared multiple times. I completed an author search on these authors: Clark, P.; Cox, M. J.; Dodge, K. A.; Early, D. M.; La Paro, K. M.; Malone, P. S.; Mann, M. B.; McIntyre, L. L.; Meyer, J. A.; Rimm-Kaufman, S.E.; Pianta, R.; Schulting, A. B.; and Wildenger, L. K. EBSCO and ProQuest were the databases that were used in this search. The inclusion and exclusion of research articles were based on the relevance the articles. The studies that were included were about home visits, transition activities, and starting kindergarten. Studies on home visits in other professions such as nursing were excluded. Studies that were on other aspects of kindergarten were also excluded, such as studies on physical activity in kindergarten classes.

Theoretical Framework

Urie Bronfenbrenner was born in Moscow, Russia, on April 29, 1917, and moved with his family to rural New York in 1923 (Brendtro, 2006). Bronfenbrenner is most well-known for creating the interdisciplinary field of the ecology of human development and his ecological model to help explain human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). He created the ecological model of human development in 1974 (Brendtro, 2006). Urie Bronfenbrenner's father, Alexander Bronfenbrenner, was a physician at an institution for children with developmental disabilities. He frequently expressed frustration at the court system for inappropriately placing children from troubled homes in an institution for youth with disabilities, as these children did

not have disabilities but other difficulties that were compounded by their home environments.

Urie Bronfenbrenner saw and understood his father's frustrations from a young age. These interactions led Urie Bronfenbrenner to look at children and their development as a combination of multiple environmental factors (Brendtro, 2006).

During the first few years of life, "human development takes place through processes of progressively more complex reciprocal interactions between an active, evolving biopsychological human organism and the person, objects, and symbols in its immediate environment" (Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 1644). Prior to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological model of human development, educational specialists primarily viewed the development of children through a narrow lens such as from the perspective of an anthropologist or psychologist; Bronfenbrenner was a pioneer in viewing children and their development through an interdisciplinary lens (Brendtro, 2006). Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological system theory of human development is based on multiple disciplines including education, psychology, anthropology, and sociology as well as a landmark study completed by Schwabe and Bartholoami in 1870 in Germany on how children's development is impacted by their neighborhoods (Bronfenbrenner, 1994).

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological system theory of human development states that there are many layers of children's development much like the layers of a nested Russian doll. This model of human development shows how children's development is interconnected, evolving, and influenced by overlapping systems (Collins et al., 2013; Ruppap et al., 2017).

Human development is the process through which the growing person acquires a more extended, differentiated and valid conception of the ecological environment, and becomes motivated and able to engage in activities that reveal the properties of, sustain, or

restructure the environment at levels of similar or greater complexity in form and content.

(Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 27)

Children's development is impacted by the combination of their microsystems, mesosystems, exosystems, macrosystems, and chronosystems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). A child's microsystem

is a pattern of activities, social roles, and interpersonal relations experienced by the developing person in a given face-to-face setting with particular physical, social, and symbolic features that invite, permit, or inhibit engagement in sustained, progressively more complex interaction with, and activity in, the immediate environment.

(Bronfenbrenner, 1994, p. 1645)

Children's microsystems include schools, families, and other peer groups. When two or more systems in a child's microsystem are linked together, a child's mesosystem is created (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). Exosystems contain the people who indirectly impact children (such as doctors, principals, and parents' employers), while the economy and culture create children's macrosystems. A chronosystem includes the environmental events that impact children (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Children are not directly impacted by their exosystems, macrosystems, or chronosystems, even though they are indirectly impacted by elements in these systems such as parents' income, family cultural values, caregivers' work schedules, laws, and environmental factors (Lin & Bates, 2010). "The main focus of the ecological model of transition is to place the individual child into a net of relationships, thus easing the discontinuity between the different cultures of preschool environments and school" (Ahtola et al., 2011, p. 295). When viewing the transition to kindergarten through this lens, stakeholders value the quality of relationships between home and school (Hampden-Thompson & Galindo, 2016).

Bronfenbrenner (1994) is known for saying “that much of developmental psychology is the science of the strange behavior in children in a strange situation with strange adults for the briefest possible periods of time” (p. 513). Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) teachings and work on the developmental needs of young children led him to help create the Head Start movement in 1965, which is a preschool program that serves over a million disadvantaged young children in the United States (Ansari & Purtell, 2018; Brendtro, 2006). This program addresses the social, cognitive, and emotional needs of preschoolers, and it provides health, educational, nutritional, and social services to the children and their families (Ansari & Purtell, 2018).

Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological system theory of human development has been used to look at the effect of family/school partnerships in an urban high school (Leonard, 2011), the impact of school-family relationships on academic performance (Hampden-Thompson & Galindo, 2016), the influence of multiple environments on children with significant disabilities (Ruppar et al., 2017), and the impact of Head Start teachers conducting home visits (Lin & Bates, 2010). Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological system theory of human development has advanced and informed literature on kindergarten teachers using transition activities including home visits. This theory was used to examine how a child’s positive transition into formal schooling predicts positive academic performance (Dockett & Perry, 2009) and was used in a qualitative study on rising kindergarteners’ beliefs about transitioning to formal schooling (Eskela-Haapanen, Lerkkanen, Rasku-Puttonen, & Poikkeus, 2016).

Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) ecological system theory of human development “suggests that optimal development occurs when children experience consistent and supportive interactions with the people and objects in their immediate environment” (Bassok & Latham, 2017, p. 8). The practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits is part of a child’s mesosystem,

since the home and school interact during a home visit (Lin & Bates, 2010). Furthermore, when teachers conduct home visits, they can learn about a child's exosystem and macrosystem.

During home visits, teachers can find out about cultural values, parent attitudes, family dynamics, and other aspects of children's exosystems and macrosystems. When using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory, teachers critically examine the relationship between children, their parents, and other family characteristics and how the combination of these relationships and environments impact children's development (Lin & Bates, 2010). The relationships between a child's home and family are often intertwined, complex, and diverse (Lam & Pollard, 2006).

When using Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory to look at the transition to kindergarten, the transition "expands from a focus on children's 'readiness' skills as the key to transition success to an emphasis on relationships within and across contexts, as well as the continuity (or discontinuity) in these relationships over time" (La Paro, Kraft-Sayre, & Pianta, 2009, p. 148). My case study of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits relates to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory because it acknowledges that important development occurs in children's homes and schools. Kindergarten teachers who conduct home visits step into a child's mesosystem by visiting the home of a student. Teachers can also learn about children's exosystems and macrosystems when conducting home visits. When teachers know and understand these aspects of children's lives and acknowledge the impact of these systems, teachers are able to plan lessons and use appropriate strategies to better meet the needs of students (Lin & Bates, 2010). My study could potentially advance or extend this theory by providing qualitative insight on kindergarten teachers conducting home visits. When teachers conduct home visits, they are acknowledging that important development occurs at home and at school.

Related Literature

Starting kindergarten has been referred to as a “rite of passage,” “a big deal,” “a landmark event,” “a turning point,” and “one of the major challenges children have to face in their early childhood years” (Friedman et al., 2006, p. 213). This major transition is one of the most significant transitions that young children face. Many children have difficulty transitioning into kindergarten (Ahtola et al., 2011; Little et al., 2016; Nelson, 2004). To help with this transition, schools often use transition activities with students who are starting kindergarten (Friedman et al., 2006; Green et al., 2011; Little et al., 2016; Schulting et al., 2005). These transition activities have been shown not only to help create a smoother transition to kindergarten but also to improve academic performance, social skills, and behavior (Ahtola et al., 2011; Little et al., 2016; Schulting et al., 2005). Furthermore, success in kindergarten is predicative of success in higher grades (Clark & Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2008; Galindo & Sheldon, 2011; McIntyre & Welchons, 2015). Poor performance in kindergarten can “initiate a lifelong trajectory of underachievement and subsequent underemployment” (Bierman et al., 2015, p. 1877). Kindergarten teachers can help improve the transition to kindergarten by conducting transition activities such as home visits (Friedman et al., 2006; Little et al., 2016; Schulting et al., 2005).

History of Kindergarten

Friedrich Froebel was born in Thuringia, Germany, on April 21, 1782 (Armytage, 1959). As a young child, he enjoyed spending time in nature, especially in forests. He was an introvert and was lonely as a child. Froebel did not perform well in school, and as a teenager, he became an apprentice with a forester. His father passed away when Froebel was a young adult, and Froebel tried several different jobs. When Froebel was 23 years old, he got a job as a teacher at a

school in Frankfurt which was based on Pestalozzi's beliefs (Armytage, 1959). He fell in love with teaching and found his passion in life.

In 1837 in the German town where Froebel was born, he created a new class for young children called "kindergarten" (Bauernschuster & Falck, 2015). The word "kindergarten" is a German word that means "garden of children" (Allen, 2006) and was chosen "for his institution because it should be like a garden where experienced gardeners in harmony with nature should cherish children like small plants" (Bauernschuster & Falck, 2015, p. 602). He was inspired by the teachings and beliefs of Comenius, Pestalozzi, and Rousseau (Dombkowski, 2010). The purpose of Froebel's kindergarten was to develop children's character; reading, writing, and math skills were not explicitly taught (Weber, 1970). Froebel acknowledged that young children learn most authentically through play (Dhuey, 2011; Graue, 2009), and, therefore, play-based instruction was at the heart of the first kindergarten class (Dombkowski, 2010). Play was a crucial platform of instruction (Dhuey, 2011).

Students frequently explored nature to learn in Froebel's kindergarten class (Hoskins & Smedley, 2016; Moore & Campos, 2010), and kindergarteners used natural materials such as blocks and rocks to explore mathematical concepts through play (Hoskins & Smedley, 2016; Kinzer, Gerhardt, & Coca, 2016). Froebel created kindergarten classes around student interests, which led to student-centered classrooms as opposed to teacher-centered/teacher-directed classrooms (Dombkowski, 2010). Kindergarten teachers were facilitators of student learning as opposed to merely instructors passing information to pupils (Dhuey, 2011). Kindergartners learned concepts through hands-on experiences guided by their teacher (Hoskins & Smedley, 2016; Kinzer et al., 2016). Froebel's kindergarten class was built upon the connection between the social universe, nature, and individual psyche (Allen, 2006). The structure of these

kindergarten classes promoted students' social skills in a natural way (Dhuey, 2011). Froebel's original kindergarten was radical and unlike any other institution of its kind at its inception (Bauernschuster & Falck, 2015).

Kindergarten classes started popping up around the world by the middle of the 19th century (Albisetti, 2009). The first kindergarten class in the United States was taught in German and was started in 1856 by Margareth Meyer Schurz in Watertown, Wisconsin (Watertown Historical Society, 2018). The first English-speaking kindergarten class in the United States was created in 1860 by Elizabeth Peabody (Allen, 2006). In 1920, less than 10% of schools in the United States had kindergarten classes (Dombkowski, 2010). Urban school districts in the United States were the first school districts to create kindergarten classes (Allen, 2006). All public school systems in the United States had kindergarten classes by 1986 (Dhuey, 2011; Manning, 2005). Even though many kindergarten classes vary greatly from Froebel's original class, Froebelian educational ideals are still nearly universal in kindergarten classes; singing songs, learning finger plays, circle time activities, building with blocks, using puppets, and unstructured play were part of Froebel's first kindergarten class (Moore & Campos, 2010). Most kindergarten classes in the United States are now full-day programs, but many started as half-day programs (Dhuey, 2011).

The Transition to Kindergarten

The transition to kindergarten should be viewed as a process that students and families go through as opposed to a single, one-time event (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2002). Even though nearly 80% of students attend some type of prekindergarten program (Gullo & Hughes, 2011), starting formal schooling is a major transition for young children (Friedman et al., 2006). This transition is so significant that it has been noted as a national priority in the United States

educational system (Gomby et al., 1999). The ever-changing population makeup of kindergarten classes is making the transition to kindergarten more multi-faceted than in previous years.

“Challenges of cultures, language, family background and processes, and differences in the way families view schools, all of which are formidable even for children entering school today, will be exacerbated by these demographic shifts” (Pianta & Cox, 2000, p. 363). These factors make the transition to kindergarten a complex process for families, schools, and communities.

When students start kindergarten, they often experience “a period of ambiguity, marginality, and transformation” (Lam & Pollard, 2006, p. 132). The transition can be difficult because of physiological changes (Iruka et al., 2014) and because of qualitative differences between the environment of kindergarten and early childhood settings (Cook & Coley, 2016; Santo & Berman, 2012). There are also philosophical variables such as teaching practices that are different between kindergarten and preschool (Santo & Berman, 2012). Kindergarten students are expected to be more independent and are primarily taught through whole group instruction, which means having less support from teachers in kindergarten than in preschool settings (Quintero & McIntyre, 2010). Kindergarten students are also expected to have higher levels of behavior, social skills, and academic skills (Dail & McGee, 2008). The transition to kindergarten is complex, as it involves children’s academic skills, emotional well-being, social skills, and behavior (Haciibrahimoglu & Kargin, 2016). Numerous contextual factors such as parent beliefs, age of parents, cultural background, parent expectations, gender of parents, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status also influence a child’s transition to kindergarten (Kang, Horn, & Palmer, 2017).

When students start kindergarten, they have new responsibilities, identities, roles, behaviors, and goals (Ferretti & Bub, 2016). Daily schedules are different between kindergarten

classrooms and early childhood settings. For most students, starting kindergarten means that they no longer have snack time, play time, and/or nap time (Quintero & McIntyre, 2010). In kindergarten, students are expected to be able to correctly use novel materials, participate in group activities, and follow directions (Daley, Munk, & Carlson, 2011). Kindergarten classrooms usually have one teacher, whereas preschool classrooms typically have more than one teacher, which yields a higher student-to-teacher ratio in kindergarten than in preschool (Early, Pianta, & Cox, 1999). The transition to kindergarten also usually implies larger class size, as there are typically more students in kindergarten classrooms than preschool classrooms (Daley et al., 2011). During the transition to formal schooling, students starting kindergarten have expressed concerns over not being able to play during the day and having to attend kindergarten in a new environment. Students also expressed excitement over having formal schoolwork and learning new things. Students transitioning to kindergarten were both excited and worried about having a new teacher in kindergarten (Eskela-Haapanen et al., 2016).

Difficulty Transitioning to Kindergarten

Nearly half of the students starting kindergarten experience a challenging transition, with 32% of students having some problems and 16% of rising kindergarteners having a difficult transition to kindergarten (Schulting et al., 2005). Transitioning to kindergarten can be challenging for students regardless of the age they start school and regardless of the country where they are attending kindergarten (Fabian & Dunlop, 2007). The length of time it takes to successfully transition into formal schooling varies between kindergarteners (Lam & Pollard, 2006).

Students who have a hard time transitioning to kindergarten may demonstrate low academic skills, have a difficult time following directions, and display a lack of independence

(Smythe-Leistico et al., 2012). More than half of the students transitioning to kindergarten have school readiness challenges indicated by low language skills, low cognitive skills, delayed motor skills, and/or low social-emotional skills (Jarrett & Coba-Rodriguez, 2018). Students who struggle transitioning into kindergarten have increased morning cortisol levels which indicates physiological stress (Quas, Murowchick, Bensadoun, & Boyce, 2002; Rickmeyer, Lebigier-Vogel, & Leuzinger-Bohleber, 2017). Kindergarteners who do not successfully transition into kindergarten make progress at a slower rate than children who have a successful transition (Ahtola et al., 2011). There are intrinsic and extrinsic factors that impact the transition to kindergarten for students. Intrinsic factors can include a child's social skills, academic skills, and satisfaction of school. Extrinsic factors may include parental concerns, the school where the child is enrolled, support services, and approaches used by the child's teacher (Haciibrahimoglu & Kargin, 2016).

While any type of student can experience a challenging transition to formal schooling, students from low-income backgrounds are more at risk for having a difficult time successfully transitioning to kindergarten than students from families with higher incomes (Schulting, 2008), as a plethora of research has shown a linkage between the transition to kindergarten and socioeconomic status (SES; Conger et al., 1992; Entwisle & Alexander, 1993; Entwisle et al., 2007; Iruka et al., 2014; McLoyd, 1998). Kindergarteners who live in low socioeconomic homes are less likely to attend prekindergarten classes and have access to fewer materials, resources, and experiences that can help them get ready to tackle the social and academic expectations of starting kindergarten (Iruka et al., 2014).

Iruka et al. (2014) conducted one study that showed that the transition to kindergarten is the hardest for African American boys. For African American boys, the transition to

kindergarten can be “even more arduous than other groups of children, given the additional sociocultural challenges that some face when teachers view their behaviors negatively and assume that they are deficient cognitively” (Iruka et al., 2014, p. 106).

National data shows that during the first five years of life, African American boys were more likely to experience poverty, reside in one-parent households, have a mother with less than a high school education, have more mothers exhibiting depressive symptomatology, and were less likely to be read to daily when compared to white boys. (Iruka et al., 2014, p. 107)

The transition to kindergarten is more challenging for children with disabilities and/or children who are considered at risk of having a disability (Haciibrahimoglu & Kargin, 2016; Lillvist & Wilder, 2017). Children with developmental disabilities are more likely to have a difficult time transitioning into kindergarten than typically developing students due to adaptive behavior deficits, delayed communication, and low problem-solving skills (Quintero & McIntyre, 2010). Students who have developmental disabilities and/or behavioral problems are more likely to exhibit deficits in self-regulation skills, thus making the transition to kindergarten even more challenging (Pears, Kim, Healey, Yoerger, & Fisher, 2015). Rising kindergarten students who have limited expressive and/or receptive communication may not be able to clearly communicate concerns, wants, and/or needs (Lillvist & Wilder, 2017). When students with developmental disabilities and behavioral difficulties have a difficult transition to kindergarten, they experience longer-term social difficulties and academic problems than their typically developing peers, which yields an increase of special education services (Pears et al., 2015). Parents of students who have developmental delays expressed more concerns over the transition to kindergarten than did parents of neurotypical children (Quintero & McIntyre, 2010). Also,

shy students are more likely to struggle transitioning to kindergarten than students who are not shy (Coplan & Arbeau, 2008).

Importance of Successfully Transitioning into Kindergarten

The impact of the transition to kindergarten “cannot be underestimated” (Lam & Pollard, 2006, p. 137). Kindergarten is the foundation of formal schooling for young children (Graue, 2009). Success in kindergarten is predicative of success in higher grades (Bierman et al., 2015; Clark & Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2008; Galindo & Sheldon, 2011; La Paro et al., 2009; McIntyre & Welchons, 2015). A successful transition to kindergarten also has long-term social implications (Santo & Berman, 2012). Furthermore, “kindergarten test scores are highly correlated with outcomes such as earnings at age 27, college attendance, home ownership, and retirement savings” (Chetty et al., 2011, p. 1593).

Kindergarteners learn many foundational academic and social skills during the kindergarten year (Cook & Coley, 2016). “Kindergarten provides children the experiences to draw conclusions about school and their abilities as learners in school” (La Paro et al., 2009, p. 148). When students have positive experiences during early elementary years, they have fewer absences and report enjoying school (Cook & Coley, 2016). A successful transition into kindergarten is important for a student’s emotional well-being (Santo & Berman, 2012). Students are more likely to make friends in school if they successfully transition into kindergarten (Munz, 2013). Students also exhibit fewer aggressive behaviors if they have a smooth transition to kindergarten (Racz et al., 2016). A positive transition to kindergarten has been shown to predict positive academic skills and positive social skills (Dockett & Perry, 2009).

Types of Kindergarten Transition Activities

Schools and communities can implement activities to promote a successful transition into kindergarten (Dail & McGee, 2008; Green et al., 2011). Elementary schools and early childcare settings should coordinate transition efforts as much as possible to ensure continuity between settings (Arnold, Bartlett, Gowani, & Shallwani, 2008). Fortunately, using transition activities for students starting kindergarten is an almost universal practice, as most schools use at least one transition activity for rising kindergarten students (McIntyre et al., 2014). Transition activities can take place before kindergarten begins or once the school year has started. One large study across the United States showed that 90% of transition activities took place after the school year started (Pianta, 2004). Transition activities vary in frequency, duration, and purpose. Some types of transition activities consist of a one-time event or practice, while other types of transition activities are repeated activities. Transition activities can be general or specified for individual students. Transition activities can vary in the duration of the practice, ranging from a few minutes to several hours (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2002). Transition activities can be one-way such as paperwork going from the school to the home or two-way such as a parent conference (Whittaker, 2004).

The activities used with students entering kindergarten can be teacher-focused, child-focused, and/or parent-focused. Teacher-focused practices are typically generic practices that provide information on school expectations such as mailings and orientations (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008; McIntyre et al., 2014; Nelson, 2004). Many of these teacher-focused practices take place once the school year begins and are low-intensity and impersonal (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008). Child-focused activities are used to obtain information on student achievement such as observations and screenings (Nelson, 2004). Parent-focused practices are a way for parents and

caregivers to provide information about their children (Nelson, 2004). Young children begin forming ideas about kindergarten long before starting school, so effective transition practices should directly involve children as opposed to just parents and teachers: “Starting kindergarten is often discussed in the presence of children, but not with them, thus leaving children to conceptualize this major milestone in their lives from their understanding of adults’ perceptions” (Santo & Berman, 2012, p. 476). According to the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics, the most frequently used transition practice was sending information home to families whereas visiting the homes of rising kindergarten students was used the least (Friedman et al., 2006).

While there is a range of teachers and schools that use multiple transition activities for students entering kindergarten, research has shown that veteran teachers are more likely to use transition practices than novice teachers (Nelson, 2004). School psychologists are most likely involved in kindergarten transition activities in big, urban schools (McIntyre et al., 2014). Teachers who have more than a fourth of their students who are classified as English Learners (ELs) use less transition practices than teachers who have fewer ELs (Daley et al., 2011). Fewer transition practices are used in urban schools with low-income students and/or minority students than in rural, low minority, or low poverty schools (Daley et al., 2011; Jung & Han, 2013; Little et al., 2016; Schulting et al., 2005). Also notable is that there is not as much parental involvement in schools that are urban, high poverty, and/or have a large minority population (Jung & Han, 2013). Low levels of parent involvement can have a negative impact on students’ transition to kindergarten (Cooper, 2010). Poorer parents have less parent engagement during the transition to kindergarten than parents from more affluent families (Cooper, 2010).

While there are transition activities that can be conducted solely by schools, the most effective transition plans are community based and involve multiple stakeholders. Transition teams can consist of kindergarten teachers, preschool teachers, administrators, parents, school counselors, and other community members (Liu, 2008). “Children’s adjustment in the transition to school relies upon relationships with, and within, a wide array of contexts and persons, including the family, elementary schools and teachers, peers, and preschool and preschool teachers” (La Paro et al., 2009, p. 148). Many elementary schools have formed transition teams to help students better transition to kindergarten. “The focus of the transition planning team is to develop and support transition activities that are offered by school districts, pre-K care and education programs, and community agencies” (Liu, 2008, p. 159). Furthermore, the most effective transition activities and plans for students starting kindergarten

view transition as a long-term process, beginning in the preschool years and extending into the kindergarten year; build relationships, communication, and collaboration across settings; promote continuity across settings; prepare, partner with, and involve parents; and prepare children, building needed academic social-emotional, and other competencies. (Green et al., 2011, p. 48)

While it has been noted that the most effective transition activities are multi-faceted and view the transition to kindergarten as a process, there is not a “one size fits all” transition plan (Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000). Transition activities can cost little to no money or can be very expensive. Likewise, transition activities can include multiple organizations or just the school and the rising kindergarten families. The location of transition activities varies between communities, as some transition activities take place in schools, homes, and/or community centers. What works in one

area may not be the most appropriate, most effective transition activity in a different community (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2002).

When planning transition activities, schools should reach out to communities. This establishes two-way communication between schools and communities. Schools should also reach back in time to families of students enrolled in public preschools. Relationships should be established between the school and families as soon as students are enrolled in the school. When planning transition activities, schools and communities should reach out with the most appropriate intensity given the resources, relationships, and time allotted. Regardless of which transition activities are implemented, schools must remember to view the transition to kindergarten as a long process that should not stop on the first day of kindergarten (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2002). The Harvard Family Research Project has identified the following transition practices as promising practices that can be used to help promote a more successful transition to kindergarten: informational meetings, kindergarten visits, contact with preschool families, parent support groups, informal dissemination of information about kindergarten, home learning activities, contact with preschool children, partnerships with local Parent Teacher Associations, and home visits. Schools can also maintain informal correspondence with students who complete preschool and can offer early registration for parents of kindergarteners. Lastly, schools should have bilingual staff and translators as needed for all transition activities (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2002).

The Interactive Systems Framework was the foundation for a community transition to kindergarten program in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. The transition program, *Ready Freddy*, was based on current research and yielded a transition program for schools and communities to use with rising kindergarten students. This model has been used in schools in the Pittsburg area

since its inception in 2008. Other school districts have adopted this Interactive Systems Framework. This community-centered model was designed for “low-income, high-risk, hard to reach communities” (Smythe-Leistico et al., 2012, p. 357) and is based on research on the most effective transition practices.

In Boston, Massachusetts, the entire city comes together for *Countdown to Kindergarten* each year. This program starts in September of every year and is a series of monthly transition activities throughout the community such as phone calls from the schools, information on how families can help promote a more successful transition to kindergarten, and registration information. Families can register for kindergarten in January of each year. This early registration allows for families to visit the school and kindergarten classrooms prior to the start of the school year (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2002).

Benefits of Kindergarten Transition Activities

There are many benefits of transition activities for students starting kindergarten. “Evidence from education, developmental psychology, neuroscience, and economics has demonstrated that early childhood is a particularly malleable time in the life course and that interventions targeted toward this period can have long-lasting and cost-effective impacts” (Bassok & Latham, 2017, p. 8). Students who participate in transition activities have increased academics skills, improved social skills, and better behavior (Ahtola et al., 2011; Little et al., 2016; Schulting et al., 2005). “Effectively engaging parents and families in the education of their children has the potential to be far more transformational than any other type of education reform” (National Parent Teacher Association, 2018, p. 17). The more transition practices that are used with students entering kindergarten, the higher the student achievement scores at the

end of kindergarten (Ahtola et al., 2011; Little et al., 2016; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008; Munz, 2013; Schulting, 2008; Schulting et al., 2005).

Transition activities promote positive relationships between the school and family (Cook & Coley, 2016; Eisenhower et al., 2015), and parental involvement has been shown to help ensure a smooth transition into kindergarten (Kang et al., 2017). Interactions between homes and schools are important as students transition to kindergarten (La Paro et al., 2009). Furthermore, connecting schools, children, and families has been shown to help improve the transition into kindergarten (Dockett & Perry, 2009). When parents are involved in their child's school, they have an increased capacity to be able to support their child at home (Kang et al., 2017). Transition activities can also positively impact student/teacher relationships and children's behavior (Eisenhower et al., 2015). "Schools' effort to communicate with and engage families predicted greater family involvement in school and higher levels of student achievement in reading and math at the end of kindergarten" (Galindo & Sheldon, 2011, p. 90). Strong relationships between teachers and students are associated with better behavior, improved social skills, cognitive development, and higher literacy skills (Hampden-Thompson & Galindo, 2016; Vesely, Brown, & Mehta, 2017).

Most elementary schools do some type of transition activity (Cook & Coley, 2016), and most of the kindergarten families participate in them and find the transition activities useful (Cook & Coley, 2016). A student's performance in kindergarten is indicative of academic performance in upper grades (Berlin, Dunning, & Dodge, 2011; Clark & Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2008). Furthermore, preschool students who were exposed to kindergarten transition activities were noted to have higher social skills, increased self-regulatory skills, fewer behavior problems,

and better overall mental health (Diamond & Robinson, 2014; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008; Meyer et al., 2011).

Research was conducted on transition activities for 17,212 students entering kindergarten who attended 992 schools throughout the United States, and results indicated that students from low- and middle- class families benefitted more from the transition activities than students from high socio-economic families (Schulting et al., 2005).

Affluent children, whose already high levels of achievement and parent involvement are not further increased by kindergarten transition practices, are offered the greatest number of transition practices. In contrast, low-income children, who are at greatest risk of early school failure and who would benefit the most from kindergarten transition practices, are least likely to receive them. (Schulting, 2008, p. 8)

Home visits can greatly impact children from low-income families (Schulting, 2008).

Home Visits

Even though early educators conduct nearly 500,000 home visits a year (Gomby et al., 1999), the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits is the least frequently used transition activity (Friedman et al., 2006). “Home visits are a unique service-provision strategy, because they bring the services directly to hard-to-reach families who may be isolated geographically, socially, and psychologically thereby overcoming these barriers for people who cannot attend center-based programs because of a lack of transportation and childcare” (Bhavnagri & Krolikowski, 2000, p. 1). Home visits are a way for educators to see firsthand each student’s unique family and environmental circumstances (Korfmacher et al., 2008) and are a way to meet children and families “where they are” (Korfmacher et al., 2008, p. 172). Home visits are a way for teachers to build relationships with families and are a way to discuss the

transition to kindergarten with students and help them process this major milestone (Whyte & Karabon, 2016). Home visits can be conducted to help improve the transition to kindergarten, to educate parents, and to provide support for parents (Gomby et al., 1999; Roggman et al., 2001). Research has shown that home visits can benefit students, teachers, and families (Meyer et al., 2011; Schulting, 2009; Taveras, 1998).

History of home visits. The first home visiting programs in the United States were conducted by social workers, nurses, and doctors. The first documented home visiting programs by early educators in the United States were in the 1880s (Bhavnagri & Krolikowski, 2000; Sweet & Appelbaum, 2004). Many of these home visits during this time were to promote kindergarten during the charity kindergarten movement called “Kindergarten Crusade” (Bhavnagri & Krolikowski, 2000). The goals of the initial home visits by kindergarten teachers were the following:

to educate parents about [the] innovative kindergarten education; to know children as individuals by knowing their families and communities; to facilitate “Americanization” of children and families; to teach parents about nutrition, hygiene, alternative methods of discipline, and child development; and to utilize community businesses, services, and resources to optimize children’s development and promote kindergartens. (Bhavnagri & Krolikowski, 2000, p. 2)

These initial home visiting programs with families of kindergarteners were conducted to establish rapport between families and schools. Teachers introduced the Froebelian ideas and philosophies that inspired kindergarten classes. This was very different than students memorizing content in upper grades. During the home visits, teachers taught families about the educational benefits of play. Teachers conducted these home visits so that parents would see

play as having an educational value, to teach parents about child-rearing practices, and to connect families with local resources as necessary (Bhavnagri & Krolikowski, 2000).

Millions of dollars have been spent on home visiting programs in the United States (Gomby et al., 1999; Sweet & Appelbaum, 2004). With the increased support of parent involvement and increased funding for home visiting programs, there has been a sharp rise of home visits conducted in the United States. In 1993, there were almost 200,000 home visits completed. By 1999, more than 550,000 home visits were completed annually (Bhavnagri & Krolikowski, 2000; Gomby et al., 1999).

Reasons home visits are conducted. Home visits are an intensive, proactive, personalized transition activity that creates a relationship between the student, family member(s), teacher, and school (Berlin et al., 2011). Traditionally, home visits have been unidirectional with the goal to teach parents how to better care for their children and/or to share information about school (Whyte & Karabon, 2016). There are thousands of home visiting programs in the United States, and they usually focus on young children (Sweet & Appelbaum, 2004). However, there are many reasons early educators conduct home visits. Home visiting has been used to educate parents about the importance of their role in the brain development of young children (Gomby et al., 1999). Some teachers conduct home visits to educate parents on academic skills (Gomby et al., 1999; Roggman et al., 2001) and to teach parents strategies to help improve student behavior (Bierman et al., 2015; Gomby et al., 1999). Home visits are also conducted to improve parent-child relationships (Roggman et al., 2001) and to prevent child neglect and abuse (Gomby et al., 1999). Some educators conduct home visits to educate parents about mental health (Harden et al., 2012) and to promote better health both physically and emotionally (Gomby et al., 1999).

Lastly, home visits have been conducted to link families and communities, to improve parent attitudes, and to provide social support (Gomby et al., 1999).

Home visiting programs can focus on different types of families including families from specific ethnicities, single parents, families with unique social risk factors, teenage mothers, and families from unique socioeconomic backgrounds (Sweet & Appelbaum, 2004). Some home visiting programs focus on specific outcomes or behaviors including school readiness, preventing child abuse, and helping mothers obtain and keep employment (Sweet & Appelbaum, 2004). Other home visiting programs target specific ages of children, as some focus on pregnant mothers, while others focus on ages of children. There is also a difference in the intensity of home visiting programs and the length the programs (Sweet & Appelbaum, 2004). Home visits can be conducted by administrators, teachers, and/or school social workers (Johnson, 2014).

Home visiting programs also provide a wide range of services to children and families including educating parents on safety, helping parents teach school readiness skills, and preventing child abuse (Sweet & Appelbaum, 2004). Most of the research on home visits is on home visits that target parenting skills or the health of children (Johnson, 2014). Home visits can be with typically developing children or with children with disabilities (Sweet & Appelbaum, 2004). Some home visiting programs target improving socioeconomic skills or cognitive outcomes for children, while others indirectly impact children through educating parents and improving parent attitudes and parenting skills (Sweet & Appelbaum, 2004). This range of audiences, purposes, and intensities of home visiting programs explains why it is difficult for researchers to make generalizations about the efficacy of home visiting programs in general (Sweet & Appelbaum, 2004).

Home visits can be conducted using a Funds of Knowledge approach (Whyte & Karabon, 2016). The purpose of home visits using this approach is so that teachers can learn about families and learn from families, as opposed to conducting home visits to teach parents about child development. Teachers can see firsthand the cultural dynamics of a child's home. When a teacher steps into a child's home as a learner, as opposed to stepping into the home to teach a concept, "there is a potential for a lasting shift in teachers' attitudes and beliefs about children and their families" (Whyte & Karabon, 2016, p. 209). Teachers can ask parents about the educational background of other family members, daily practices in the home, genealogy, and employment history of parents/caregivers (Whyte & Karabon, 2016).

A meta-analysis conducted by Sweet and Appelbaum (2004) examined 60 home visiting programs in the United States. More than 95% of the home visiting programs target specific age groups. Nearly 75% of the home visiting programs targeted children from birth to age 3. Their results showed that almost 80% of home visiting programs lasted between nine and 36 months. The meta-analysis found a significant effect size greater than zero when examining home visiting programs that targeted child development, health care, and maternal help. Results showed higher cognitive and socioemotional skills for children who received a home visit when compared to control groups. While home visiting programs greatly vary, this meta-analytic review did show that there are benefits of home visits for young children and their families (Sweet & Appelbaum, 2004).

Benefits of home visits. Home visits have yielded numerous positive outcomes such as higher academic achievement, good work habits, better behavior, improved social skills, and increased academic motivation (Schulting, 2009; Sweet & Appelbaum, 2004). The impact of home visits is more significant for girls than boys (Schulting, 2009). When teachers visit student

homes, teachers are more likely to learn about stressors that can cause distractibility and/or anxiety in school (Meyer et al., 2011). Teachers can also learn about interests, demeanors, and hobbies of the children and family (Bradley & Schalk, 2013). “In addition to alleviating pressure on parents, home visits simultaneously demonstrate the educators’ willingness to relinquish authority and learn from their students’ families and communities” (Johnson, 2014, p. 363). Teachers can better address the needs of families when home visits are conducted (Whyte & Karabon, 2016).

Even though very few kindergarten teachers conduct home visits with their students, teachers who conduct them indicate that home visits provide an increased understanding of how a child’s environment impacts their behavior and performance in school (Lin & Bates, 2010; Meyer et al., 2011). Teachers have indicated that knowledge obtained from home visits impacts curriculum (Whyte & Karabon, 2016). Kindergarten teachers who conduct home visits can see family dynamics and family conditions firsthand, which in turn, helps teachers to really know their students (Allen & Tracy, 2004; Meyer & Mann, 2006). When teachers conduct home visits, they can truly create child-centered classrooms, since they have had direct contact with families prior to the beginning of the school year (Lin & Bates, 2010). The information obtained from home visits can be used to inform pedagogy (Whyte & Karabon, 2016). Students who receive a home visit have higher attendance (Bradley & Schalk, 2013; Kronholz, 2016) and are less likely to be expelled from school (Bradley & Schalk, 2013). Students are less likely to have anxiety on the first day of school if they receive a home visit from their teacher (Meyer et al., 2011).

Most of the kindergarten teachers who conduct home visits feel like the home visits are an effective way to connect with families (Taveras, 1998). Home visits provide a comfortable

way for teachers to meet parents and students (Meyer & Mann, 2006) and can help initiate mutual trust between schools and families (Meyer et al., 2011). Teachers have better communication with families who have had a home visit (Meyer et al., 2011), as home visits are a way to establish rapport with families (Faltis, 2001). After conducting home visits, future interactions between families and teachers are more likely to be positive (Meyer & Mann, 2006). Teachers who conduct home visits show more compassion towards their students (Meyer & Mann, 2006), as home visits are a way to see firsthand the constraints that families face (Faltis, 2001). Most kindergarten teachers who conduct home visits indicate that they learned new things about the student and family by conducting a home visit (Faber, 2016).

In 2012, 98% of kindergarten teachers were women (Pianta & Cox, 2000). Furthermore, 82% of all teachers were White, 7% Black, and 8% Hispanic. During the same time frame, 51% of students were White, 16% Black, 24% Hispanic, 5% Asian/Pacific Islander, 3% multi-racial, and 1% American Indian/Alaska Native (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016b). Most kindergarten students will have a different ethnicity than their teacher (Barbarin, Downer, Odom, & Head, 2010). Teachers have noted that it is challenging to relate to students who have different racial, cultural, socioeconomic and linguistic backgrounds (Ray & Bowman, 2003), as there is an increasing cultural divide between students and teachers (Marx & Moss, 2011). Furthermore, “in order to improve the education of culturally and linguistically diverse students, it is fundamental that teachers understand the relationship between pupils’ home culture and school learning” (Peralta-Nash, 2003, p. 112). Conducting home visits helps teachers develop cultural competence (Vesely et al., 2017). Teachers that conduct home visits have an increased understanding and appreciation of the cultural diversity of their students and are more likely to set up classrooms that promote multicultural learning and include more diversity in their lesson

plans (Lin & Bates, 2010). These teachers also have a greater willingness to reach out to parents and have a more positive connection to students and their families (Schulting, 2009). When home visits are conducted with non-English speaking families, teachers and parents both report that the issue of the language barrier is reduced and is less of a barrier (Schulting, 2009).

Home visits are a way to build a “respectful and symmetrical social relationship with families” (Whyte & Karabon, 2016, p. 209). Effective home visits can cultivate mutual respect between families and the school system (Johnson, 2014; Whyte & Karabon, 2016). Parents are more likely to have a positive view of the school when teachers conduct home visits (Meyer et al., 2011). Home visits can also establish open lines of communication between families and the school (Johnson, 2014). Parents feel that teachers care about their children when teachers conduct home visits (Meyer et al., 2011). Home visits allow teachers and parents to form a “partnership to enhance student’s success by discussing mutual goals and individual roles to achieve common objectives” (Meyer et al., 2011, p. 192). Parents of students who have a home visit are more likely to be involved in the school than parents of children who do not receive a home visit (Sweet & Appelbaum, 2004).

Structure of home visiting programs. Home visiting programs are structured differently depending on the purpose of the home visit (Roggman et al., 2001). Some home visits are structured with questions to ask families, while other home visits are semi-structured with guiding questions. Home visits can be a singular event if used as a transition activity or can occur repeatedly when educating parents or when working on parent-child relationships (Roggman et al., 2001). Some organizations videotape home visits and reflect on them to continually improve the home visitation program (Thurgood, 2001).

Recommendations for conducting home visits. Most teachers who conduct home visits do not have formal training on conducting home visits (Bennett, 2006; Taveras, 1998). Without proper training on how to conduct home visits, teachers have noted that home visits can be uncomfortable (Taveras, 1998). Conducting structured home visits via a list of questions and conversation starters has been found to make home visits more comfortable and effective (Lin & Bates, 2010). Teachers must “figure out how to be inquisitive without being intrusive and voyeuristic” (Whyte & Karabon, 2016, p. 209). It is recommended to conduct home visits in teams, follow district documentation procedures, and to dress professionally (Johnson, 2014). Some teachers take a book to read to students and leave the book with the family. Teachers should carefully reflect on the home visit immediately following the visit (Johnson, 2014). Some families opt to have the home visit in a local church, civic club, or community center instead of in their home (Bradley & Schalk, 2013). Barriers to conducting transition activities such as home visits include lack of teacher compensation, late notice of class lists, difficulty contacting parents, and/or danger in visiting student homes (La Paro et al., 2009). However, the biggest barriers for parents and students participating in transition activities are parent work schedules and other scheduling conflicts (Kang et al., 2017; La Paro et al., 2009).

Sacramento City Schools conduct over 2,000 home visits each school year (Kronholz, 2016), while teachers in Saint Paul, Minnesota, conduct over 1,000 home visits every school year (Faber, 2016). Many school systems use Title I funds to pay teachers to conduct home visits (Kronholz, 2016). School systems are required to use 1% of Title I funds for parent engagement activities (Kronholz, 2016). Many schools who do not receive Title I funds seek donations from private organizations to pay teachers to conduct home visits (Kronholz, 2016).

Research has shown that many students struggle transitioning to kindergarten (Clark & McGann, 2007; Little et al., 2016; McIntyre & Welchons, 2015) and that a successful transition into kindergarten is predicative of success in higher grades (Galindo & Sheldon, 2011; McIntyre & Welchons, 2015). Research has shown that almost all schools use some type of transition practice (McIntyre et al., 2014) and that the more transition practices that are used, the more successful the transition into kindergarten and the higher student achievement at the end of kindergarten (Ahtola et al., 2011; Little et al., 2016; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008; Munz, 2013; Schulting, 2008; Schulting et al., 2005). The most common transition practice is sending home generic fliers after the beginning of the school year, and the least common transition practice is the kindergarten teacher conducting home visits (Friedman et al., 2006). Prior quantitative research has shown that there are many positive effects of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits including better work habits, improved behavior, higher academics, better social skills, and more academic motivation (Schulting, 2009; Sweet & Appelbaum, 2004). There is very limited qualitative insight on the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits, and there are no case studies on kindergarten teachers conducting home visits. Prior research has not provided thorough parent or student perspectives on kindergarten teachers conducting home visits.

This single case study helps fill this gap in research on transition activities for students starting kindergarten, as it provides qualitative insight from the kindergarten teachers, Early Childhood Leaders, and parents of kindergartners describing the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits with kindergarten students. This case study has practical value as it provides qualitative insight about kindergarten teachers conducting home visits, a practice

that quantitative research has shown to have many benefits to kindergarten students (Schulting, 2009; Sweet & Appelbaum, 2004).

Summary

Starting kindergarten is a major milestone for young children and their families (Friedman et al., 2006). Many students have a challenging transition into formal schooling (Ahtola et al., 2011; Little et al., 2016; Nelson, 2004). Teachers can conduct transition practices to help students have a more successful start to formal schooling (Green et al., 2011). A student's performance in kindergarten is predictive of student performance in upper grades, so a successful start to formal schooling is important (Galindo & Sheldon, 2011; McIntyre & Welchons, 2015). While there has been quantitative research to show the benefits of home visits, there has not been qualitative research that describes the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits. This study explores the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits and adds to the existing research on transition activities used for students starting school.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

Millions of students begin kindergarten every year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016a), and many of them struggle transitioning into formal schooling (Ahtola et al., 2011; Little et al., 2016; Nelson, 2004). When kindergarteners struggle transitioning to school, they have lower academic skills, are not as independent as other students, and have a difficult time following directions (Smythe-Leistico et al., 2012). Kindergarten teachers can conduct transition activities such as home visits to help aid in a smoother transition (Friedman et al., 2006; Green et al., 2011; Little et al., 2016; Schulting et al., 2005). When students are successful in kindergarten, they are more likely to be successful in upper grades (Galindo & Sheldon, 2011; McIntyre & Welchons, 2015). This qualitative case study describes the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits.

This chapter discusses the research design of my study and the corresponding research questions. Then, I discuss the setting of the study and the participants in the study. This chapter also chronicles the procedures of this study. As the researcher, I then describe my role as the researcher. I describe the extensive data collection process and how the data were analyzed in this study. Next, Chapter Three discusses the trustworthiness of this study by examining the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the study. This chapter concludes with ethical considerations.

Design

Qualitative research studies give thorough descriptions of specific phenomena. They “study a group or population, identify variables that cannot be easily measured, or hear silenced voices” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 45). A qualitative approach is appropriate for my study, as I

am interested in obtaining a thorough description of a specific phenomenon, the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits. Furthermore, the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits has multiple variables such as the transition to kindergarten for the kindergartener and family of the kindergartener; the interactions between the kindergartener, kindergarten teacher, and the parent(s)/caregiver(s) of the kindergartener; and the context of the home environment.

The five major approaches to qualitative inquiry are ethnography, phenomenological, narrative, case study, and grounded theory (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Each of these approaches is appropriate for specific types of research problems. A case study is the most appropriate qualitative design for my research. Case studies are used to explain or provide in-depth descriptions of contemporary, real-life phenomena and are frequently used to answer how or why questions of a contemporary phenomenon in which the researcher has little control over (Yin, 2018). The practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits is a real-life, contemporary phenomenon. A case study is the appropriate design for my study because I am seeking to provide an in-depth description of this practice.

Many disciplines use case studies as a qualitative research design. Anthropologists and sociologists were the first disciplines to use case studies (Hamel, Dufour, & Fortin, 1993). Many social scientists in medical, political, and psychological fields use case studies as well (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Quality case studies are a good way to grasp a full understanding of a complex issue (Flyvbjerg, 2006) and are “down-to-earth and attention-holding” (Stake, 1978, p. 5). They can be descriptive, explanatory, or exploratory in nature (Yin, 2018). Case studies are complex and holistic, as the whole concept of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits is more than the sum of the its parts (Stake, 1978). Yin (2018) points out that,

A case study copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interests than data points, and as one result benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide design, data collection, and analysis, and as another result relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion. (p. 15)

There are many types of case studies, as case studies can examine a program, a group of people, an individual, an activity, or multiple cases. A single case study examines one person, an activity, or a program. Multiple case studies seek to describe multiple cases (Yin, 2018). My research is a single case study. This is the most appropriate type of case study, because I looked at the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits at one elementary school. Since I looked at the home visiting program by kindergarten teachers in depth at this one school, it is a single case bounded by the data collected from one site.

Research Questions

The research questions for this case study were as follows:

1. How do stakeholders describe the practices of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits in a suburban, low-income North Carolina elementary school?
2. How is the building of relationships described when kindergarten teachers conduct home visits with students starting kindergarten?
3. How is the home environment described when kindergarten teachers conduct home visits with students starting kindergarten?

Setting

The research took place at Elementary School (pseudonym) in the Winston-Salem Forsyth County School District. This is a large urban school district in North Carolina that

serves over 54,000 students (Winston-Salem Forsyth County Schools, 2017). This school district is the fourth largest in the state of North Carolina, and the 81st largest in the United States. There are 43 elementary schools in this district, and 29 of the elementary schools were classified as Title I schools for the 2017–2018 school year. The Title I program provides federal funding to schools who qualify based on the income of families who attend the school (Winston-Salem Forsyth County Schools, 2018a). “The purpose of the Title I program is to help at-risk students meet the state’s challenging academic content and performance standards” (Winston-Salem Forsyth County Schools, 2018a, p. 1). The demographics of the students in the district are as follows: 40.2% White, 28.5% African American, 24.5% Hispanic, 4.0% multi-racial, 2.5% Asian, and less than 1% American Indian or Native Hawaiians/Pacific (Winston-Salem Forsyth County Schools, 2018a). There is one superintendent of the Winston-Salem Forsyth County Schools, Dr. Beverly Emory. There are eight instructional superintendents that report to Dr. Emory (Winston-Salem Forsyth County Schools, 2017). In 2015, 23% of the people in Forsyth County lived in poverty, which is higher than both the state and national poverty rate (United States Census Bureau, 2017). One third of the children in Forsyth County live in poverty (United States Census Bureau, 2017).

Elementary School is a suburban elementary school in the Winston-Salem Forsyth County School system. Elementary School was classified as a Title I school during the 2016–2017 school year (Winston-Salem Forsyth County Schools, 2018a). More than two thirds of the students at Elementary School were considered economically disadvantaged during the 2016–2017 school year (North Carolina School Report Cards, 2017). Elementary School has one principal and one assistant principal (Winston-Salem Forsyth County Schools, 2018b). During the 2017–2018 school year, there were 590 students at Elementary School, and there were 20

students in each of the five kindergarten classes. In kindergarten, the average class size at Elementary School is higher than the county and state averages. At Elementary School, all teachers are fully licensed with 28.2% of the teachers having advanced degrees. Two teachers are Nationally Board Certified. More than two thirds of the teachers at Elementary School have taught for more than 10 years (North Carolina School Report Cards, 2017). I chose to conduct research in this school district because I work in this district. I purposefully chose this specific school to conduct a case study because all kindergarten teachers at Elementary School conduct home visits as a transition activity.

Participants

This case study examined the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits by using kindergarten teachers who conducted home visits, Early Childhood Leaders at the site and district, and parents of kindergarten students who received a home visit as participants. A purposeful, homogeneous sampling technique was used to select potential participants. This case study used a homogeneous sampling technique, as all participants experienced kindergarten teachers conducting home visits or were educational leaders supporting this transition practice. This “is a purposeful sample that intentionally sample[s] a group of people that can best inform the researcher about the research problem under examination” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 148). I intentionally sought out kindergarten teachers who conducted home visits as well as parents of kindergarteners who received a home visit. I intentionally sought out educational leaders who have a vested interest in home visits at this site which included the principal of Elementary School and two Early Childhood Leaders in the Winston-Salem Forsyth County Schools. A purposeful sample was the best sampling for this study, as all participants met the requirement of experiencing a kindergarten teacher conducting a home visit. Purposeful samples are frequently

used in case studies (Merriam, 2009). I do not currently work with any of the kindergarten teacher participants at this school, and I have not had any previous relationships with the parents who were in the study. While I have been in workshops and meetings with some of the Early Childhood Leaders, I am not directly working with any of these leaders.

All kindergarten teachers at Elementary School conduct home visits throughout the school year. I emailed these six teachers and asked which teachers would be interested in participating in the study. Once I secured kindergarten teachers as participants, I used snowball sampling to identify parent participants. Snowball sampling, or chain sampling, “identifies cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information-rich” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 159). I asked the kindergarten teacher participants for potential parents. Kindergarten teachers contacted the parents and gave them a flier about potentially participating in this research study. While kindergarten teachers want to conduct a home visit with all students, not all kindergarteners will receive a home visit due to scheduling conflicts, difficulty contacting parents, and other reasons (La Paro et al., 2009). The number of students at Elementary School slightly vary year to year, and teachers are not required to conduct home visits with all students. Of the 21 potential parent participants, three parents expressed interest in the study, and two of these three parents chose to participate in the study. All participants had the option of opting out of the research at any time.

Participants completed a questionnaire to collect demographic information at the beginning of the interviews. The teacher questionnaire (Appendix I) collected the following information: age, gender, ethnicity, highest level of education, number of years teaching, number of years teaching kindergarten, and number of years at Elementary School. The questionnaire also asked teachers to list all the transition practices that they use in addition to conducting home

visits. Early Childhood Leaders were asked to provide their age, ethnicity, gender, highest level of education, current position, and number of years in education on the questionnaire (Appendix J). Parent participants were asked to provide their age, ethnicity, gender, highest level of education, and number of children on the questionnaire (Appendix K).

Procedures

After a successful defense of my research proposal, I followed university procedures to get approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) for this research study. The IRB approval letter is in Appendix A. Formal permission from the Office of Research and Evaluation at the Winston-Salem Forsyth County School District was secured upon IRB approval and prior to conducting research. This approval letter is in Appendix B. Participants were then elicited and secured. Participants were given a \$25 gift card to Amazon for their participation in the research study. Once participants agreed to participate, I obtained informed consent. The teacher participant informed consent is in Appendix C, the Early Childhood Leader consent form is in Appendix D, and the parent participant informed consent is in Appendix E.

Teacher Participants

I emailed the six kindergarten teachers at Elementary School to see which teachers would be interested in participating in the study. Kindergarten teachers must have conducted home visits in order to participate in this research. Five kindergarten teachers chose to participate in the study. I scheduled face-to-face interviews with each teacher. Face-to-face interviews took between 18 and 29 minutes. Interviews with teachers took place at a mutually agreed upon time. These interviews took place in each teacher's classroom. Other people could not easily overhear the conversations. I interviewed participants individually using open-ended questions. Once interviews were transcribed, member checking was used. I emailed the teachers information on

writing a mock letter of advice, which included the content of the letter and how to submit it to me. This document was written for kindergarten teachers who do not currently conduct home visits but are interested in conducting home visits. There were five kindergarten teachers in the study as participants. Kindergarten teacher participants have taught kindergarten an average of six years. There were five female and no male kindergarten teacher participants. All kindergarten teachers were White.

Early Childhood Leaders

Early Childhood Leaders who have a vested interest in kindergarten teachers conducting home visits were interviewed. These leaders included the school principal of Elementary School and two other Early Childhood Leaders in the district central office. These leaders were emailed to see if they would be interested in participating in this research study. Once participants agreed to participate in the study, I scheduled interviews in a mutually agreed upon time and in a place where others could not easily overhear conversations. Interviews took between 33 and 42 minutes. Once interviews were transcribed, member checking was used. I emailed the Early Childhood Leaders information on writing a mock letter of advice, which included the content of the letter and how to submit it to me. This document was written for kindergarten teachers who do not currently conduct home visits but are interested in conducting home visits. The consent form for the Early Childhood Leaders is in Appendix D. There were two female and one male Early Childhood Leader participants, and they were all White.

Parent Participants

Kindergarten teachers were asked to provide kindergarten parents who might be interested in participating in this case study. Parents of kindergarteners must have received a home visit from their kindergarten teacher in order to be a participant in this study. Kindergarten

teachers gave fliers to parents of kindergarteners who received a home visit. There were 21 potential parent participants. Parents were asked to contact me if they were interested in participating in the study. Three parents contacted me about the study, and two parents chose to participate in the research.

Face-to-face interviews with each parent were scheduled. These interviews took between 17 and 22 minutes and were held in a mutually agreed upon location. Parents were asked open-ended questions about their experiences of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits. Once interviews were transcribed, parent participants participated in member checking. I emailed the parents information on writing a letter of advice, which included the content of the letter and how to submit it to me. This document was written for kindergarten teachers who do not currently conduct home visits but are interested in conducting home visits. The parent participant consent form is in Appendix E. Kindergarten parent participants have an average of three children, and there were two female and no male parent participants. Both kindergarten parent participants were White.

Once all participants were interviewed, I conducted a focus group to collect additional information from the participants. All focus group participants were previously interviewed as part of this research. All participants were invited to be a part of the focus group. One parent, the principal of Elementary School, and the Early Childhood Leader One chose to be a part of the focus group. Member checking was used on the face-to-face interviews and comments made during the focus group.

All records from this study will be kept private. The data are securely stored and password protected. I am the only person who has access to these records. Interviews and the focus group session were audio recorded, and I transcribed them verbatim. Audio recordings

will only be used for educational purposes. All records will be stored on a private computer for three years, and at which time, it will be disposed of. All forms of data collection were coded to produce common themes. The combination of these themes was able to answer my research questions.

The Researcher's Role

I understand that I was the “human instrument” in this study, as I collected all data through interviews, letters of advice, and a focus group. I was the sole person taking notes and asking questions (Patton, 2014). It is imperative to report my potential biases and that I am self-aware of my role in this research proposal. I have been a teacher in the Winston-Salem Forsyth County School System five years. During two of these years, I taught kindergarteners with special needs as a special educator. The other three years, I was a general education kindergarten teacher in the district. I am currently a kindergarten teacher in this district and have attended workshops with two of the Early Childhood Leaders. I am not working in the school where the research took place; however, this school is in the same school district where I am currently employed. I am also not in a mentoring or supervisory role with any of the teacher participants.

While I have not conducted home visits as a kindergarten teacher, I have conducted numerous other transition activities that are targeted to help improve the transition to formal schooling. I meet with parents and students numerous times before the start of the school year via kindergarten screenings, a summer camp for rising kindergarten students, open houses, and other social events scheduled during the summer prior to the start of kindergarten. I have seen firsthand how difficult it is for many students to start formal schooling. I firmly believe in using transition practices with students starting school. This belief could lead to a potential bias of using home visits as a transition activity to help ensure a smoother start to kindergarten, as it is

my assumption that the participants will have positive experiences of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits.

Data Collection

Researchers should use a variety of rigorous data collection methods (Patton, 2014; Yin, 2018). Triangulation of data provides corroborating evidence (Creswell & Poth, 2018) and is “determining the convergence of the data collected from different sources of evidence, to assess the strength of a case finding and also to boost the construct validity of measures used in the case study” (Yin, 2018, p. 288). Triangulation of data occurred in my study through interviews, letters of advice, and a focus group. These data collection methods describe the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits. Data were collected until data saturation occurred. I knew data saturation occurred once I was no longer obtaining any new information from interviews, the focus group, and letters of advice.

In my district, elementary schools conduct most transition practices in August. Some home visits are conducted in August, while others are completed throughout the school year. Kindergarten teachers cannot conduct home visits until class rosters have been finalized, which is usually a week before the first day of school. I conducted interviews with each participant. Interviews took place at the conclusion of the home visits so that participants could reflect on the home visits. Teachers were asked to write a mock letter of advice to other kindergarten teachers who do not currently conduct home visits but are considering using home visits as a transition activity. Using correspondence methods, such as letter writing, is a reputable method of data collection in qualitative research, as it can offer advantages over more frequently used types of data collection. Some participants are more expressive via written communication than verbal communication (Bowen, 2009; Harris, 2002). Participants were asked to write letters of advice

about the experience of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits. The letters of advice are mock letters, and were only used as a mode of data collection; letters were not sent to other kindergarten teachers. Once letters of advice and interviews were completed, I conducted a focus group with the participants. The focus group took place at the end of the data collection process so that I could talk to the participants about themes that emerged during interviews and letters of advice. Data collection did not begin until IRB approval from Liberty University was granted.

Interviews

I conducted face-to-face interviews with each participant using a semi-structured format. These interviews are “attempts to understand the world from the subjects’ point of view, to unfold the meaning of their experience, to uncover their lived world” (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015, p. 3). The questions were broad and open-ended. Interviews are of great importance in case studies: “Interviews can especially help by suggesting explanation (i.e., the ‘hows’ and ‘whys’) of key events, as well as the insights reflecting participants’ relativist perspectives” (Yin, 2018, p. 118). Researchers should ask clear, open-ended questions (Patton, 2014). I listened carefully to the participants and probed when appropriate. I remained neutral as well as empathic. I used appropriate transitions to aid in a smoother interview and was prepared for the unexpected (Patton, 2014). The questions were also grounded in relevant literature. The interviews were audiotaped, and I transcribed them verbatim. The interview protocol for teacher participants in this study is in Appendix F. The interview protocol for Early Childhood Leaders in the district is in Appendix G, and the interview protocol for parent participants is in Appendix H. Member checking took place with all participant groups once interviews were transcribed.

Standardized open-ended interview questions for the kindergarten teacher

participants. As a data collection method, I interviewed kindergarten teachers who had conducted home visits. The standardized open-ended questions for these interviews are listed below.

1. Please introduce yourself to me.
2. How many years have you taught kindergarten?
3. What draws you to be a kindergarten teacher?
4. Tell me about your kindergarten class this year.
5. What transition practices do you use with your kindergarteners and their families?
6. Which of these practices are required?
7. When you conduct home visits, who goes with you?
8. How do you schedule home visits with families?
9. Tell me about your experiences with home visits.
10. What do you gain from home visits that you would not be able to gain otherwise?
11. Think back to the home visits that you just conducted. Tell me about your experiences with the kindergarteners.
12. Likewise, tell me about your experiences with the parents.
13. Tell me about the home environments of the kindergarteners that you visited.
14. What else would you like to share about home visits with kindergarteners?

Patton (2014) discusses six types of questions that researchers use during interviews. My study utilized several types of questions in order to find out about the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits. The first two questions were background questions (Patton, 2014). Background, or demographic, questions “help the interviewer locate the respondent in

relation to other people” (Patton, 2014, pp. 444-445). Question 3 and question 10 were opinion, or value, questions. This type of question tells researchers about participants’ desires, goals, expectations, and intentions (Patton, 2014).

Questions 4, 9, 11, and 12 were experience, or behavior, questions (Patton, 2014). These were “questions about what a person does or has done to elicit behaviors, experiences, actions, and activities that would have been observed had the observer been present” (Patton, 2014, p. 444). Questions 5–8 were knowledge questions which asked the participant to tell facts (Patton, 2014). Most schools use at least one type of transition activity (McIntyre et al., 2014), and questions 5–8 asked the teacher participant to talk about transition practices in general as well as home visits. Question 13 was a sensory question, as it asked the teacher participant to describe the home environment using multiple senses including sight, sound, touch, and smell (Patton, 2014). The final question of the teacher interview was a one-shot question because it allowed one final opportunity for the participant to provide insight on the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits (Patton, 2014).

Questions 9–14 were specific to the experience of conducting home visits. When kindergarten teachers visit the homes of students, they can see the home environments and family circumstances (Korfmacher et al., 2008). Teachers can also discover stressors that could impact the student when visiting the home (Meyer et al., 2011). Teachers who conduct home visits more clearly understand how the home environment influences students (Lin & Bates, 2010; Meyer et al., 2011). The questions that were specific to home visits provided an opportunity for teacher participants to discuss the homes, family circumstances, and other pertinent information that was obtained via the home visit. When teachers conduct home visits, they are able to start or further a relationship with the kindergartener and parent(s) (Berlin et al.,

2011; Johnson, 2014). Question 12 discussed the relationship with the parent. Teachers are better able to create a student-centered classroom if they know the child's interests and abilities (Allen & Tracy, 2004; Meyer & Mann, 2006). Question 10 encouraged teachers to share what they gained from the home visit that they would not have known by just seeing the child at school.

Standardized open-ended interview questions for the early childhood leaders. There are several Early Childhood Leaders in the Winston-Salem Forsyth County School System who have a vested interest in kindergarten teachers conducting home visits. I interviewed these leaders to gain more information about kindergarten teachers conducting home visits. The standardized open-ended interview questions for these leaders are listed below.

1. Please introduce yourself to me.
2. What is your current position in the Winston-Salem Forsyth County School System?
3. Tell me about your previous work experience as an educator.
4. What draws you to work in early education?
5. What is your experience with kindergarten teachers conducting home visits?
6. What else would you like to share about home visits with kindergarteners?

Questions 1, 2, and 3 were background questions so that the Early Childhood Leaders could talk about their relevant educational background (Patton, 2014). Question 4 was a value question, as it allowed participants to talk about their educational values (Patton, 2014). Question 5 was an experience question because it asked participants to talk about their experiences with kindergarten teachers conducting home visits. Question 6 was a one-shot question, which allowed participants to provide any other relevant information (Patton, 2014).

Standardized open-ended interview questions for the parent participants. Parents of kindergarteners who had their child's teacher conduct a home visit were also interviewed. The standardized open-ended interview questions for parent participants are listed below.

1. Tell me about your family.
2. What do you like to do as a family?
3. Tell me about your kindergartener.
4. What does your kindergartner think about kindergarten so far?
5. Describe the first day of school for your kindergartener.
6. Tell me about your kindergartener's teacher.
7. What was your reaction when he/she called you about scheduling a home visit?
8. What was your kindergartener's reaction to his/her teacher coming to your house?
9. Tell me about the home visit.
10. What did you talk about during the home visit?
11. What did your kindergartener say after the home visit was complete?
12. What are your thoughts about kindergarten teachers conducting home visits?
13. What else would you like to add about kindergarten teachers conducting home visits?

Questions 1, 3, 4, 6, 9, and 12 were opinion/value questions (Patton, 2014). Questions 2, 10, and 11 were knowledge questions (Patton, 2014). These questions were asked as a non-threatening way to start the interview and to get more information about the background of the kindergartener and family. In this interview, questions 7 and 8 were feelings questions used to get the parent participant to express feelings about the experience specified. Question 5 was an experience question. The last question, question 13, was a one-shot question so that parent participants could share any additional thoughts they had (Patton, 2014). Parents have indicated

that home visits are a comfortable way to meet teachers and to establish a relationship with the school (Meyer et al., 2011; Meyer & Mann, 2006; Taveras, 1998). Questions 7–13 were specific to home visits and were asked to get more information about the impact of the kindergarten teacher conducting the home visit.

Letter of Advice

Participants were asked to write a mock letter of advice to other kindergarten teachers who do not currently conduct home visits but are interested in potentially conducting home visits with kindergarteners. These documents yielded authentic thoughts about home visits.

Documents can be used to supplement other types of data collection (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). The reason I asked participants to write a letter of advice was to obtain some additional insight about the practice of home visits. Once participants were interviewed, I gave them information about the letter of advice. Participants were able to think about what advice to give teachers before writing the letter. Some participants might have been more comfortable writing their thoughts than speaking them to an unknown researcher. The prompt for teacher participants to complete this document can be found in Appendix O. The prompt for Early Childhood Leaders is in Appendix P, and the prompt for parents is in Appendix Q.

Focus Groups

Focus groups usually consist of six to 10 people who share a commonality that the researcher is interested in (Patton, 2014; Yin, 2016). They are often used in qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). A focus group is essentially a group interview and is not primarily a discussion between participants. The purpose of a focus group is not to solve problems or to make decisions (Patton, 2014). When focus group participants hear each other's responses and interact with each other, the quality of the data obtained is elevated (Patton, 2014). It is

beneficial to use focus groups “when the interaction among interviewees will likely yield the best information, when the interviewees are similar and cooperative with each other, when time to collect information is limited, and when individuals interviewed one-on-one may be hesitant to provide information” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 164). A focus group was held once participants submitted letters of advice and when all interviews were conducted. A focus group protocol is placed in Appendix R.

Standardized open-ended focus group questions. Once interviews were completed and letters of advice were returned, I held a focus group. The standardized open-ended focus group questions are listed below.

1. Please describe your most memorable home visit this school year to our group.
2. If your whole team did not conduct home visits, how likely would you still conduct them?
3. What do you gain from conducting home visits?
4. What is the most challenging aspect of conducting home visits?
5. A common theme from my research thus far has been that home visits are a learning experience for kindergarten teachers, what are your thoughts about this theme?
6. Another common theme from my research thus far has been that home visits are an enjoyable experience for all stakeholders, what are your thoughts about this theme?
7. Another common theme from my research thus far has been that home visits help build genuine relationships, what are your thoughts about this theme?
8. Another common theme from my research thus far has been that home visits are impactful in different ways for each stakeholder, what are your thoughts about this theme?

9. What other thoughts do you have about kindergarten teachers conducting home visits?

Questions 1 and 3 were experience questions (Patton, 2014). They were asked to prompt the participants to talk about their recent experiences conducting home visits. Questions 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8 were opinion questions (Patton, 2014). Questions 2 and 4 were to elicit opinions about home visits in general, while questions 5, 6, 7, and 8 were to probe opinions about my findings from interviews and letters of advice. The final question was a one-shot question (Patton, 2014). This was a final opportunity for these participants to give thoughts on home visits.

Data Analysis

The data from this research study were analyzed through this five-step process: compiling, disassembling, reassembling, interpreting, and concluding (Yin, 2016). I first compiled the data by transcribing interviews and the focus group conversations verbatim (Yin, 2016). Transcriptions were in searchable documents, which allowed me to accurately search for specific codes. I also read through the letters of advice. This served as a preliminary read-through of all the data (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Then, I began disassembling the data by assigning open codes or Level 1 codes (Yin, 2016). Coding is “the assignment of simple words or short phrases to capture the meaning of a larger portion of the original textual or visual data” (Yin, 2016, p. 334). I used a spreadsheet to record codes that were found. These codes were grouped into Level 2, or category codes, as I started to find broader, conceptual issues (Yin, 2016). These category codes were grouped into themes, which are more complex and abstract than Level 2 codes (Yin, 2016). These themes helped me develop naturalistic generalizations, which are “generalizations that people can learn from the case for themselves, apply learnings to

a population of cases, or transfer them to another similar context” (Creswell & Poth, 2018, p. 206).

After codes were grouped into themes, I began reassembling data by looking for narrow and broad patterns through narrative arrays (Yin, 2016). Narrative arrays are “a series of direct quotations from the database or narrative constructions in the form of vignettes, anecdotes, and lengthier chunks of text” (Yin, 2016, p. 209). During the reassembling data phase, I used constant comparisons, negative instances, and rival thinking to help reduce potential biases (Yin, 2016). Throughout the data collection process, I reread all data multiple times (Patton, 2014). Researchers make constant comparisons by looking at similarities between codes that are the same and codes that are different. This can yield new relationships between codes (Yin, 2016). The purpose of using negative instances “is to refine your interpretation and findings to fit the full array of instances, positive and negative” (Yin, 2016, p. 211). Rival thinking is used by examining other explanations of initial observations which can lead to alternative themes (Patton, 2014; Yin, 2016). The result of the data analysis process was an in-depth description of the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits.

After I compiled, disassembled, and reassembled data, I interpreted the results and drew conclusions. The results can be interpreted by providing a description of the phenomena or by giving an explanation of the phenomena (Yin, 2016). I provided a thick description of the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits. I was able to draw conclusions from my research. The conclusions are “an overarching statement or series of statements that raises the interpretation of a study to a higher conceptual level or broader set of ideas” (Yin, 2016, p. 235).

Trustworthiness

It is important that researchers establish credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability in their studies. Triangulation of data, negative case analysis, and member checks are some of the ways that I established trustworthiness in this research. I provided thick, descriptive data and used direct quotes.

Credibility

Credibility is the internal validity of research studies. To ensure credibility and to increase validity in this study, I used triangulation of data (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Yin, 2018). I used interviews, letters of advice, and a focus group to describe the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits at the beginning of kindergarten. I used member checks as another way to establish credibility. Using member checks has been considered “the most critical technique for establishing credibility” (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 314). Participants were encouraged to provide feedback on preliminary analyses of the themes as well as the written analyses (Creswell, 2013). Negative case analysis was used to “refine working hypotheses as the inquiry advances” (Creswell, 2013, p. 251). This step ensures that all codes or themes are presented even if they are not positive (Creswell, 2013). Negative case analysis increases the credibility of a study (Creswell, 2013). Lastly, I clarified my bias as a researcher and current kindergarten teacher.

Dependability and Confirmability

In research studies, dependability refers to the reliability of the study and shows stableness of data. I provided thick, descriptive data to provide an in-depth description of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits. I thoroughly described all procedures which

would allow others to conduct a similar study, and I precisely followed these procedures. The use of direct quotes from participants also increased dependability (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Confirmability is equally important and ensures that objectivity and neutrality are used. Acknowledging myself as a “human researcher” and bracketing out my experiences and values adds to the trustworthiness of this study. I used appropriate direct quotes of participants to accurately describe the practice of home visits and to give the participants a voice (Creswell, 2013). The use of triangulation also increased confirmability (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2018).

Transferability

Transferability refers to the external validity and generalization of a study so that there is applicability for other people (Rockinson-Szapkiw & Spaulding, 2014). True generalization cannot occur in qualitative research. However, I used thick descriptive data which increase transferability in this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Yin, 2018). One of the limitations in my study is that my sample was from one suburban school in North Carolina. Due to a small number of participants from the same school, the results of this study may not be able to be applied to other schools.

Ethical Considerations

Researchers should carefully evaluate every step of research to ensure that all decisions were made ethically (Yin, 2018). After successfully defending my research proposal, I applied for IRB approval using corresponding procedures. Prior to the study, I went through proper protocols to get local permission from the Winston-Salem Forsyth County School System. Then, I secured participant consent from participants. Data collection did not take place until I had IRB approval, local permission, and signed consent forms.

I fully disclosed the purpose of my study (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participation in this study was voluntary, and I did not pressure participants to agree to participate. Participants could withdraw at any time. Participants' identities were protected, since pseudonyms were used to mask the identity of the participants (Creswell, 2013). Protection of data was used, since I ensured that there are multiple copies of the data through computer backups. Data are kept under password-protected folders on a computer that only I have access to. Since I used member checks, participants had the opportunity to read the transcripts and provide feedback and/or clarification as necessary. Participants could also feel "used" unless they are given something back in return for participating (Creswell, 2013). In this study participants received a \$25 Amazon gift card. Another ethical consideration was that there was a potential to side with the participants, since I am currently a kindergarten teacher. Researchers must consider if they are "open to contrary evidence" (Yin, 2018, p. 86). I presented multiple perspectives and conflicting views. I also accepted responsibility for my work, avoided plagiarizing, was honest, did not falsify information, and avoided deception (Yin, 2018).

Summary

A case study research method was used in this study to describe the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits. Case studies can provide in-depth descriptions of specific case(s) (Creswell, 2013). Data were collected via interviews, letters of advice, and a focus group to give a detailed description of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits. Data were analyzed via coding to obtain common themes. The results of this study produced a very thorough description of home visits conducted by kindergarten teachers.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

In the United States, there are millions of students who start kindergarten every year (National Center for Education Statistics, 2016a). Unfortunately, many of these kindergarten students struggle transitioning into the beginning of formal schooling (Ahtola et al., 2011; Little et al., 2016; Nelson, 2004). Students who have a difficult transition to formal schooling are not as independent as other students, have a difficult time following directions, and have lower academic skills (Smythe-Leistico et al., 2012). Schools conduct transition practices to aid in smoother transitions, including the kindergarten teacher conducting home visits (Friedman et al., 2006; Green et al., 2011; Little et al., 2016; Schulting et al., 2005).

This qualitative research study was a single case study to examine and describe the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits at one suburban, low-income elementary school in North Carolina. This chapter starts by giving a description of the participants in this study. The results of this study are then presented, which answer these research questions: How do stakeholders describe the practices of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits in a suburban, low-income North Carolina elementary school? How is the building of relationships described when kindergarten teachers conduct home visits with students starting kindergarten? How is the home environment described when kindergarten teachers conduct home visits with students starting kindergarten?

Participants

There were 10 participants in this qualitative case study. All participants had experienced a kindergarten teacher conducting a home visit at Elementary School or were an Early Childhood Leader who had a vested interest in kindergarten teachers conducting home visits in the district.

One of the Early Childhood Leaders, the principal of Elementary School, had conducted home visits as a teacher at previous schools and currently conducts home visits as the principal of Elementary School. One of the other Early Childhood Leaders had conducted home visits when she taught kindergarten at previous schools, and she currently supports Elementary School conducting home visits with kindergarten students in her current leadership role with the Winston-Salem Forsyth County School District. The other Early Childhood Leader participant has coached and supported kindergarten teachers in the practice of conducting home visits for many years and actively supports teachers at Elementary School conducting home visits in her leadership position with the school district.

There were five kindergarten teachers, two parents of kindergarten students who received a home visit, and three Early Childhood Leaders who took part in this study. The kindergarten teacher participants were teachers at Elementary School, a suburban, low-income school in North Carolina. The parent participants were parents of kindergarteners at this school. One of the Early Childhood Leaders was the principal of the school; the other two Early Childhood Leaders worked in the Winston-Salem Forsyth County School District central office. Of the 10 participants, nine were female and one was male. All participants were White. The average age of the Early Childhood Leaders was 46, the average age of the teachers was 34, and the average age of the parent participants was 41. The average age of all participants was 40. The teacher participants have taught an average of 11 years, and the Early Childhood Leaders have an average 23 years in education. The Early Childhood Leaders and kindergarten teachers have an average of 16 years in education. All Early Childhood Leaders have a master's degree. Three of the kindergarten teachers have a master's degree, while the other two kindergarten teachers only have a bachelor's degree. Both parent participants have a master's degree.

There is a brief description and overview of the participants below. The participants were given pseudonyms to protect participant identity. Names of my current kindergarten students were randomly assigned as pseudonyms, and they match gender and ethnicity of participants. The school is referred to as “Elementary School” to mask the identity of the elementary school and so that the participants’ names would not be easily derived from the school system webpage. Two of the Early Childhood Leaders are referred to as “Early Childhood Leader One” and “Early Childhood Leader Two” so that their identities cannot be deduced from the Winston-Salem Forsyth County School District website. Since the other Early Childhood Leader is the principal of Elementary School, and there are 43 elementary schools in the district, it is unlikely that his identity could be deduced from the district website. There are multiple male principals in the school district.

Austin

Austin is the principal of Elementary School. He is an enthusiastic 37-year-old White male. He has 15 years’ experience in education, and this is his second year as principal of Elementary School. Austin has a Master of Education in Elementary Education and in Educational Leadership. Austin has a wife and two children.

Austin considers himself an innovator and has a vast array of educational experiences. He has taught fifth grade in the Winston-Salem Forsyth County School District and in the Charlotte Mecklenburg School District. He was a curriculum coordinator for one year in the Charlotte Mecklenburg School District. Austin taught at the Ron Clark Academy in Atlanta, Georgia. He was also the School Implementation Director there and taught educators around the United States how to implement new strategies. Austin was an adjunct professor at Wake Forest University in the School of Education. Austin completed home visits at his previous schools as a

teacher, curriculum coordinator, and administrator. When he came to Elementary School, one of the new strategies he implemented was requiring all certified staff members to conduct home visits, and this is a part of the school's School Improvement Plan. Austin conducts home visits with students in various grades at Elementary School.

Carson

Carson is an energetic, 24-year-old White female. Carson lived in Pennsylvania until her family moved to rural North Carolina when she was 13 years old. This is her third year teaching kindergarten at Elementary School. She has only taught kindergarten and has only taught at Elementary School. When Carson interviewed at Elementary School, she interviewed for a job teaching fourth grade. Even though she did not initially see herself as a kindergarten teacher, she loves teaching kindergarten and cannot imagine teaching upper grades. Carson has her Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education from Appalachian State University. She has completed seven home visits with her kindergarteners this year.

Elizabeth

Elizabeth is an Early Childhood Leader in the Winston-Salem Forsyth County School System and works in the central office. In this research, she is referred to as "Early Childhood Leader One." She is an energetic, 45-year-old White female with over 23 years in education. She graduated from James Madison University with a major in psychology and a minor in Early Childhood Education. Elizabeth has a Master of Education in Curriculum and Instruction from Appalachian State University. Elizabeth has taught kindergarten and first grade in Richmond, Virginia, and in rural North Carolina. She has also served as an instructional facilitator in two elementary schools.

Elizabeth works with prekindergarten to second grade classes with her current job. She is on the Smart Start Board and serves as co-chair of the North Carolina Pre-Kindergarten program. She leads four Early Learning Coaches who work directly with kindergarten teachers in the Winston-Salem Forsyth County School System. She leads professional development for pre-kindergarten to second grade teachers. Elizabeth also works with the Forsyth Promise, a local nonprofit who brings various community members together for the betterment of local education. She is on the design team for Great Expectations' Family, Friends, and Neighbor program, which supports young children who stay with family, friends, or neighbors as opposed to attending formal preschool programs. Elizabeth has conducted home visits as a teacher and instructional facilitator. She supports teachers and schools in the district who are interested in conducting home visits.

Finley

Finley is a 40-year-old White female. She has three children, and her youngest child is a kindergarten student at Elementary School. She is a parent participant in this study. Finley and her family like to ride bikes, watch movies, and go hiking. They also like to spend time at home together. Finley's highest level of education is a master's degree. She is originally from New York and moved to North Carolina five years ago.

Hannah

Hannah is a quiet, 40-year-old White female kindergarten teacher at Elementary School. She has taught for 15 years, and this is her third year at Elementary School. She has taught all elementary grades as an ESL teacher and as an arts teacher. Hannah's highest level of education is a Master of Education. She has two children. Hannah has conducted two home visits this school year.

Hattie

Hattie is a passionate, 45-year-old White female kindergarten teacher. Hattie is originally from Maryland and moved to North Carolina 20 years ago. Hattie and her husband have two children that are in middle school. She has been a teacher for 15 years, with 14 years as a kindergarten teacher. All her teaching has been in schools classified as Title I schools. Hattie has a Bachelor of Arts in Elementary Education. This is Hattie's second year at Elementary School. She has 19 students in her current kindergarten class. There are 14 boys and 5 girls in her current kindergarten class. She has conducted three home visits this year, and she conducted home visits at her previous school.

Laurel

Laurel is a 43-year-old White female kindergarten teacher. Laurel and her husband have three children that are 14, 16, and 17. She has taught elementary school for 16 years, 11 of which have been in kindergarten. This is Laurel's first year at Elementary School. Laurel has taught in North Carolina and in Virginia. Her highest level of education is a Master's in Education. She has been to numerous trainings such as Orton Gillingham and Wilson reading programs.

Laurel has taught upper elementary as well as kindergarten. However, she says that teaching kindergarten is her favorite, as she likes being children's first teacher and being the teacher who ensures that they have all of their foundational skills prior to moving on to the next grade level. She has 21 kindergartners this school year, and she describes them as sweet and very talkative. She was voted as Elementary School's Teacher of the Year for the 2018–2019 school year. Laurel has conducted seven home visits this school year.

Maggie

Maggie is a 55-year-old White female who is currently an Early Childhood Leader. In this research study, she is referred to as “Early Childhood Leader Two.” She has worked in education for 32 years. She has taught kindergarten for 22 years in addition to teaching third, fourth, and fifth grade in other years. For 10 years, she served as an instructional facilitator. She coached kindergarten teachers and supported them in conducting home visits when she was an instructional facilitator. In her current role, she helps preschool teachers and kindergarten teachers create smooth transition plans into formal schooling. Maggie currently supports schools and teachers in transition practices for kindergarten students, including teachers conducting home visits.

Sutton

Sutton is a dynamic, 41-year-old White female. Sutton and her husband have two children, one of which is a kindergarten student. She is a first time kindergarten parent and a parent participant of this study. Her highest level of education is a master’s degree. Her kindergarten son is in Cub Scouts, which has become a family affair, often involving the entire family going on outings to hockey games and camping excursions. As a family, they also like to play board games and swim at the neighborhood pool every day it is open. Sutton and her family spend a lot of time with their extended family.

Teagan

Teagan is a White, 29-year-old female who is currently expecting her first child. She has taught elementary grades for four years. This is her first year in kindergarten, and she has 21 kindergartners. Teagan previously taught first and second grade. She did not seek teaching kindergarten and would have preferred to have taught first or second grade this year. However,

she has found many things that she enjoys about teaching kindergarten. This is Teagan's first year at Elementary School. She conducted home visits at her previous school, and has conducted two home visits this school year.

Results

The results of my single case study are presented in this section. I transcribed the face-to-face interviews and the focus group verbatim. Data were then compiled from interviews, mock letters of advice about conducting home visits, and the focus group. Once the data were compiled, I read it multiple times. Member checking was also used.

Theme Development

Qualitative research studies analyze data to answer research questions. I conducted 10 face-to-face interviews with participants. Then, I asked participants to email me a mock letter of advice written for kindergarten teachers who were not conducting home visits but were interested in conducting home visits. Lastly, participants were invited to be a part of a focus group about kindergarten teachers conducting home visits. The following section describes how I analyzed data to establish themes.

Questionnaire. Participants filled out questionnaires prior to the face-to-face interviews. The questionnaires contained demographic information about the participants such as age, race, and highest level of education. The questionnaires for each of the participant groups was slightly different. The questionnaire for kindergarten teacher participants is in Appendix I, and the questionnaire for Early Childhood Leaders is in Appendix J. The questionnaire for parent participants is in Appendix K.

Face-to-face interviews. I conducted face-to-face interviews with each of the 10 participants. These interviews lasted between 13 minutes and 39 minutes and were audio

recorded. A semi-structured format was used for each interview. After each interview, I transcribed the audio recording verbatim. The interview protocol for kindergarten teacher participants is in Appendix L, and the interview protocol for Early Childhood Leaders is in Appendix M. The interview protocol for parent participants is in Appendix N.

Letters of advice. Once I completed each interview, I emailed participants information on writing a mock letter of advice. This document was to be written for kindergarten teachers who do not currently conduct home visits but are interested in home visits. Eight letters of advice were returned to me. The length of these documents ranged from a short paragraph to one page. The prompt for the letter of advice for teachers is in Appendix O. The prompt for the letter of advice for Early Childhood Leaders is in Appendix P, and the prompt for the letter of advice for parent participants is in Appendix Q.

Focus group interview. Participants were invited to be a part of my focus group. I asked Austin, the principal of Elementary School, to schedule the focus group at a time that would not interfere with other scheduled meetings at the school. Participants were invited to the focus group via email on the day it was scheduled and then sent a reminder the day before the focus group. Three participants attended the focus group, which included the principal of Elementary School, Early Childhood Leader One, and a parent. The focus group was audio recorded, and I transcribed it verbatim.

Codes. At the conclusion of my research, I placed the transcriptions from the interviews, transcriptions from the focus group, and the mock letters of advice in one searchable document. While I read each transcription during and after transcribing them, I also read through the entire searchable document once it was compiled, which was a preliminary read-through (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Afterwards, I created codes based on participant responses. Codes appeared at

least twice and were recorded. This process led to 28 codes, which were used between two and 38 times by participants.

While I was coding, I used constant comparisons to see how codes were the same and different. I also looked at negative instances. While 11 of the codes were about the practice of home visits being an enjoyable experience for all stakeholders, there were some comments that could be taken as negative. Two of the Early Childhood Leaders talked about the fact that some staff are anxious about going into homes of students. Elizabeth, Early Childhood Leader One, mentioned that this was especially true if the home of the student was different than the teacher's home. Some participants also talked about how the safety of the teacher needs to be taken into consideration when discussing the practice of conducting home visits. Table 1 shows the codes and the frequency of the codes.

Table 1

Frequency of Codes

Codes	Frequency
Learn about home environment/home interactions	38
Genuine/real/true/heart of people	33
Excited kindergartners	31
To build relationships	22
Fun/enjoyable	18
A way to welcome/comfort students	16
Child/parent/family-led	15
Can change previous bad experience of formal schooling for families	14
Food was served	12
Played games	11
Sense of pride for kindergartner	11
Positive	10

Informal	9
Anxious staff	8
Did not take place in the home	8
Not about school topics	8
To get to know child/family	8
Differentiated experiences based on family	7
Made a connection	7
Short	7
Helps to relate to students	5
Shifts power from teacher to family	5
Shows teacher cares	5
Take safety of teacher into consideration	5
Changed teacher's preconceived notions	4
Plan the visit/no unannounced home visit	4
Part of the school culture	2
Personal	2

Themes. After coding was completed, I examined the codes to see which codes were related. I placed similar codes together. Two codes were related to the teacher learning about the child and family (to get to know child/family and learn about home environment/home interactions). I also placed the code “helps to relate to students” in this group, since the teacher would need to learn something to be able to “relate to students.” The last code I placed in this group was the code “child/parent/family-led.” Since the visit was not led by the teacher, the teacher would be able to learn what the family and child were interested in. The principal of Elementary School said that at one of the home visits, they played with the family's chickens during the bulk of the visit. During other visits, families based the home visit around a tea party, games, or other family interests. These interests would be something that the teacher would

learn about the family. This process of placing codes in themes based on similarities was used with the remaining codes.

Rival thinking was also used during this process. The code “anxious staff” is completely opposite of the code “fun/enjoyable.” I could have created a theme called “mixed feelings” towards visits to accompany these codes. However, I chose to place the code “fun/enjoyable” with the other codes that alluded to this practice being an enjoyable experience. The code “anxious staff” is an important code and was mentioned eight times. The principal of Elementary School and Early Childhood Leader One talked about things they have done to alleviate staff anxiety. They both mentioned that it was only with teachers who had not previously conducted home visits and gave ideas to help with this including taking another teacher on the home visit, starting with the parent you are most comfortable with in your classroom, and giving the teacher talking points for the home visit to use if there was a break in the flow of the conversations. When reviewing these comments, I felt like this code was more of a consideration that educators need to keep in mind as opposed to a theme. The anxiety of some staff members needs to be considered but was not something that greatly impacted the enjoyment of the home visits. Table 2 shows the codes that came together to make each theme.

Table 2

Theme Development

Theme	Codes
Learning experience for kindergarten teacher	To get to know child/family, helps to relate to students, learn about home environment/home interactions, child/parent/family-led
Enjoyable experience for all stakeholders	Fun/enjoyable, not about school topics, positive, short, food was served, excited kindergartners, informal, part of the school culture, played games, differentiated experiences based on family, did not take place in the home
Helps build genuine relationships	Genuine/real/true/heart of people, shows teacher cares, personal, made a connection, to build relationships
Impactful in different ways for each stakeholder	A way to welcome/comfort students, shifts power from teacher to family, can change previous bad experience of formal schooling for families, changed teacher's preconceived notions, sense of pride for kindergartner

The frequency with which each theme appeared in my data is compiled in Table 3.

Table 3

Frequency of Themes

Theme	Frequency	Percentage of Total
Enjoyable experience for all stakeholders	123	40.0
Helps build genuine relationships	69	22.5
Learning experience for kindergarten teacher	66	21.5
Impactful in different ways for each stakeholder	50	16.0

In the following sections, each of the four themes is explored in detail.

Learning experience for kindergarten teacher. One of the themes that emerged from my data collection was that the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits was a

learning experience for kindergarten teachers. When a teacher conducts a home visit, the teacher is able to get to know the child and family in a more intimate way. Teagan noted, “It can be a very safe place for the kid to feel like the teacher is in my zone, and I’m [the child is] not in the teacher zone. I think that is an awesome benefit to get to know them and to see what they are like outside of this environment [school].” Elizabeth also talked about how the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits helps kindergarten teachers learn about all their students. She noted,

If I’m going to serve every child in my room, I’m going to understand the heart and home of every child in my room. I think that’s an important distinction. We think of home visits as only in Title I schools or high poverty schools and that’s what gets the most attention but home visits should be for all schools.

Laurel talked about the insight that home visits provided to her that she would not otherwise get. She said,

You always think you know some of the families. But it’s just nice to see them in their own environments and them comfortable in their own environments [and] how excited they get for you to actually see their bedroom. One kid even just got so excited to show me all the clothes in his closet and his shoes . . . just to see their true interests, because we don’t always get to see that side of their personality in the classroom.

Some of the things that kindergarten teachers from Elementary School learned from conducting home visits were the background of the family, sports that the children played, weekend activities, parent interests, and parent hobbies. Teagan learned that one child’s dad composes music and how much the kindergartener knows about it. She went on to say,

You kind of get to hear about things that kids wouldn't necessarily think to share. You get that from the parents. They are very proud of their child, too, and they want to be a part of the whole interactive home visit experience.

Hattie also talked about how the practice of conducting home visits allowed her to learn more about her students. She said, "You just get a better understanding of who they are and why they might do the things that they do." Hattie went on to say,

They might come in looking this way, or acting this way, or they are always tired. It just gives you a better understanding of everything when you actually get to sit down at their house. With the little girl who I just went to visit . . . I could just see how even though the mom apologized for where they live, they just take care of her well. You know, they are worried about her and stuff and you can see why or how they are, you know, a little bit more into their house except for what you assume when they walk through the door. You assume "this person is this way because he looks like this or acts like this." But not until you actually go into the house and see or talk to the parent or see their environment what it's like.

Home visits can help kindergarten teachers to better relate to their students. Elizabeth said that home visits make families and teachers more relatable. Likewise, Hattie said that home visits provide her with the parents' background, where the family is from and "you get to know just a little bit more of why, maybe, why the child is this way." Laurel also talked about how conducting home visits helps her better relate to her kindergartners. She noted that "I think it also gives me a better understanding of how to help them and care for them and nurture them while they are in my class." Hannah also talked about how home visits allowed her to learn more about her students. She indicated,

I think it was just a more intimate setting, because it's in their space. They feel more comfortable in their own space, so they are more willing to share informal conversation about the family, about things they might do and activities. When you are here [school], you are going to talk more about academic stuff because you are on the teacher's ground and you are on the teacher's space and the teacher has the things to show so it's a little bit of a power differential, but I think it's a good one.

When a kindergarten teacher does a home visit, the teacher is able to learn about the home environment. Elizabeth indicated that from the home visit, she became aware why a specific student was sleepy at school, as there was only one bedroom for eight family members to share. She also shared about another child who shares a tiny home with six brothers and sisters, which makes it hard to go to sleep at night. Sutton also talked about learning about the home environment when conducting home visits. She said that home visits are helpful because teachers do not truly know the life and environment of the kindergarteners. She also indicated that the teachers can learn about pets that are potentially aggressive such as a dog that could bite children or adults. Likewise, Hattie talked about how visits allow her to learn about the home environment. She described a home visit "that was an eye opener" to her. She said,

When I got there, I was like "ok, this is where they live." We knocked on the house door. . . . The smell coming from it was very rancid, but the mom didn't answer the door. So, I saw her coming down and she was like "oh, I'm not at this one, let's go to my mom's house where the kids are staying." So, we went over there, and she just had twins. And we were sitting on the couch, and there's cockroaches crawling all over the things. All these adults are in the house, and so, that was eye-opening . . . "this is why, this is what is happening at home." People were just in and out of the house constantly, and I could tell

the child didn't have a set home. She was either here where mom supposedly lives or in the apartment up there where mom is or grandma's which had two bedrooms, I think. There were all these adults going back and forth. So, you know, you just see a lot of different things.

Hannah also talked about one home visit that opened her eyes to safety concerns in an apartment complex. She said that the mom was

talking about putting out their pumpkin. They had a pumpkin on the balcony. She would worry about putting it in the walkway, because she was worried someone would take it. And it's not an unsafe place by any means, but just when there's so much uncertainty of who is around and so many people coming in and out you just don't know. That's just not something I would ever have to think about.

Kindergarten teachers are also able to learn about home interactions when they conduct a home visit. Teagan said, "It was just great to see them in their environment and how they interact outside of school. Sometimes, it's so different than it is in school. And it's good to have both of those perspectives." Carson also talked about home visits allowing her to see how her students interact with their siblings. Likewise, Elizabeth talked about insights about the home environment she gained from conducting home visits:

You also can learn how parents or caregivers, um, how they discipline, how they interact with their child, how physically they interact with their child. I mean, some of them have them sitting on their laps, and they are just holding them so tight. And then ironically, you get to the first day of kindergarten, and that's the one that wants to hold on to your leg the whole time. Well, that makes sense, because they are loved on all the time at home.

Elizabeth also noted that teachers are able to learn types of languages used in homes:

I think you learn more of the heart of the home, and you also learn the culture of the home, the language of the home. I don't mean bad language, but the language of the home, how does that family interact with one another. It's no different than in my house. We can be highly sarcastic, and other people would be in tears in two minutes, right? So, it's not a right or a wrong. It's learning the characteristics of that house.

Typically, the conversations and structure of the home visits were driven by the family. Austin indicated that he has been to temple and to church with students. He has also participated in a tea party, played video games, played with chickens in the family chicken coop, and played basketball. Carson, Hattie, Teagan, and Austin said that families of kindergartners served dinner as part of the home visit. Austin, Sutton, Hattie, Laurel, and Teagan said that board games were a part of the kindergarten teacher conducting home visits.

Enjoyable experience for all stakeholders. One of the themes that emerged from my research was that the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits was an enjoyable experience for all stakeholders. When Maggie talked to her kindergarten teachers about conducting home visits, she said teachers “were ecstatic.” Laurel said, “I’ve absolutely loved them,” and Carson said, “They [home visits] have all been great.”

Maggie went on to talk about the experience for the families. She said, “But always, the families were proud of what they had and excited that the teacher was there to talk to them about their child. They couldn't believe that somebody was that interested.” Sutton said, “As a mom, it's [the home visit] just fun for a kid.” Likewise, Finley said her son was excited about the home visit, and she enjoyed the visit. Kindergartners also enjoyed the home visits. When I asked Laurel about the experience of the kindergarten students, she replied, “What I've heard

they are excited about me coming and keep asking ‘when is she coming?’ They are at the door waiting usually. They are very eager for me to be there.” Hannah also talked about the kindergartners being excited about the home visit. She said,

They are just so pumped when you walk into the house. They come up and hug. They are just really excited to show you their home, and you get to be a part of it. And then you can see, the next day you see them in school, they feel connected to you because you had that intense talk with their parents and [have] seen their house.

Moreover, Elizabeth told me about the excitement of students when their teacher conducts a home visit:

I mean, children are so excited when you are in their environment because for once, they are in control of that environment. Depending on how you run your classroom, a lot of teachers are in control of that environment and that home is theirs and theirs to share with you and the joy they get from you being in their environment, I think is really important.

The home visits were short, informal, and positive. The participants typically did not talk about school topics. Austin tells his teachers to avoid talking about school and to make the home visit positive. He says that “absolutely nothing negative” can be discussed during the home visit. Many of the participants played games and shared food as part of the home visit. Several participants indicated that home visits were a part of the school culture. Participants indicated that the home visits were differentiated based on family preferences. Some families opted to have the home visit in a different location than in the home. Austin, Sutton, Finley, and Elizabeth talked about meeting families in places other than the child’s home. Finley talked about the impact of meeting families off the school campus. She said,

I think when we are on school grounds, it's got to be serious for them. We have a job to do – as a student and as a parent. It's kind of serious business. It's not always having fun. If you do something other than here, it's a different environment, and I think it's acceptable to have fun in that environment.

Helps build genuine relationships. The practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visit helps build genuine relationships. Hattie said that home visits give her “a better understanding, and I think a better relationship” with the families, and Finley said “home visits are a great way to build relationships.” Maggie talked about home visits being a way to “cement” relationships by saying,

It just cemented the relationship because they had seen each other outside of the context of school. There was a little more trust there; a little bit more relief there on part of the family – that this teacher has already seen me, my children, I feel like my child will be safe when I leave them with her, she knows my family, she knows our situation, she knows my hopes and dreams for my children, what goals I've set.

Elizabeth talked about how home visits help build relationships by allowing stakeholders to see commonalities. She said,

I think that people on both ends – teachers forget that parents are people and parents forget that teachers are people. I think that we get so caught up in how we are different that the home visit allows us to see how we are the same.

Home visits also allow teachers to make a deep connection with families. Elizabeth said, “What I find the most valuable that you learn [from home visits] is that you learn the heart of the parents or the caregiver that are taking care of the child.” Likewise, Hattie also talked about how her relationships is different with the families she has conducted home visits with. She said, “I

just felt like we got on another level, and I have a different relationship with those parents now. It's easier to talk to them and they feel like they can come to me." Likewise, Hannah talked about how a home visit gave her a deeper connection with families than she had prior to the home visits. She spoke about one girl in particular:

It's [the home visit] their first introduction to school, and it can be scary. The little girl has just connected so much. And the mom, I'll see her outside and she will give me hugs. She gave me that bear for Valentine's Day. She's very sweet and always asking about my family. I have a relationship with her that I don't have with the other parents.

Hattie also spoke about the difference home visit made with her families. She said, "The bond is closer between us than it was before, because she [the parent] comes to talk to me. I feel like, she is like 'ok, I've been at home, she's been to my house, she has talked to my parents.'"

Moreover, Teagan indicated that the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits allowed her to make a deep connection with families. She said, "I really enjoy getting to know the parents. I think that's one of the biggest aspects of home visits, because it makes your communication the rest of the year a lot easier." Laurel talked about the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits being a way to build relationships with families:

I would even say I feel like I usually have a good relationship with my students but even more so, a deeper understanding of what they are genuinely going through and what their home environment is like and what that looks like on a day to day basis. I would especially say the trust, the trust with them and the trust with their parents. Whereas in the past, I haven't always had that with parents. You know, that definitely has to be earned and, so, um, I think they are excited to see that I truly have, um, a desire to want to come visit them outside of the school day.

Home visits show that the teacher cares. Sutton said that the home visit “sets them [kindergartners] up on the right foot of their educational career, knowing that people care about them, especially those kids who need to know that somebody cares about them.” Laurel also talked about how home visits show that she truly cared about students and the impact of home visits by saying,

It’s truly helped with some hard conversations that we’ve had to have even as well as behavior conversations, because I think it does help them understand that I genuinely care about their kid, just to know, you know that I truly care about your kid, just that the investment is there.

Participants indicated that the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits is a personal experience. Austin, the principal of Elementary School, talked about how home visits are a personalized means of building relationships with families. He said,

Relationships, as you know, are vital to your success as a classroom community and family. Traditional means such as open house, parent newsletters, and phone calls are all helpful in this process, but they can lack the personal touch that will take building relationships to the next level.

Sutton, a parent participant in this study, also talked about the home visit being personal. She told me,

It just makes it more personal. For her coming to my house, like it makes it more personal. It lets her see “so, this is what you are talking about when you say ‘Mom and I cuddled on the couch last night’ or that my bedroom is upstairs.” It just gives you a visual on what’s going on. It gives you a lot of clues into why kids act that way. . . . You know being in someone’s home just changes things.

A family's home environment is a "safe zone" according to Teagan, and families are more comfortable at home according to Austin. He elaborated on this and how that impacts the conversations between families and teachers:

We don't always get the "real them" if we can get them to come here [school]. There's maybe a stigma or something that goes on in their head when they come here as opposed to us going to their house. They are kind of in their comfort zone.

Elizabeth gave an example of how a relationship she made with a parent at a home visit established a connection, which allowed the parent to ask the school for a basic need. She said,

We went to their home. It was a brother and a sister and . . . they were just so excited, and the family was, um, so very appreciative . . . the interesting part was that we met them, got to know them, [told them] "if you need anything let us know." We did this before school had started. We get to Open House and see that family there. . . . They were like "hello, we get to see you again." I was like "welcome, we are so excited that you are here" and gave them all a big hug. So, about 30 minutes into Open House, the dad comes over and was like "hey, we got a ride here. Our ride says they are not coming to pick us up, can you help me figure out how to get home?" So, like, is that not bizarre to think about "help me figure out how to get home?" Because the bus doesn't run right in front of _____ [Elementary]. The public bus wasn't running by the time Open House was over. . . . And, so I was like "oh my goodness, stay right here, I'm going to connect you with Mrs. _____, parent involvement." . . . And, so I came back and was like "oh, we've got Mrs. _____. She's going to be able to drive you home and she can fit everyone in the car, all four of you." He was like "oh my gosh, thank you so much." So, had that connection not been made and had I not seen his face when he walked in the

door and spoken and made an intentional effort to speak . . . he wouldn't have had that relationship to feel that comfortable to have said "I need a ride home."

Impactful in different ways for each stakeholder. The practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits is impactful in different ways for parents, kindergartners, and teachers.

Austin told me that

in a short amount of time, your visit may shift a parent's perspective, a child's behavior, or your notions on the student. We become more human and approachable by doing this simple act, and it is one that will inevitably be remembered and appreciated by any family you visit. . . . By conducting home visits, you are opening yourself up to your student's life by visiting the place they likely feel most comfortable. As teachers, we feel most comfortable in our classrooms, but there are many parents who fear or have bad memories of school. To bridge this gap, and build trust in you and the school, conducting home visits can assist.

Austin went on to say,

So many of our parents in kindergarten are first time parents into schooling so they are nervous and scared. So many of the kids are first time into schools – they're nervous. And home visits are just a great way to bridge the gap to show them that you are a real person.

Elizabeth also talked about home visits in general from a districtwide perspective and how home visits have the power to impact students and families by letting them know that schools are a safe place. She said,

It often makes me think about if we were a district where families felt welcome and they were a part of it, and I think home visits are a part of that – that when it comes time to get

ready for K, their communities already know - all communities, not just when families come to school, but all families know “hey, wait a minute, this is a safe community, safe place – not only for my child but for me as an adult.” And, I think that begins with home visits for families to feel safe.

Parents. When kindergarten teachers conduct home visits, power is shifted from the teacher to the family. Home visits also have the potential to change previous bad experiences of formal schooling for families. Sutton talked about how home visits can change perceptions. She said,

You just never know what’s going to change it for a kid or for a parent. So, a lot of times, kids and parents in low socioeconomic groups, they are there because they didn’t have good experiences in their own schooling. So, then, there’s some prejudice, some ill feelings towards teachers and education in general. So, by building that relationship with them, you can change that perception of schools which then changes their interactions with their kids about school.

Austin also talked about parents having previous bad experiences in school. He went on to say that “school could be a really scary place for a lot of parents based on their own personal experiences.” Elizabeth discussed how having conversations in school are impacted by parents’ previous experiences in school, whether with other children or as a student themselves. She said,

I think when families are in schools and you are trying to have a conversation, it just kind of becomes institutionalized, especially when you have families who had other bad experiences which I know sounds really cliché but it’s really true and it impacts how they feel about schools.

Laurel also talked about the impact of parents' previous negative school experiences. She said, "Sometimes I feel, because of their own personal experiences that they've had in the past with education, some of them with older children that they've had in the past experiences with school systems, that it's not always positive unfortunately."

Kindergartners. Home visits are a way to welcome and comfort students. Laurel told me about a little girl who was really quiet and shy at school. During the home visit, she opened up and was more talkative in the home environment. Laurel was very excited about this and noted that the student was a little more talkative at school after the home visit. Likewise, Carson talked about how kindergartners are more comfortable during home visits than at school. She said, "I think they [kindergartners] feel safer. You know, I've seen both sides now. And [they feel] more comfortable." Sutton also talked about the home visit being impactful for her son. She said it was a source of pride for her son. She went on to say that the home visit was a way for her son's teacher to see what his life "is really like." Moreover, Finley also talked about how the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits are impactful for kindergartners, and said,

I think with kindergarten, it's the first time that some of those children are ever going out of the home or ever going out to a place that is all day. They might have gone to preschool half day, but now they are going somewhere all day every day with someone their parents may not know for like six hours. The students are with their teachers more than they are with their families and I think for a mom that it's her first kindergartener, it might be difficult of her to be trusting of people she doesn't really know. So, I think building trust with the family really cements that kind of relationship.

Teachers. The practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits can change teachers' preconceived notions. Four of the teacher participants indicated that the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits has the power to change a teacher's preconceived notions.

Research Question Responses

The following section provides answers to the three research questions of my qualitative case study. Kindergarten teacher participants, parent participants, and Early Childhood Leader participants were all interviewed to learn more about the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits. Participants were invited to be part of a focus group and were asked to write a mock letter of advice to kindergarten teachers about the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits.

How do stakeholders describe the practices of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits in a suburban, low-income North Carolina elementary school? In this study, stakeholders were kindergarten teachers at Elementary School who had conducted home visits, parents of kindergartners who received a home visit at Elementary School, and Early Childhood Leaders who have a vested interest in kindergarten teachers conducting home visits at Elementary School. The practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits was described as an informal, positive, short, fun experience for all stakeholders, a learning experience for the kindergarten teacher, and a way to help build genuine relationships between the school and family. Numerous participants talked about how the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits was a learning experience. Participants said that kindergarten teachers were able to learn things about the child that they would not know from just typical school conversations such as parent hobbies, background of the families, and parent interests. Teagan

specifically said, “You kind of get to hear about things that kids wouldn’t necessarily think to share. You get that from the parents. They are very proud of their child, too, and they want to be a part of the whole interactive home visit experience.” Broadly speaking, Hattie stated that home visits allow her to “just get a better understanding of who they are and why they might do the things that they do.” Elizabeth also talked about how home visits are a learning experience for her, and she said that she is able to understand “the heart and home of every child” when she is able to conduct a home visit.

Participants indicated that the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits was an enjoyable experience for teachers, parents, and students. One teacher (Laurel) said that she loved all the home visits, and another teacher (Carson) said that they were all great. Both parent participants talked about their children and whole family enjoying the home visits.

Hannah elaborated on the excitement of students by saying,

They are just so pumped when you walk into the house. They come up and hug. They are just really excited to show you their home and you get to be a part of it. And then you can see, the next day you see them in school, they feel connected to you because you had that intense talk with their parents and seen their house.

Elizabeth also went into detail about children being so excited to have their teacher in their home environment. She said,

I mean, children are so excited when you are in their environment because for once, they are in control of that environment. Depending on how you run your classroom, a lot of teachers are in control of that environment and that home is theirs and theirs to share with you and the joy they get from you being in their environment. I think [that] is really important.

The visits were also informal, short, and positive. Austin tells his teachers at Elementary School that nothing negative such as academic concerns and inappropriate behavior can be discussed during the home visit. Home visits were differentiated based on family preferences and interests. A range of activities took place during the home visits such as tea parties, playing sports, interacting with family pets, board games, sharing snacks or full meals, and playing video games.

One of the things that kindergarten teachers learn from conducting home visits is the type of interactions that take place in the child's home. Teagan noted that some children interact differently at home and school and that the practice of conducting a home visit allowed her to see both perspectives. Participants noted that teachers are able to learn about how students interact with their siblings and with their parents/caregivers. Elizabeth elaborated on this and talked about how seeing these interactions helped her better understand how to nurture the kindergarten students. She said,

You also can learn how parents or caregivers, um, how they discipline, how they interact with their child, how physically they interact with their child. I mean, some of them have them sitting on their laps, and they are just holding them so tight. And then ironically, you get to the first day of kindergarten, and that's the one that wants to hold on to your leg the whole time. Well, that makes sense, because they are loved on all the time at home.

When kindergarten teachers conduct home visits, teachers are able to learn about the types of language that is used in the home. Elizabeth gave an example of this when she stated,

I think you learn more of the heart of the home and you also learn the culture of the home, the language of the home. I don't mean bad language, but the language of the

home, how does that family interact with one another. It's no different than in my house. We can be highly sarcastic, and other people would be in tears in two minutes, right? So, it's not a right or a wrong. It's learning the characteristics of that house.

Learning about this can help teachers better understand children's interactions at school. Laurel summed up how the things she learned from the home visit helped her in the classroom. She said, "I think it also gives me a better understanding of how to help them and care for them and nurture them while they are in my class."

How is the building of relationships described when kindergarten teachers conduct home visits with students starting kindergarten? The practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits was described as a way to build genuine relationships between the school and family. Teacher participants indicated that they had deeper relationships with families that they conducted home visits with and that the relationships were different between those families with whom they had conducted home visits and those they had not. Hattie talked about these relationships in more detail: "I just felt like we got on another level, and I have a different relationship with those parents now. It's easier to talk to them, and they feel like they can come to me." Laurel also described how the practice of her conducting a home visit gave her a deeper relationship with the family. Laurel told me,

I would even say I feel like I usually have a good relationship with my students but even more so, a deeper understanding of what they are genuinely going through and what their home environment is like and what that looks like on a day to day basis. I would especially say the trust, the trust with them and the trust with their parents. Whereas in the past, I haven't always had that with parents. You know, that definitely has to be earned and, so, um, I think they are excited to see that I truly have, um, a desire to want

to come visit them outside of the school day. . . . It's truly helped with some hard conversations that we've had to have even as well as behavior conversations, because I think it does help them understand that I genuinely care about their kid, just to know, you know that I truly care about your kid, just that the investment is there.

Participants in this study said that the practice of the kindergarten teacher conducting home visits was a personalized experience. The principal of Elementary School, Austin, said that home visits were a personalized way to build relationships with kindergarteners and their family:

Relationships, as you know, are vital to your success as a classroom community and family. Traditional means such as open house, parent newsletters, and phone calls are all helpful in this process, but they can lack the personal touch that will take building relationships to the next level.

One of the parent participants of this study, Sutton, told me about how the home visit for her child felt personal. During Sutton's interview, she said,

It just makes it more personal. For her coming to my house, like, it makes it more personal. It lets her see "so, this is what you are talking about when you say 'Mom and I cuddled on the couch last night' or that 'my bedroom is upstairs.'" It just gives you a visual on what's going on. It gives you a lot of clues into why kids act that way. . . . You know being in someone's home just changes things.

When kindergarten teachers conduct home visits, they can better see commonalities between themselves and the family. Elizabeth said that it is easy to talk about how families and teachers may be different, but the practice of home visits helps teachers and parents to see how they are the same. Maggie said that the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits

“cemented the relationship” between families and the teacher. She also said that in this type of relationship, the family is more trusting. Maggie went on to say that “the parents feel like [their] children will be safe when I leave them with her, she knows my family, she knows our situation, she knows my hopes and dreams for my children, what goals I’ve set.” Not only does the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits make a stronger relationship between the parents and the teacher, it also helps children become more comfortable and to have a stronger relationship with their kindergarten teacher. Hattie talked about a specific instance with a child and the difference after the home visit. Hattie told me, “The bond is closer between us than it was before, because she comes to talk to me. I feel like, she is like ‘ok, I’ve been at home, she’s been to my house, she has talked to my parents.’”

The practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits is a way to build strong, authentic relationships with families. Multiple participants in my study talked about how conducting home visits has the power to change parents’ previous bad experiences with formal schooling. Laurel mentioned that parents’ previous negative experiences with schools impact their perception of her relationship with her students. Austin also talked about parents’ personal experiences with school and said, “School could be a really scary place for a lot of parents based on their own personal experiences.” Sutton elaborated on this:

You just never know what’s going to change it for a kid or for a parent, so a lot of times, kids and parents in low socioeconomic groups, they are there because they didn’t have good experiences in their own schooling. So, then, there’s some prejudice, some ill feelings towards teachers and education in general. So, by building that relationship with them, you can change that perception of schools which then changes their interactions with their kids about school.

How is the home environment described when kindergarten teachers conduct home visits with students starting kindergarten? The practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits was a way for the kindergarten teacher to learn about the child's home environment. Learning about the child's home environment helps the kindergarten teacher better relate to the students and gives the teacher insight into the child's home life. Teachers can learn things about the physical environment of homes including safety concerns like neighbors or animals that are nearby that can be potentially dangerous. Two participants indicated that through a home visit, they were able to see why a child was sleepy at school. In one of these situations, the child was living in a small apartment which had one bedroom for eight people. The other participant went on a home visit at the apartment address that was provided and found out that the child sleeps between three different apartments depending on the day. There were times that the child stayed in the mom's home, and there were times when the child stayed in the apartment where the grandmother lived. Other times, the child slept in another apartment, but the teacher was not aware of which adult(s) primarily stayed in that apartment.

Teachers did indicate that they learned about physical things in the home environment that were helpful such as seeing that eight family members shared one bedroom. In some situations, teachers were able to connect families with social workers or other school personnel so that basic needs could be better met. However, the bulk of the data from the face-to-face interviews about the home environment was not about the physical environment but rather about the emotional environment of not being on school grounds. This finding was confirmed when discussing it with the focus group participants. Families are most comfortable in their own homes, which Teagan referred to as "safe zones." Furthermore, conversations have a different focus when not at school. Hannah talked about this and said,

I think it [home] was just a more intimate setting, because it's in their space. They feel more comfortable in their own space, so they are more willing to share informal conversation about the family, about things they might do and activities. When you are here [school], you are going to talk more about academic stuff, because you are on the teacher's ground and you are on the teacher's space and the teacher has the things to show so it's a little bit of a power differential but I think it's a good one.

Austin, the principal of Elementary School, also talked about how parents are more comfortable at home than at school:

We don't always get the "real them" if we can get them to come here [school]. There's maybe a stigma or something that goes on in their head when they come here as opposed to us going to their house. They are kind of in their comfort zone.

Austin, the principal of Elementary School, went on to say,

By conducting home visits, you are opening yourself up to your student's life by visiting the place they likely feel most comfortable. As teachers, we feel most comfortable in our classrooms, but there are many parents who fear or have bad memories of school. To bridge this gap, and build trust in you and the school, conducting home visits can assist.

While learning about the child's home environment was insightful and helpful to teachers, it was noted by the principal of Elementary School, one of the parents, and one of the teachers that meeting the family off of the school campus at other locations besides the child's home also proved to be an impactful way to build relationships with families. Not all parents feel comfortable having the teacher in their home. In many of these instances, parents requested to meet the teacher at another neutral location where the parent is comfortable. In this case study, four of the participants talked about meeting families in a location other than their home.

Finley talked about meeting the family off campus and how it is a different type of conversation and feel. She said,

I think when we are on school grounds, it's got to be serious for them. We have a job to do – as a student and as a parent. It's kinda serious business. It's not always having fun. If you do something other than here, it's a different environment, and I think it's acceptable to have fun in that environment.

Elizabeth also talked about how the conversations are different between families when they take place off school grounds. She said,

I think when families are in schools and you are trying to have a conversation, it just kind of becomes institutionalized, especially when you had families who had other bad experiences which I know sounds really cliché, but it's really true and it impacts how they feel about schools.

Summary

Chapter Four started by providing thorough participants profiles of each participant in my qualitative case study on kindergarten teachers conducting home visits. Chapter Four then discussed the results of my study. Participants filled out a questionnaire prior to the face-to-face interview. After all of the interviews, participants were asked to write a mock letter of advice for kindergarten teachers who do not conduct home visits but are interested in conducting home visits, and participants were invited to be a part of my focus group on kindergarten teachers conducting home visits. All these data were compiled, and theme development began. Codes were established and counted. Common codes came together to create themes for my case study. Each of these themes was described in detail. The chapter ended by answering my three research questions: How do stakeholders describe the practices of kindergarten teachers conducting home

visits in a suburban, low-income North Carolina elementary school? How is the building of relationships described when kindergarten teachers conduct home visits with students starting kindergarten? How is the home environment described when kindergarten teachers conduct home visits with students starting kindergarten?

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this single case study was to develop an in-depth description of the practice of home visits conducted by kindergarten teachers in a low-income, suburban North Carolina elementary school. Chapter Five summarizes the findings of this qualitative case study. Afterwards, there is a discussion of the findings. This discussion is in consideration of relevant theories and current literature about the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits. Next, I discuss the methodological and practical implications of my study. Chapter Five then examines the delimitations as well as limitations of my case study. This chapter ends with recommendations for future research.

Summary of Findings

My single case study had three research questions: How do stakeholders describe the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits in a suburban, low-income North Carolina elementary school? How is the building of relationships described when kindergarten teachers conduct home visits with students starting kindergarten? How is the home environment described when kindergarten teachers conduct home visits with students starting kindergarten? The following sections summarize the findings of each of these research questions.

Research Question One

The first research question asked, “How do stakeholders describe the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits in a suburban, low-income North Carolina elementary school?” Stakeholders described the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits as an enjoyable, informal experience that was also informative to the kindergarten teacher. The practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits was positive, fun, and did

not involve much time by any of the stakeholders. Kindergarten teachers were able to learn more about children and families than what they would know from typical conversations at school. One of the Early Childhood Leaders, Elizabeth, said, “What I find the most valuable that you learn [from home visits] is that you learn the heart of the parents or the caregiver that are taking care of the child.”

Research Question Two

The second research question asked, “How is the building of relationships described when kindergarten teachers conduct home visits with students starting kindergarten?”

Participants in this study indicated that the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits allowed the school and family to develop strong, genuine relationships. This experience helped build deep relationships by showing that the teacher cared. One of the participants, Sutton, said that home visits “sets them [kindergartners] up on the right foot of their educational career, knowing that people care about them, especially those kids who need to know that somebody cares about them.” Maggie also talked about this, and said parents “couldn’t believe that somebody was that interested” in their child. The practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits helps create lasting relationships by allowing the family and teacher to better relate to each other. Austin, the principal of Elementary School, said,

In a short amount of time, your visit may shift a parent's perspective, a child's behavior, or your notions on the student. We become more human and approachable by doing this simple act, and it is one that will inevitably be remembered and appreciated by any family you visit . . . so many of our parents in kindergarten are first time parents into schooling so there are nervous and scared. So many of the kids are first time into

schools. They're nervous. And home visits are just a great way to bridge the gap to show them that you are a real person.

Research Question Three

The third research question asked, "How is the home environment described when kindergarten teachers conduct home visits with students starting kindergarten?" The home environment was briefly described by participants in physical terms such as size of the home and how a small, overcrowded home can impact a student's ability to regularly sleep as well as potential safety concerns and how those impact a child's daily life. Moreover, the home environment was described in emotional terms and how the comfort of the home allowed the family to be more comfortable than on the school campus. Austin, the principal of Elementary School, said,

By conducting home visits, you are opening yourself up to your student's life by visiting the place they likely feel most comfortable. As teachers, we feel most comfortable in our classrooms, but there are many parents who fear or have bad memories of school.

Participants indicated that the type of conversations that are typically held on school grounds are teacher-driven and can be almost institutionalized, as one participant stated. Activities at school are typically more serious than at home. The comfort of the home environment, which allowed for more genuine conversations, seemed to be more important than the physical characteristics of meeting in a home. Moreover, some parents were unwilling to have the teacher in their home and opted to be meet at another location off school campus. Participants indicated that the conversations and activities that were held off school grounds and not in the home were also a genuine way to get to know families.

Discussion

My qualitative case study described the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits with their students in a low-income, suburban North Carolina elementary school. I discuss these findings in consideration of the empirical literature and theoretical literature.

Empirical Literature

While the first day of school marks the beginning of formal education, the transition into school is much longer than one day; it is a process that takes children and families different amounts of time to successfully complete (Bohan-Baker & Little, 2002; Lam & Pollard, 2006). The importance of a successful transition cannot be overemphasized. When students are academically successful in kindergarten, they have greater success in upper grades (Bierman et al., 2015; Clark & Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2008; Galindo & Sheldon, 2011; La Paro et al., 2009; McIntyre & Welchons, 2015). However, when a student has a challenging transition to kindergarten, the student makes academic progress slower than peers who have a less challenging transition to formal schooling (Ahtola et al., 2011). A difficult transition into kindergarten also has long-term social implications (Santo & Berman, 2012) and is vital for children's emotional well-being (Santo & Berman, 2012). Elementary schools can conduct a variety of transition activities to help improve the transition to kindergarten, including the kindergarten teacher conducting home visits with students (Friedman et al., 2006; Little et al., 2016; Schulting et al., 2005).

Home visits are a learning experience for kindergarten teachers. One theme that emerged from my research is that the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits was a learning experience for the kindergarten teacher. Laurel told me she was able to learn things about students that she would not typically know by being able to see their true interests

when conducting home visits, and Teagan mentioned how she was able to learn what the child is like outside of school by conducting the home visits. Faber (2016) noted that the majority of kindergarten teachers who conducted home visits were able to learn something new about the student. Specific things that participants in my research learned through conducting home visits included parent interests and hobbies, weekend activities, family backgrounds, and other student interests. This theme confirmed previous research that stated teachers can learn about family hobbies, interests, and family demeanors (Bradley & Schalk, 2013), family backgrounds and daily life in the child's home (Whyte & Karabon, 2016), and family living conditions and dynamics (Allen & Tracy, 2004; Meyer & Mann, 2006). Participants in my study were also able to learn how children interact at home with siblings and other family members. Elizabeth elaborated on this, and she provided a specific example that would directly impact a teacher's interactions with the child at school:

You also can learn how parents or caregivers, um, how they discipline, how they interact with their child, how physically they interact with their child. I mean, some of them have them sitting on their laps, and they are just holding them so tight. And then ironically, you get to the first day of kindergarten, and that's the one that wants to hold on to your leg the whole time. Well, that makes sense, because they are loved on all the time at home.

Elizabeth also shared how she learned about the types of languages used in homes of her students. She said,

I think you learn more of the heart of the home, and you also learn the culture of the home, the language of the home. I don't mean bad language, but the language of the home, how does that family interact with one another. It's no different than in my house.

We can be highly sarcastic, and other people would be in tears in two minutes, right? So, it's not a right or a wrong. It's learning the characteristics of that house.

Korfmacher et al. (2008) indicated that the practice of teachers conducting home visits allows the teachers to meet students and families “where they are” (p. 172) and allows the teachers to firsthand see each child's unique home environment. My research pointed to this as well. Hattie said, “You just get a better understanding of who they are and why they might do the things that they do.” She went on to say,

They might come in looking this way, or acting this way, or they are always tired. It just gives you a better understanding of everything when you actually get to sit down at their house. With the little girl who I just went to visit . . . I could just see how even though the mom apologized for where they live, they just take care of her well. You know, they are worried about her and stuff and you can see why or how they are, you know, a little bit more into their house except for what you assume when they walk through the door. You assume “this person is this way because he looks like this or acts like this.” But not until you actually go into the house and see or talk to the parent or see their environment what it's like.

Participants in my study noted that they learned about stressors in the home environment that could impact students at school. One of the Early Childhood Leaders gave specific examples of how the home environment impacted children at school such as a home with one bedroom for eight family members to share. Other participants mentioned learning about aggressive pets and unsafe neighborhoods. Learning about the potential impact of specific home stressors was also discussed in previous literature (Meyer et al., 2011). Previous research on the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits also indicated that the teacher gleaned a

better understanding of the impact of the home environment on student academic performance and behavior (see Lin & Bates, 2010; Meyer et al., 2011).

Home visits are impactful in different ways to each stakeholder. Multiple researchers talked about how the practice of teachers conducting home visits is beneficial to multiple stakeholders including students, teachers, and families (see Meyer et al., 2011; Schulting, 2009; Taveras, 1998). The results from my case study supported researchers' claim of benefits for stakeholders, as one of my themes was that the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits is impactful in different ways for each stakeholder. When talking about the power of home visits, the principal of Elementary School said, "In a short amount of time, your visit may shift a parent's perspective, a child's behavior, or your notions on the student."

The practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits has the power to change perceptions about schools. Several participants talked about how some parents had negative experiences and perceptions about schools and how the home visits changed the parents' perceptions about schools. In my interview with Laurel, she said, "Sometimes I feel, because of their own personal experiences that they've had in the past with education, some of them with older children that they've had in the past experiences with school systems, that it's not always positive unfortunately." Sutton also talked about how home visits have the power to change perceptions when she said,

You just never know what's going to change it for a kid or for a parent. So a lot of times, kids and parents in low socioeconomic groups, they are there because they didn't have good experiences in their own schooling. So, then, there's some prejudice, some ill feelings towards teachers and education in general. So, by building that relationship with

them, you can change that perception of schools which then changes their interactions with their kids about school.

Previous research on the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits indicated that future interactions with the child and family were more positive and included better communication (see Meyer & Mann, 2006; Meyer et al., 2011; Schulting, 2009). Some of the participants in my case study talked about this during the data collection process. One of the teachers told me that one of her shy students was more talkative at school following the home visit, and another teacher talked about one of her students being more comfortable at school after the home visit was complete.

My research showed that when teachers conduct home visits, there is an opportunity to change a teacher's preconceived notions. Three participants gave examples of how the practice of conducting home visits changed a preconceived notion about a child or family. This is in agreement with Whyte and Karabon (2016), as they noted that "there is a potential for a lasting shift in teachers' attitudes and beliefs about children and their families" (p. 209). The practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits helps teachers to better know their students if the teacher is able to correct a certain belief.

My research pointed to how the act of the kindergarten teacher conducting a home visit is able to shift power from the school/teacher to the family. Hannah talked about how home visits allow for informal conversations in the setting where the family is the most comfortable. She said that at home, families

are more willing to share informal conversation about the family, about things they might do and activities. When you are here [school], you are going to talk more about academic stuff, because you are on the teacher's ground, you are on the teacher's space, and the

teacher has the things to show. So, it's a little bit of a power differential but I think it's a good one.

Johnson (2014) also noted this shift in power: "In addition to alleviating pressure on parents, home visits simultaneously demonstrate the educators' willingness to relinquish authority and learn from their students' families and communities" (p. 363). During home visits, teachers take the role of a learner; family members take the role of teachers. The end result of this shift in power is that teachers are able to learn more about their children and how to better teach them.

Home visits help build genuine relationships. One of the themes that emerged from my research was that the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits a way to help build genuine relationships. Previous research supports this theme. Meyer et al. (2011) stated that the act of the teacher conducting a home visit showed that the teacher cared about the child and helped build trust between the family and school. Previous research also noted that home visits can help create rapport with parents and other family members in the home (Faltis, 2001). When a teacher enters a child's home as a learner, power and roles are shifted from the teacher to the family. This helps build collaborative relationships between a teacher and a family (Whyte & Karabon, 2016). Lastly, the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits provides an open line of communication between the elementary school and the family that receives a home visit (Johnson, 2014). Participants in my study noted that the home environment was more comfortable for the families which resulted in more authentic relationships and communication. Austin, the principal of Elementary School, talked about how parents and students are more comfortable at home than at school. He said,

By conducting home visits, you are opening yourself up to your student's life by visiting the place they likely feel most comfortable. As teachers, we feel most comfortable in our classrooms, but there are many parents who fear or have bad memories of school.

Hannah, one of the kindergarten teachers, talked about the comfort of the home. She said, “I think it [home] was just a more intimate setting, because it’s in their space. They feel more comfortable in their own space.” The value of the comfort of a family’s home was discussed in previous research (see Meyer & Mann, 2006). Families are more open and have more authentic conversations when they are most comfortable.

While my case study on kindergarten teachers conducting home visits supported previous research on the topic (e.g., Ahtola et al., 2011; Bohan-Baker & Little, 2002; Johnson, 2014; Korfmacher et al., 2008; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008; Reglin, 2002; Schulting et al., 2005), there are also some novel contributions that my study adds to the field. My study was a qualitative study on the practice on kindergarten teachers conducting home visits; the previous studies on this topic were quantitative (see Bhavnagri & Krolikowski, 2000; Friedman et al., 2006; Schulting, 2009; Schulting et al., 2005). So, this study provided numerous quotes about the practice of home visits that provided a thorough description of this practice. One of the themes from my research was that the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits was an enjoyable experience for all stakeholders, including teachers, parents, and kindergartners. This theme was not discussed in previous literature and adds to related research. If the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits is enjoyable, teachers will be more likely to want to do it. Likewise, if this practice is enjoyable, parents will be more willing to allow the kindergarten teacher to conduct the home visit. Home visits are enjoyable because they were described as positive, short, and informal.

Theoretical Literature

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological system theory of human development was used to frame my research study which states that child development is an evolving process that is both influenced by overlapping systems and interconnected (Collins et al., 2013; Ruppert et al., 2017). This theory "suggests that optimal development occurs when children experience consistent and supportive interactions with the people and objects in their immediate environment" (Bassok & Latham, 2017, p. 8). When using this theory to look at the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits, the value of the relationship between home and school is emphasized.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) used the analogy of a nested Russian doll to explain child development and named these systems: microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem. A kindergartner's home and school interact when a kindergarten teacher conducts a home visit, which is part of a child's mesosystem. Not only did my research look at children's mesosystems, the kindergarten teachers were able to learn about kindergartners' exosystems and macrosystems. My research indicated that when kindergarten teachers conduct home visits, they can learn about how the child interacts with other family members, which is part of a child's exosystem. A parent's attitude is also in a child's exosystem. Several participants in my case study talked about how the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits was able to change a parent's view or attitude towards school. Many parents have negative thoughts about school because the parents had a bad experience in school or because of a negative experience of an older child. One of the participants of my study, Sutton, said,

You just never know what's going to change it for a kid or for a parent. So a lot of times, kids and parents in low socioeconomic groups, they are there because they didn't have good experiences in their own schooling. So, then, there's some prejudice, some ill

feelings towards teachers and education in general. So, by building that relationship with them, you can change that perception of schools which then changes their interactions with their kids about school.

The practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits is a way for teachers to “understand the heart and home of every child,” according to Elizabeth.

Since families are more comfortable in their home environments, teachers are able to learn more about the families. Laurel said, “You always think you know some of the families. But it’s just nice to see them in their own environments and them comfortable in their own environment.” Teagan also talked about how the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits gives teachers the opportunity to learn about children, their families, and their homes. Teagan went on to say that during home visits,

You kind of get to hear about things that kids wouldn’t necessarily think to share. You get that from the parents. They are very proud of their child, too, and they want to be a part of the whole interactive home visit experience.

When kindergarten teachers conduct home visits, they are able to learn about the multiple layers of children’s development that Bronfenbrenner (1979) discussed in his ecological system theory of human development.

Implications

This section discusses the implications of my case study on kindergarten teachers conducting home visits. When children begin formal schooling, many of these students struggle making a successful transition into school (Ahtola et al., 2011; Little et al., 2016; Nelson, 2004). Schools conduct transition activities to help aid in a smoother transition to kindergarten, including the kindergarten teacher conducting home visits (Friedman et al., 2006; Green et al.,

2011; Little et al., 2016; Schulting et al., 2005). The purpose of this case study was to describe the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits. In this section, the theoretical and empirical implications are first discussed. Then, the practical implications for kindergarten teachers and parents of kindergarteners are addressed.

Theoretical Implications

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological system theory of human development guided my research. This theory indicates that there are multiple layers of children's development, and these layers are much like the layers of a nested Russian doll. When viewing the development of children in this manner, children's development is evolving, intertwined, and impacted by multiple overlapping systems (Collins et al., 2013; Ruppert et al., 2017). When kindergarten teachers conduct home visits, they are able to connect the home and the school while acknowledging that important development occurs in both environments.

My case study examined the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits with their students. This practice would be placed in the second layer of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) layers of development. When stepping into this place of development, kindergarten teachers are able to learn more about the student than they would typically learn about the child. When talking about things she learned from conducting home visits, Elizabeth said, "If I'm going to serve every child in my room, I'm going to understand the heart and home of every child in my room." Another participant, Laurel, told me about insights she learned about a child and the family that she would not otherwise know. Teagan also talked about the practice of home visits being a learning experience for her. She said,

You kind of get to hear about things that kids wouldn't necessarily think to share. You get that from the parents. They are very proud of their child, too, and they want to be a part of the whole interactive home visit experience.

When kindergarten teachers conduct home visits, they are able to learn things about children from different layers of their development. This allows the kindergarten teachers to have more authentic relationships with their students and families. Educators should view home visits through this lens to acknowledge that important development occurs in all environments and that the information obtained from home visits is valuable. When educators view the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits through Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological system theory of human development, educators understand how the home and school are interconnected.

Empirical Implications

There are empirical implications of my study that were not explicitly stated, but observed. I have taught early childhood grades fourteen years and have heard talk about teachers conducting home visits. I have also researched this topic in great detail. My previous impression about home visits is that they were a formal, complicated process that would be so much extra work for the teachers. However, after conducting my research, I have concluded that the opposite of that preconceived notion is true. All participants talked about home visits as casual. Teachers and Early Childhood Leaders presented it in a manner that would require less preparation than any parent conference at school, because the home visits are family-centered and informal. Not only were the home visits presented in a casual manner, the home visits were enjoyed by the teachers, parents, and students. I knew about the benefits of home visits, as there is a bulk of previous research on this topic (see Ahtola et al., 2011; Bohan-Baker & Little, 2002;

Johnson, 2014; Korfmacher et al., 2008; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008; Reglin, 2002; Schulting et al., 2005). As a teacher, I knew “why” home visits should be completed. After my research, the better question is “why not” conduct a home visit. There are academic, social, motivational, and behavioral benefits to conducting home visits (Schulting, 2009; Sweet & Appelbaum, 2004), and my research showed that the practice is a fun learning experience for the teacher that helps build strong relationships. Teachers should conduct a couple of home visits before making judgements about the potential stress of them. Once a couple home visits are completed, teachers will be able to see how this casual experience can be a very valuable experience for the teacher, child, and family. As a current kindergarten teacher, I was both surprised and saddened that my research showed that in some situations, the family did not think that the teacher truly cared about their child until after the teacher conducted a home visit. This surprised me and made me sad when I thought about my current kindergarten class and that there could be parents who do not think I truly care about their child. If conducting a home visit would be a way to gain trust with the parents and for them to know that I care about their child, the experience would be well worth the time that it took for the visit.

Practical Implications

My case study on the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits has practical implications for a variety of stakeholders including kindergarten teachers and parents of kindergarteners. The following section details implications for each group of stakeholders.

Kindergarten teachers. The practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits has been shown to have many positive implications including increased academic performance, social skills, academic motivation, behavior, and work habits (Schulting, 2009; Sweet & Appelbaum, 2004). Previous research on this practice also indicated that they improved

communication between families and schools by increasing trust (Meyer et al., 2011) and that future interactions were more likely to be positive (Meyer & Mann, 2006). My research on kindergarten teachers conducting home visits showed that it was a learning experience for the teacher, enjoyable for all stakeholders, helped build genuine relationships, and was impactful in different ways for each stakeholder. The principal of Elementary School made this statement about the impact of teachers conducting home visits:

In a short amount of time, your visit may shift a parent's perspective, a child's behavior, or your notions on the student. We become more human and approachable by doing this simple act, and it is one that will inevitably be remembered and appreciated by any family you visit. . . . By conducting home visits, you are opening yourself up to your student's life by visiting the place they likely feel most comfortable. As teachers, we feel most comfortable in our classrooms, but there are many parents who fear or have bad memories of school. To bridge this gap, and build trust in you and the school, conducting home visits can assist.

This positive, informal, and short experience yields tremendous value for teachers, students, and families.

Parents of kindergarteners. While there is only limited research from parents of kindergarteners about the practice of the teacher conducting home visits, my research did show that home visits are a positive, fun, informal way to establish a strong relationship between the school and family. Parents in my study enjoyed the home visits and indicated that their children enjoyed the visits as well. When a kindergarten teacher wants to conduct a home visit, the goal is to obtain a stronger relationship with the entire family and to learn more about the child. Teachers are not coming to make judgements about the home or parenting. In my study,

participants indicated that the structure of the home visit was driven by the family. Some families played games during the visits, while others shared a meal. Lastly, some families opted to have the visit in a location other than the home. If parents are uncomfortable having the teacher come to their home, meeting in neutral location such as a restaurant or recreation center is a good alternative.

Early childhood leaders. In order for kindergarten teachers to be able to conduct home visits, Early Childhood Leaders must be supportive and allow time for teachers to visit families. Leaders should also encourage parents to allow the teachers to conduct home visits. There were some other considerations that came up about the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits. These are especially applicable for Early Childhood Leaders. From a leadership standpoint, it is important to understand that some staff members are anxious about going into homes that may be different than their childhood home and/or current home. Early Childhood Leaders can have conversations with teachers about how to relieve anxiety while still being able to conduct the home visit. Elizabeth talked about some of her experiences with this. She told me,

I think the best thing you can do is share experience and try to honor their [teachers'] fear and not make it seem like it's irrational because at times, it can be rational. If you've never lived, experienced anything outside of what you have experienced, it can be frightening . . . it can be only because it's different, but not because it's better or worse. So, that's the differentiation you have to make, because it is different than what I know in my home, in my neighborhood but that doesn't mean it's better or worse. It just means that it's different. The purpose of the home visit is not to talk about what we perceive as a good or bad home but to truly develop a relationship with the families.

Teachers must also use what they learn from the home visit to help inform instruction, while not making judgements about the family. Elizabeth said,

The hard part for educators is not judging what you see but allowing it to be what you use to guide your learning and work with the child. It's not a judgement of "they don't have," "what they need to be doing." That's not my job, right? My job is to go to seek to understand.

This is a concept that Early Childhood Leaders can help teachers process and reflect on.

Delimitations and Limitations

This section discusses the delimitations and limitations of my study. Delimitations are boundaries that I placed on my case study of the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits in a low-income school in North Carolina. These decisions were made to fulfill the purpose of my study. Limitations are things that could be viewed as potential weaknesses of my study.

Delimitations

I used a purposive sample in my case study to get a thorough description of the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits. I only used participants who had direct knowledge of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits at Elementary School. All kindergarten teachers at Elementary School had conducted home visits and were invited to be a part of my study. Since not every kindergarten student had received a home visit from their teacher, I was selective in my potential participants. I only invited parents of kindergarteners who had received a home visit to be a part of my study. Likewise, the only Early Childhood Leaders that I invited to be a part of my study were those who were directly involved with Elementary School and had firsthand knowledge of kindergarten teachers conducting home

visits. Since this was a case study, I only sought participants from Elementary School. Single case studies are used to describe one person, activity, or program (Yin, 2018). A single case study was chosen to be able to describe the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits at Elementary School. I chose to conduct the case study using participants at Elementary School, since all kindergarten teachers conduct home visits at Elementary School.

Limitations

All studies have limitations, and there are several limitations of my study which could not be controlled. One of the limitations is that my study took place in a low-income, suburban elementary school in North Carolina. The information obtained from the sample of qualitative case studies is not able to be generalized to other samples. In order to be able to generalize the results of this study, further research would need to occur using multiple schools who have kindergarten teachers who conduct home visits.

Another limitation is the ethnicity of my participants. While Elementary School is in the school district where I live and work, I had not previously visited the school or interacted with any parents, teachers, or administrators at Elementary School. The sole reason I used Elementary School as my research site was because of its use of home visits. Once I had approval for my study, I emailed the principal for permission to conduct research at his school. I then emailed the teachers at this elementary school. Five out of the six kindergarten teachers wanted to participate. The kindergarten teachers then passed out recruitment letters to the parents in each of their classrooms who had received a home visit. The Early Childhood Leaders besides the principal of Elementary School that were invited to be a part of this study were invited because of their role in the district. All participants in my study were White. A more diverse group of participants could strengthen this research.

Another limitation of this study is that there were only two parent participants. Also notable is that both parent participants have their master's degree. While these two parents did present perspectives of their child's kindergarten teacher conducting home visits, their perspectives may not be representative of all the parents who received home visits at Elementary School.

While I had not met any of the teachers, parents, or the principal of Elementary School prior to conducting my research, I had been in workshops taught by Early Childhood Leader One and Early Childhood Leader Two. Since I had previously known them, they could have altered their behavior as a result of volunteering for my research study. While there is no single Hawthorne effect or single kind of social desirability bias (McCambridge, Witton, & Elbourne, 2014; Sedgwick & Greenwood, 2015), participants' familiarity with me could have led them to respond to my interview questions in a manner they perceived would be favorable to me or by filtering their remarks to be more guarded.

Recommendations for Future Research

I have several recommendations for future research on kindergarten teachers conducting home visits. Research should be conducted in numerous geographical locations besides a suburban school in North Carolina. Since this research was from a low-income, suburban school, future research should include participating schools from rural and urban America. Elementary School is classified as a Title I School, with more than two thirds of the students from homes considered economically disadvantaged (North Carolina School Report Cards, 2017). Future research on kindergarten teachers conducting home visits should include student populations who have more students who are economically disadvantaged as well as student populations that have fewer students who qualify for free/reduced lunch.

I used a single case study in my research so that I could get a thorough description of the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits. However, future research should include different types of case studies such as within-case case studies to examine multiple schools at once. Other future research should include phenomenological studies (Moustakas, 1994) on kindergarten teachers to examine the phenomenon of home visits with kindergartners.

Future research on kindergarten teachers conducting home visits should include observations of home visits and should include kindergarten students as participants. Observations can be a rich source of data and could provide insight that my data sources did not provide. My case study used teachers, parents, and Early Childhood Leaders as participants. Future research could use kindergartners as participants to get their perspective of their teacher doing a home visit.

All teachers at Elementary conduct home visits, not just the kindergarten teachers. Future research should include studies on other grade level teachers conducting home visits at Elementary School and other schools that use this practice. While less than five percent of kindergarten teachers conduct home visits (Nelson, 2004), my assumption, based on my personal experiences and related research, is that even fewer upper grade teachers conduct home visits. The principal of Elementary School has seen the value of home visits across grade levels at his current school and previous ones. One of the kindergarten teacher participants in my study (Carson) said that she thinks that the relationship that is built by conducting a home visit would be even more important if she were teaching upper grades and highly recommends that all teachers conduct home visits.

Summary

Chapter Five provided a summary of the findings of my qualitative, single case study, which described the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits in a low-income elementary school in North Carolina. There was a discussion of these findings in consideration of current literature on home visits and one theory, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological system theory of human development. Then, I talked about the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications on my study. I also discussed the limitations and delimitations of my case study. Lastly, I provided recommendations for future research. The practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits was a short, informal experience that was enjoyable by all stakeholders, was a way to build authentic relationships between schools and families, and was a true learning experience for teachers. The principal of Elementary School summed up this unique experience and the corresponding impact of it well when he said,

In a short amount of time, your visit may shift a parent's perspective, a child's behavior, or your notions on the student. We become more human and approachable by doing this simple act, and it is one that will inevitably be remembered and appreciated by any family you visit.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: IRB Approval Letter

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

January 28, 2019

Sheena Green

IRB Approval 3574.012819: A Case Study of Home Visits Conducted by Kindergarten Teachers in a Low-Income Elementary School

Dear Sheena Green,

We are pleased to inform you that your study has been approved by the Liberty University IRB. This approval is extended to you for one year from the date provided above with your protocol number. If data collection proceeds past one year or if you make changes in the methodology as it pertains to human subjects, you must submit an appropriate update form to the IRB. The forms for these cases were attached to your approval email.

Your study falls under the expedited review category (45 CFR 46.110), which is applicable to specific, minimal risk studies and minor changes to approved studies for the following reason(s):

7. Research on individual or group characteristics or behavior (including, but not limited to, research on perception, cognition, motivation, identity, language, communication, cultural beliefs or practices, and social behavior) or research employing survey, interview, oral history, focus group, program evaluation, human factors evaluation, or quality assurance methodologies

Thank you for your cooperation with the IRB, and we wish you well with your research project.

Sincerely,



G. Michele Baker, MA, CIP
Administrative Chair of Institutional Research
Research Ethics Office

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Appendix B: District Approval Letter



P.O. Box 2513 • Winston-Salem, NC 27102-2513

Project ID 2019-16

Approval Form for Research Project to be conducted in the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools

Name of Principal Investigator: Sheena Green

Advisor's Name (if student): Rollen Fowler

Research/Educational Institution: Liberty University


Research Title: A Case Study of Home Visits Conducted by Kindergarten
Teachers in a Low-Income Elementary School

The above project has been approved by the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools Administrative Offices. Stipulations to this approval, if any, are noted below. *The investigator understands that the principals have the authority to grant or deny permission for the study to be conducted in their schools.*

Project Timeline: January 15, 2019 thru June 30, 2019

Stipulations:

Data Confidentiality Form Needed? (Check if yes) : _____


Marty Ward, Ph.D.
WS/FCS Research & Evaluation

January 22, 2019

Date

Board of Education

Malishai Woodbury, *Chair* • Barbara Burke, *Vice Chair* • Andrea Bramer • Lida Calvert-Hayes
Lori Goins Clark • Leah Crowley • Dana Caudill Jones • Deanna Kaplan • Elisabeth Motsinger

Dr. Beverly Emory, Superintendent



Appendix C: Consent Form for Kindergarten Teachers

CONSENT FORM (Teacher Participants)

A Case Study of Home Visits Conducted by Kindergarten Teachers in a Low-Income Elementary School
Sheena Green
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of home visits conducted by kindergarten teachers. You were selected as a possible participant because of your use of home visits with your kindergarten students. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Sheena Green, a doctoral candidate in School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to describe the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Complete demographic questionnaire. This will take 5 minutes.
2. Take part in one interview that is expected to be between 30 - 45 minutes long. Audio recording will take place during the interview so that accurate transcriptions take place.
3. Read the transcription from your interview to ensure accuracy. This will take 10 minutes.
4. Write a letter of advice to kindergarten teachers who do not currently conduct home visits. This will take 10 – 15 minutes.
5. Be part of the focus group that will take place at the conclusion of interviews which will take 30 – 45 minutes. Audio recording will take place during the focus group so that accurate transcriptions take place.
6. Read the transcription of your quotes from the focus group to ensure accuracy. This will take 10 minutes.

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Benefits: Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include a better understanding of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits.

Compensation: Participants will be compensated for participating in this study with a \$25 Amazon gift card. You will be fully compensated whether or not you complete the procedures of this study. Compensation will not be prorated.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participants will be assigned a pseudonym.
- I will conduct the interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be secured and stored on a password locked, private computer. The data will be disposed of after three years.
- Interviews and the focus group will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Recordings will be used for educational purposes only, and only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- I cannot assure participants that other members of the focus group will not share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Sheena Green. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at sabrannock@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Rollen Fowler, at rcfowler@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio record me as part of my participation in this study.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

Appendix D: Consent Form for Early Childhood Leaders

CONSENT FORM (Early Childhood Leaders)

A Case Study of Home Visits Conducted by Kindergarten Teachers in a Low-Income
Elementary School
Sheena Green
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of home visits conducted by kindergarten teachers. You were selected as a possible participant because you are a school leader who has knowledge of, experience with, and leadership of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Sheena Green, a doctoral candidate in School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to describe the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Complete demographic questionnaire. This will take 5 minutes.
2. Take part in one interview that is expected to be between 30–45 minutes long. Audio recording will take place during the interview so that accurate transcriptions take place.
3. Read the transcription from your interview to ensure accuracy. This will take 10 minutes.
4. Write a letter of advice to kindergarten teachers who do not currently conduct home visits. This will take 10–15 minutes.
5. Be part of the focus group that will take place at the conclusion of interviews which will take 30–45 minutes. Audio recording will take place during the focus group so that accurate transcriptions take place.
6. Read the transcription of your quotes from the focus group to ensure accuracy. This will take 10 minutes.

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Benefits: Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. Benefits to society include a better understanding of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits.

Compensation: Participants will be compensated for participating in this study with a \$25 Amazon gift card. You will be fully compensated whether or not you complete the procedures of this study. Compensation will not be prorated.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participants will be assigned a pseudonym.
- I will conduct the interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be secured and stored on a password locked, private computer. The data will be disposed of after three years.
- Interviews and the focus group will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Recordings will be used for educational purposes only, and only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- I cannot assure participants that other members of the focus group will not share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Sheena Green. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at sabrannock@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Rollen Fowler at rcfowler@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio record me as part of my participation in this study.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

Appendix E: Consent Form for Parents

CONSENT FORM (Parent Participants)

A Case Study of Home Visits Conducted by Kindergarten Teachers in a Low-Income Elementary School
Sheena Green
Liberty University
School of Education

You are invited to be in a research study of home visits conducted by kindergarten teachers. You were selected as a possible participant because your kindergartener received a home visit from his/her kindergarten teacher this year. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

Sheena Green, a doctoral candidate in School of Education at Liberty University, is conducting this study.

Background Information: The purpose of this study is to describe the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits.

Procedures: If you agree to be in this study, I would ask you to do the following things:

1. Complete demographic questionnaire. This will take 5 minutes.
2. Take part in one interview that is expected to be between 30–45 minutes long. Audio recording will take place during the interview so that accurate transcriptions take place.
3. Read the transcription from your interview to ensure accuracy. This will take 10 minutes
4. Write a letter of advice to kindergarten teachers who do not currently conduct home visits. This letter will describe the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits. This will take 10–15 minutes.
5. Be part of the focus group that will take place at the conclusion of interviews which will take 30–45 minutes. Audio recording will take place during the focus group so that accurate transcriptions take place.
6. Read the transcription of your quotes from the focus group to ensure accuracy. This will take 10 minutes.

Risks: The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

Benefits: Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study. Benefits to society include a better understanding of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits.

Compensation: Participants will be compensated for participating in this study with a \$25 Amazon gift card. You will be fully compensated whether or not you complete the procedures of this study. Compensation will not be prorated.

Confidentiality: The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report I might publish, I will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participants will be assigned a pseudonym.
- I will conduct the interviews in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be secured and stored on a password locked, private computer. The data will be disposed of after three years.
- Interviews and the focus group will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Recordings will be used for educational purposes only, and only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- I cannot assure participants that other members of the focus group will not share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

Voluntary Nature of the Study: Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any without affecting those relationships.

How to Withdraw from the Study: If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address/phone number included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, apart from focus group data, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study. Focus group data will not be destroyed, but your contributions to the focus group will not be included in the study if you choose to withdraw.

Contacts and Questions: The researcher conducting this study is Sheena Green. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at sabrannock@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty chair, Rollen Fowler at rcfowler@liberty.edu.

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Please notify the researcher if you would like a copy of this information for your records.

Statement of Consent: I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

The researcher has my permission to audio record me as part of my participation in this study.

Signature of Participant

Date

Signature of Investigator

Date

Appendix F: Recruitment Letter for Kindergarten Teacher Participants

February 1, 2019

Dear Kindergarten Teacher:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to be able to provide a thorough description of the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits, and I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

If you are a kindergarten teacher who conducted home visits this school year and are willing to participate, you will be asked to be interviewed, participate in a focus group, and write a mock letter of advice to other kindergarten teachers who do not currently conduct home visits but are interesting in learning more about this practice. It should take approximately 70–105 minutes for you to complete the procedures listed. Your name and/or other identifying information will be requested as part of your participation, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, contact me to schedule an interview (sabrannock@liberty.edu).

A consent document is attached to this letter. The consent document contains additional information about my research, please sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the interview.

If you choose to participate, you will receive a \$25 Amazon gift card.

Sincerely,

Sheena Green, Ed. S.

Appendix G: Recruitment Letter for Early Childhood Leaders

February 1, 2019

Dear Early Childhood Leader:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to be able to provide a thorough description of the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits, and I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

If you are an Early Childhood Leader who has knowledge of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits, and are willing to participate, you will be asked to be interviewed, participate in a focus group, and write a mock letter of advice to other kindergarten teachers who do not currently conduct home visits but are interesting in learning more about this practice. It should take approximately 70 – 105 minutes for you to complete the procedures listed. Your name and/or other identifying information will be requested as part of your participation, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, contact me to schedule an interview (sabrannock@liberty.edu).

A consent document is attached to this letter. The consent document contains additional information about my research, please sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the interview.

If you choose to participate, you will receive a \$25 Amazon gift card.

Sincerely,

Sheena Green, Ed. S.

Appendix H: Recruitment Letter for Parent Participants

February 1, 2019

Dear Parent of a Kindergarten Student:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctoral degree. The purpose of my research is to be able to provide a thorough description of the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits, and I am writing to invite you to participate in my study.

If you are a parent of a kindergarten student and your child's teacher conducted a home visit this school year and are willing to participate, you will be asked to be interviewed, participate in a focus group, and write a mock letter of advice to other kindergarten teachers who do not currently conduct home visits but are interesting in learning more about this practice. It should take approximately 70 – 105 minutes for you to complete the procedures listed. Your name and/or other identifying information will be requested as part of your participation, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, contact me to schedule an interview (sabrannock@liberty.edu).

A consent document is attached to this letter. The consent document contains additional information about my research, please sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the interview.

If you choose to participate, you will receive a \$25 Amazon gift card.

Sincerely,

Sheena Green, Ed. S.

Appendix I: Questionnaire for Kindergarten Teacher Participants

Name:

Age:

Ethnicity:

Gender:

Highest level of education:

Number of years teaching at current school:

Total number years teaching:

Number of students in current kindergarten class:

Number of years teaching kindergarten:

Kindergarten transition practices that are conducted at your school in addition to home visits (e.g. Open House, summer camps, screening, fliers, phone calls):

Appendix J: Questionnaire for Early Childhood Leaders

Name:

Age:

Ethnicity:

Gender:

Highest level of education:

Current position:

Number of years in education:

Appendix K: Questionnaire for Parents

Name:

Age:

Ethnicity:

Gender:

Highest level of education:

Number of children:

Appendix L: Interview Protocol for Teacher Participants

A Case Study of Home Visits Conducted by Kindergarten Teachers in a Low-Income Elementary School

Date:

Interviewee:

Place:

Time started:

Time ended:

Ensure that the kindergarten teacher has conducted home visits. If not, discontinue interview.

Step 1: Ice breaker and start of interview session.

Step 2. Questions.

1. Please introduce yourself to me.
2. How many years have you taught kindergarten?
3. What draws you to be a kindergarten teacher?
4. Tell me about your kindergarten class this year?
5. What transition practices do you use with your kindergarteners and their families?
6. Which of these practices are required?
7. When you conduct home visits, who goes with you?
8. How do you schedule home visits with families?
9. Tell me about your experiences with home visits.
10. What do you gain from home visits that you would not be able to gain otherwise?
11. Think back to the home visits that you just conducted. Tell me about your experiences with the kindergarteners.
12. Likewise, tell me about your experiences with the parents.
13. Tell me about the home environments of the kindergarteners that you visited.

14. What else would you like to share about home visits with kindergarteners?

Appendix M: Interview Protocol for Early Childhood Leaders

A Case Study of Home Visits Conducted by Kindergarten Teachers in a Low-Income
Elementary School

Date:

Interviewee:

Place:

Time started:

Time ended:

Step 1: Ice breaker and start of interview session.

Step 2. Questions.

1. Please introduce yourself to me.
2. What is your current position in the Winston-Salem Forsyth County School System?
3. Tell me about your previous work experience as an educator.
4. What draws you to work in early education?
5. What is your experience with kindergarten teachers conducting home visits?
6. What else would you like to share about home visits with kindergarteners?

Appendix N: Interview Protocol for Parent Participants

A Case Study of Home Visits Conducted by Kindergarten Teachers in a Low-Income
Elementary School

Date:

Interviewee:

Place:

Time started:

Time ended:

Ensure that the parent has a kindergarten student that received a home visits from his/her teacher. If not, discontinue interview.

Step 1: Ice breaker and Start of interview session.

Step 2. Questions.

1. Tell me about your family.
2. What do you like to do as a family?
3. Tell me about your kindergartener.
4. What does your kindergartner think about kindergarten so far?
5. Describe the first day of school for your kindergartener.
6. Tell me about your kindergartener's teacher.
7. What was your reaction when he/she called you about scheduling a home visit?
8. What was your kindergartener's reaction to his/her teacher coming to your house?
9. Tell me about the home visit.
10. What did you talk about during the home visit?
11. What did your kindergartener say after the home visit was complete?
12. What are your thoughts about kindergarten teachers conducting home visits?
13. What else would you like to add about kindergarten teachers conducting home visits?

Appendix O: Script for Letters of Advice for Teacher Participants

Dear Kindergarten Teacher,

Think about your experiences conducting home visits with your students. Reflect on the conversations with students, parents, and other family members during the visits. Think about things that you learned about your students that you would not have learned if you only saw the student at school. Reflect on the home environment, and remember that you were able to learn about the child from this home. Taking all of that into consideration, write a letter to another kindergarten teacher who has not conducted a home visit but would like to do so. What advice would you give this teacher?

Please email your letter of advice to me by [00] at sabrannock@liberty.edu. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to ask me. Thank you for your time and effort in helping me more accurately describe the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits.

Sincerely,

Sheena Green

Appendix P: Script for Letters of Advice for Early Childhood Leaders

Dear Early Childhood Leader,

Think about the kindergarten teachers that you know who have conducted home visits with their students. Think about the conversations about the relationships that were established during the home visit, conversations about the home environment, and conversations about the interactions that took place during the home visit. Taking that into consideration, write a letter to a kindergarten teacher who has not conducted a home visit but would like to do so. What advice would you give this teacher?

Please email your letter of advice to me by [00] at sabrannock@liberty.edu. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to ask me. Thank you for your time and effort in helping me more accurately describe the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits.

Sincerely,

Sheena Green

Appendix Q: Script for Letters of Advice for Parent Participants

Dear Parent of a Kindergartener,

Think about the experience of your child's kindergarten teacher conducting a home visit with your child. Reflect on the conversations with the kindergarten teacher, your child, and other family members. Taking all of that into consideration, write a letter to a kindergarten teacher who has not conducted a home visit but would like to do so. What advice would you give this teacher?

Please email your letter of advice to me by [00] at sabrannock@liberty.edu. If you have any questions, do not hesitate to ask me. Thank you for your time and effort in helping me more accurately describe the practice of kindergarten teachers conducting home visits.

Sincerely,

Sheena Green

Appendix R: Focus Group Protocol

A Case Study of Home Visits Conducted by Kindergarten Teachers in a Low-Income Elementary School

Date:

Place:

Participants:

Time started:

Time ended:

Step 1: Ice breaker and Start of interview session.

Step 2. Questions.

1. Please describe a memorable home visit to our group.
2. What do you gain from kindergarten teachers conducting home visits?
3. What is the most challenging aspect of conducting home visits?
4. A common theme from my research thus far has been that home visits are a learning experience for kindergarten teachers. What are your thoughts about this theme?
5. Another common theme from my research has been that home visits are an enjoyable experience for all stakeholders. What are your thoughts about this theme?
6. Another common theme from my research thus far has been that home visits help build genuine relationships. What are your thoughts about this theme?
7. The final common theme from my research has been that home visits are impactful in different ways to each stakeholder. What are your thoughts about this theme?
8. What other thoughts do you have about kindergarten teachers conducting home visits?