

EARLY LEARNING TEACHER COLLABORATION AND CLASSROOM TRANSITIONS:  
A QUALITATIVE CASE STUDY

by

Danielle Christine Robertson

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 collective case study was to examine how Early Head Start and Head Start teachers collaborate to create successful transitions for students from classroom to classroom. The theory guiding this study was the sociocultural theory by Lev Vygotsky (1978), which focuses on learning through interactions and communications with others and collaborative learning. Vygotsky's theory aligned with the study by informing educators that children learn from a guide and teachers should be intentional in adding to children's knowledge and supporting children's ways of understanding the world around them. This study addressed the following research questions: How do early learning teachers collaborate to prepare students for transitions to a classroom? How do teachers collaborate with families to create a positive transition experience for students? How are teachers utilizing transition strategies to ensure a smooth transition for students? For this study, a case study was used, and the sample was Early Head Start and Head Start teachers in various Early Head Start and Head Start programs in Washington, DC. Data were drawn from interviews, document analysis, and focus groups to capture the case under study in its complexity and entirety through interviews, analyzing documents, and focus groups. The data analysis involved consolidating, reducing, and interpreting codes, themes, and data analysis strategies. The following six themes emerged after completing the data analysis: (a) communication amongst educators; (b) communication with parents and guardians; (c) improvement needed; (d) positive teacher collaboration experiences; (e) program support; and (f) transition strategies.

*Keywords:* teacher collaboration, transitions, Early Head Start, Head Start, teachers

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to each individual who has laid bricks to add to my foundation. The importance of education was instilled in me at an early age through Elois and Bernard Robertson who were intentional in laying the foundation of trusting God and setting the standard of pursuing goals from early childhood to now. My parents were my first examples of hard work and dedication. Thank you for paving the way for me, always encouraging me, your infinite support, teaching me the importance of staying focused, showing me how to trust God, praying for me, praying with me, and most importantly, believing in me every step of the way.

I also dedicate this to all of my angels that paved the way and have touched my life growing up. “Mama”, my gospel singing, southern meal cooking, loving, godmother that cared for me growing up and has gone home to be with the Lord. My favorite aunt, Rubye Davis who has gone home to be with the Lord, but her never-ending love and encouragement lives on and will never be forgotten.

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Colossians 3:23 says, “Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters” (New International Version). Jeremiah 29:11 affirms, “For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future” (NIV). Galatians 6:9 says, “Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up” (NIV). Joshua 1:9 says, “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go” (NIV). I shared this to say, The Word of God has encouraged me daily, and the completion of this journey would not have been possible without my Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I cannot say thank you or accept any gratitude without making it known Who has made this possible for me, and I give Him the upmost praise and worship for seeing me through. I can truly declare, I prayed for this!

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### **List of Abbreviations**

Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT)

Early Head Start (EHS)

National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS)

Situation of Development (SSD)

Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS)

Individualized Education Programs (IEP)

Child Development Associate (CDA)

Family and Educational Rights and Privacy regulations (FERPA)

Institutional Review Board (IRB)

Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA)

English Language Learners (ELL)

Early Childhood Education (ECE)

Associate of Arts (AA)

Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Overview

From their inception, Head Start and Early Head Start (EHS) have had a dual role. The goal for the programs is to provide comprehensive health, nutrition, and education services for young children and identify physical and mental health problems early enough to offer interventional medical, dental, and psychological services (Hinitz, 2014). An overarching goal of the program is to enhance social and emotional competence, which includes the child's everyday effectiveness in dealing with his or her environment and later responsibilities in school and life (Hinitz, 2014). In preparation for school, EHS and Head Start teachers must ensure that they are collaborating to ensure students are prepared for the transition to a new classroom or new school (U.S. Department of Health & Humans Services, 2020). Also, for the past two decades, the federal, state, and local governments have encouraged collaborations among childcare, Head Start, and prekindergarten with the aim of supporting young children's school readiness while also meeting the childcare needs of working parents (Schilder et al., 2017).

Transitioning to school is an important developmental milestone for young children and considered a sensitive period necessary for later school success (Harper, 2016). During the transition, children acquire basic skills and understandings that serve as the foundation for further learning (Harper, 2016). Moreover, collaboration has been seen as a solution to problems in education with various and substantial benefits, particularly in regard to the quality of teaching and learning (Forte & Flores, 2014). As Del Grosso, Akers, Mraz Esposito, and Paulsell (2014) reported, although dozens of technical reports on collaboration exist, currently, there are significant gaps in the peer-reviewed literature on early care and education collaboration. Overall, this chapter will provide the background, situation to self, problem, purpose,

significance of the study, and definitions for the study.

### **Background**

While analyzing how the research problem evolved over time, this study will include relevant literature that covers the historical, social, and theoretical contexts. The background explores why the problem is of interest and who is affected by the problem. The reader will learn what research has been undertaken to investigate or address the problem.

### **History**

Head Start originated from a strong base of civil rights advocacy and a long history of government-funded and private early childhood education programs in the United States (Hinitz, 2014). Head Start was developed during President Lyndon B. Johnson's war on poverty in the middle of the civil rights movement of the 1960s (Hinitz, 2014). At the time of Head Start's creation, 10 years had already passed since the Supreme Court's momentous *Brown v. Board of Education* (1954) decision that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional. President Johnson announced the creation of Head Start in a special message to Congress on January 12, 1965, in which he focused on the expansion of preschool programs in order to reach disadvantaged children early (Hinitz, 2014). Part of the government's outlook on poverty was influenced by new research that revealed the impacts of poverty on education. Research indicated the need for supporting disadvantaged groups and compensating for inequality in social or economic conditions (Office of Head Start, 2019).

In addition, the Improving Head Start for School Readiness Act of 2007 had several provisions to strengthen Head Start's quality (Office of Head Start, 2019). The revisions included alignment of Head Start school readiness goals with state early learning standards, higher qualifications for the Head Start teaching workforce, State Advisory Councils on Early

Care and Education in every state, and increased program monitoring, including a review of child outcomes and annual financial audits (Office of Head Start, 2019).

The EHS and Head Start programs have grown and have become well-known over the years, and researchers have analyzed whether the services have been beneficial for EHS and Head Start families. Since 1965, EHS and Head Start programs have served more than 36 million children in urban and rural areas in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the U.S. territories, including American Indian, Alaskan Native, and Migrant/Seasonal communities. The programs grew from an eight-week demonstration project to include full day/year services and many program options (Office of Head Start, 2019). However, research on the results of the Head Start program has been mixed: the scathing 1969 Westinghouse report; the Jensen article (1969), which stated that “compensatory education has been tried, and it apparently has failed”; and Bronfenbrenner’s (1974) report on the fade-out hypothesis (p. 96). These reports all caused much concern, but such reports also triggered major revisions to the Head Start program (Hinitz, 2014). Research after those scathing reports has focused on Head Start’s impact on child outcomes, the ability to support and meet family needs, the effectiveness of the comprehensive services provided, and collaboration with local agencies.

Nearly six million infants and toddlers participate in some type of out-of-home care arrangements each week (Doudna, Aaron, Flittner, & Peterson, 2015). During the infant and toddler years, many of these children and their families experience a transition. Transitional moves include going from in-home care to care outside of the home, moving from family childcare to a center-based program, changing centers, or going from one classroom to another in the same center (Doudna et al., 2015). Particularly for low-income children with the proliferation of the federal Head Start program, preschool rather than kindergarten is their first

real experience with group-based learning (Goodrich, Mudrick, & Robinson, 2015). In contrast to infant/toddler childcare environments such as EHS, which provide children with more individualized, responsive supports for learning through teacher to child ratios of 1:4, joining a typical preschool classroom presents a 3-year-old with multiple opportunities and challenges for learning (Goodrich et al., 2015). The preschool classroom includes less individualized attention from the teacher and more demands for children to focus attention, inhibit inappropriate behaviors while initiating appropriate ones, cooperate and follow the rules, and communicate their needs and converse about what they are learning (Goodrich et al., 2015). In programs like Head Start, there are groups of up to 20 children per classroom, and the teacher to child ratio can be as large as 1:10; this necessitates that children acquire behavioral and cognitive skills that permit instruction to flow from the teacher to all children in the group. In other programs, ratios can be as large as 1:20 (Goodrich et al., 2015).

During classroom and program transitions, children must cope with many new demands, including disparate educational structures, processes, and curricula (Harper, 2016). Successful transitions depend on a system in which community partners collaborate together, team members have access to effective training and assistance, and families are given adequate information and support (Doudna et al., 2015). Gilliam (2008) reported that collaborations among childcare, Head Start, and pre-K have a greater potential to serve children and families through seamless services. Selden, Sowa, and Sandfort (2006), as well as Schilder and Smith Leavell (2014), studied the characteristics of programs engaging in collaborations and the benefits of collaborations. The authors found that childcare and Head Start programs with greater organizational capacity are more likely to engage in collaborations and reported that these collaborations are correlated with improved classroom quality. In order for transitional practices

to take place, teachers should collaborate with other fellow educators to analyze what the transition will look like and support the child's individual needs and learning.

### **Social Background**

Current initiatives require all educators to begin addressing the individual developmental and educational needs of all children through collaborations with caregivers, schools, and communities (Lees & Kennedy, 2017). Teacher collaboration refers to the professional collaborative and cooperative practices and activities that teachers engage in to achieve their shared educational goals. Effective collaboration between teachers has also been recognized as a vital component of teacher professional development and student success (Ning, Lee, & Lee, 2015). Collective learning and application require teachers to prioritize professional advancement as a collective effort and derives the best strategies to optimize student learning and outcomes (Ning et al., 2015). Sharing personal practices requires teachers to engage in activities such as peer coaching, classroom observations, lesson study, discussion, etc. to advance their professional development. Besides, when teachers open their practice up to scrutiny by colleagues and engage in peer observation and feedback, they learn to ask questions and evaluate their practices in a more analytic fashion (Ning et al., 2015). Effective teacher collaboration has its positive effects; however, previous studies also expound on what happens if the efforts are not intentional or implemented properly (Ketterlin-Geller, Baumer, & Lichon, 2015).

A transition refers to the process of change that is experienced when children move from one setting to another (Harper, 2016). It is an interactive process that occurs over time and includes all those events and activities that occur during the change from one environment to another. Transition encompasses the time between the points of awareness that a transition is going to occur, to settling into the new environment, to the time when the child is fully



established as a member of the new setting (Harper, 2016). The pre-transition experiences of children and their families are varied and diverse, and children differ in their educational backgrounds and levels of preparation that they bring to the school experience. If teacher collaboration is not intentional when it comes to transitions, it can have a negative effect on a child's transition into a classroom. The emotional journey a child faces during transition is significant and will, to some degree, yield stress and discomfort when the child is placed into an unfamiliar setting (Harper, 2016). To ensure that every child has the best possible chance of adjusting successfully to a new classroom, a wider support system needs to be implemented with the teaching professionals, parents, and children working together. In particular, it is proposed that the greatest potential lies in the alliance of teachers; aligning teaching practices and philosophies across the new teachers and new institutions would ensure continuity and support for children as they progress through their education (Skouteris, Watson, & Lum, 2012). The need for teacher collaboration across preschool and primary school is particularly necessary when the discontinuities between early childhood centers and primary schools are highlighted (Skouteris et al., 2012).

Programs that children attend can differ widely in philosophy, curriculum, structure, and practice (Harper, 2016). Early childhood education programs, particularly public school kindergarten and first-grade programs, have become increasingly academic in focus in response to legislation and common core state standards, which endorse higher curricular expectations among educators. The increased academic focus makes the transition to public school difficult for families and children, especially from private school settings where curricula may not be mandated by common core state standards (Harper, 2016). The transition experience for a typically developing child may also include a loss of attachment to familiar people, friends,

environment, and objects within that environment; a decrease in the sense of belonging, role, and identity uncertainty, a feeling of being devalued, uncertainty about the future, and a perceived loss of voice, control, and uniqueness (Harper 2016). During these transitions, children must cope with many new demands, including disparate educational structures, processes, and curricula (Harper, 2016). Preparing children for a successful classroom transition is a national priority, yet the degree to which teachers are involved in the transition needs more focus.

### **Theoretical**

This study is grounded in the social interaction theory of learning, which aligns with research on communities of practice, relevance to practice, and collective practice (Killion, 2015). Lev Vygotsky (1978), a developmental theorist and researcher, first wrote about the importance of both teacher-student and student-peer interaction in the process of learning in the late 1970s, and it has had an important impact on the educational environment ever since (Loh, 2015). Human development starts with dependence on caregivers. The developing individual relies on the vast pool of transmitted experiences of others, and Vygotsky emphasized the primacy of social interaction in human development (Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Social interaction is one of the cornerstones of the social constructivist paradigm, and social interaction with others was explored in depth in Vygotsky's attempt to understand human consciousness (Kim, 2014). When beginning an activity, learners depend on others with more experience, and over time they take on increasing responsibility for their own learning and participation in joint activity when their support is effective (Steiner & Mahn, 1996). Vygotsky recognized that learning takes place in social contexts and encouraged educators to create social learning settings that maximize student learning and promote a positive environment. This theory encourages educators to be intentional in their planning to support and guide children's learning. A core tenet of Vygotsky's

(1978) sociocultural theory of development is that children develop the skills necessary to interact with and learn from the broader social world through active engagement with their primary caregivers within the sociocultural environment. Specifically, teachers help young children to internalize the social rules of society, learn how to regulate their own behavior, and communicate effectively by preparing them for a transition and meeting their needs throughout the transition process (Vygotsky, 1978). This theory aligns with the study by supporting the principle that children need guided participation. Students should receive guidance during the process of transitioning to a new environment that builds their knowledge, skills, and abilities to be successful and to understand their new environment.

### **Situation to Self**

Having a background in early learning and work experience as an educator in EHS (0-3 years old) and Head Start (3-5 years old) programs, I noticed how EHS and Head Start programs were intentional about building partnerships and collaborating with local education agencies, and I observed the various benefits of effective collaboration. Children experience multiple transitions early in life, some transition from nursing to bottle-feeding, one-on-one time with their guardian to family childcare, family childcare to an EHS classroom, infant classroom to toddler classroom, preschool to kindergarten, and so on, so they learn early in life about change. However, to ensure secure attachments and effective adaptations to learning, children should not be expected to learn how to cope with change alone. Children spend a significant period of their lives at school, which provides essential opportunities for children to build consistent, trusting, secure relationships with adults, through which they can experience themselves positively, thus increasing their self-esteem and confidence. Secure attachments have been found to facilitate the

development of coping skills, which, in turn, have been found to be an important protective factor for mental health in later childhood (Ubha & Cahill, 2014).

I believe students obtain knowledge over time through cognitive development and can learn how to reason and understand logic through their experiences and environment, which is also known as the epistemology philosophy; how we come to know knowledge or reality (“Epistemology,” 2001). The philosophical assumption that is the foundation for this study is epistemology which is the study of our method of acquiring knowledge. It answers the question, "How do we know?" This philosophy encompasses the nature of concepts, the constructing of concepts, the validity of the senses, logical reasoning, as well as thoughts, ideas, memories, emotions, and all things mental. It is concerned with how our minds are related to reality and whether these relationships are valid or invalid (“Epistemology,” 2001). As Merriam noted, “Research is, after all, producing knowledge about the world and in our case, the world of educational practice” (Merriam, 1998, p. 3).

Parents, teachers, and students’ environments can mold and add to students’ knowledge. This epistemological philosophical assumption compelled me to learn how educators with knowledge, skills, and competencies can be effective at working together in building and supporting children’s learning. Another philosophical assumption that contributes to this study is the ontological philosophy which relates to the nature of reality and its characteristics (Creswell, 2018). Different people embrace different realities, so when studying individuals, I would study with the intent of reporting multiple realities and perspectives. Evidence of multiple realities include the use of multiple forms of evidence in themes using the actual words of different individuals and presenting their different perspectives (Creswell, 2018). In addition, all researchers bring values to a study, but qualitative researchers make their values known in a

study, which is also known as the axiological assumption. The axiological assumption examines the roles of values in the research. From this philosophical perspective, the researcher openly discusses values that shape the narrative and includes the researchers own interpretation in conjunction with the interpretation of participants. As the researcher, I will acknowledge the value-laden nature of the study and actively report my values and biases, as well as the value-laden nature of information gathered from the field (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Creswell & Poth (2018) shared that researchers should position themselves by identifying their positionality in relation to the context and setting of the research.

Merriam (1998) shared that the epistemology that should orient qualitative case study is constructivism, and “the key philosophical assumption upon which all types of qualitative research are based on the view that reality is constructed by individuals interacting with their social worlds” (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). In the same vein, Merriam (1998) comments, “that reality is not an objective entity; rather, there are multiple interpretations of reality” (Merriam, 1998, p. 22). The constructivism theory contributes to this case study because individuals seek to understand the world in which they live and work (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Constructivist theorists have identified qualitative educational research as a sound strategy for discovering meaning and understanding because of the researcher’s active involvement in the construction of meaning (Loh, 2015). Thus, as a constructivist researcher, I would address the processes of interaction among teachers (Creswell, 2018). Therefore, espousing this philosophical assumption, my primary interest as a qualitative researcher is to understand how the meaning or knowledge constructed by people in a collaborative setting can ensure students have a smooth classroom transition. In other words, what really intrigues me as a qualitative researcher is the way people make sense of their world and their experiences in this world (Yazan, 2015).

## Problem Statement

The significance of teacher collaboration has been highly emphasized in the field of teacher education over the past decades. Teacher collaboration is important because collaboration, or working in groups among teachers, is a major contributor helping to improve teachers' achievement, including the quality of their teaching (Ismail, Muhammad, Kanesan, & Yaacob, 2018). The ultimate benefit of teacher collaboration is that it can also improve student achievement (Jao & McDougall, 2016). Research has shown that the efforts of teachers that result in collaboration may have a positive impact at the student level (Jao & McDougall). Ahtola et al., (2016) stated that well-planned and focused transition practices have been shown to lead to better learning and adjustment in school. In recent years, there has been increased interest in children's perspectives on transition and how they manage transition. The number of studies that focus on how transitions are accomplished by those involved is growing, and questions about how children manage and talk about transition have caught the interest of an increasing number of researchers (Lago, 2017). However, existing peer-reviewed research articles and conceptual frameworks do not adequately reflect the field's understanding of the nature of early care and education collaborations or the relationship between such collaborations and desired outcomes (Schilder, Broadstone, & Curenton, 2017). The problem is that EHS and Head Start programs collaborate and build partnerships with local agencies, but the ways in which teacher collaboration is implemented to ensure children experience smooth transitions from classroom to classroom has not been revealed. Thus, this study seeks to understand how early learning teachers are collaborating to support students' transitions. To date, few studies have tracked the formation and development of teacher collaboration in school contexts (Yuan & Zhang, 2016). Although collaboration, specifically in early learning programs has been

examined in the literature, there is limited research on collaboration within early childhood education. Further research is needed urgently to determine how such teacher collaboration is achieved to result in the best outcomes for both the students and teachers for classroom transitions (Skouteris et al., 2012).

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this collective case study is to examine how early learning teachers collaborate to create successful transitions when it is time for a student to transition to the next classroom. EHS programs typically have infant (six weeks to 12 months), toddler (12 months to 24 months), and older toddler (24 months to 36 months) classrooms. When the child reaches the upper age limit, the teachers will transition them to the next classroom. As for Head Start programs, preschool classrooms typically include children ages three to five years old. When children reach age five, the teacher should have transition practices in place to help transition the children to kindergarten. At this stage in the research, teacher collaboration is defined as two or more people combining their resources to achieve specific goals over a period of time (Yuan & Zhang, 2016). The theory guiding this study is the sociocultural theory by Lev Vygotsky (1978), who believed we learn through our interactions and communications with others and encouraged collaborative learning. Vygotsky's theory aligns with this study by informing educators that children learn from a guide, and teachers should be intentional about adding to children's knowledge and supporting children's ways of understanding the world around them.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study is an effort to learn how early learning programs are implementing teacher collaboration to support classroom transitions for students. This study will add to current research on how EHS and Head Start educators collaborate to ensure children are prepared for

classroom transitions; therefore, this research could benefit early learning teachers, education administrators, and parents by presenting how teacher collaboration can support teachers in implementing intentional classroom transitions for students.

### **Theoretical**

The proposed study on teacher collaboration and classroom transitions will make a contribution to the knowledge of teachers, educational administrators, and parents. The emphasis on collaboration is theoretical and is based on the understanding that learning is socially situated and constructed in interaction with others (Vygotsky, 1978). This study will continue to contribute to the development of the sociocultural theory by Vygotsky that children need a guide to understand the world. Moreover, this study also relates to other studies about teacher collaboration and transitions. The Cultural Historical Activity Theory (CHAT) was developed by Leontèv (1981) and is another theory that builds on Vygotsky's work. Therefore, the CHAT and sociocultural theories have the same origin, with both theories emphasizing development and learning in social settings. Leontèv believed that our knowledge of the world is mediated by our interaction with it; accordingly, teachers' professional development is facilitated by educators ascertaining how they learn to learn and how they apply their knowledge in practice to support student learning (Postholm, 2016).

While Vygotsky's theory focuses on how educators should create settings to maximize learning for students, this study will support the sociocultural theory by sharing how teacher collaboration can be used to maximize learning and understanding for teachers as well.

Vygotsky's sociocultural theory argued that learning stems from the exchange of ideas and interactions. This research will extend the sociocultural theory by promoting collaborative



learning amongst teachers and exploring how educators plan and exchange helpful information to support students as they transition to the next classroom.

### **Empirical**

This study will provide empirical evidence by revealing how early learning educators collaborate with one another to support children in transitioning from one classroom to another through observations. Learning how teachers utilize transition documents and implement transition strategies will show what teachers have in place and how leadership support and guide teachers with transitions. Head Start and school leaders share responsibility for ensuring successful transitions. Teachers have noted that a lack of guidance and support from leadership, including the absence of a district-wide plan, is a major barrier to putting good transition practices into action (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). This study will also add to the body of research for early learning education and encourage educators and school leaders who are not implementing transition strategies to acknowledge the importance of teacher collaboration and implementing transition practices. A study conducted by Forte and Flores (2014) magnifies that the literature has emphasized the importance of collaborative professional cultures by recognizing and valuing knowledge that is built collectively in order to foster teacher professional development and is understood as the process through which all-natural learning experiences and conscious and planned activities are intended to be of direct or indirect benefit to the individual, group, or school.

### **Practical**

This study may also improve the conditions and lives of teachers and their school environment. Existing literature highlights several benefits that arise from collaborative work such as moral support, which allows teachers to respond to problems and difficulties overcoming

failures, frustrations, and personal insecurity (Forte & Flores, 2014). Collaboration leads to authentic continuing professional development and is seen as an indicator of informal learning within the professional community in schools and classrooms (Forte & Flores, 2014). It also allows teachers to gain new ideas by encouraging a reflective and questioning process on their professional practices. In addition, teachers gain more analytical and creative energy that helps them to be more effective with their students. Another positive feature of teacher collaboration relates to reducing the burden and pressure arising from the intensification of teacher's work, greater security, and responsiveness to change and; therefore, greater capacity to learn from others and encouraging them to improve (Forte & Flores, 2014). Moreover, meaningful collaboration not only benefits educators but students as well. For teachers and other service providers, collaboration can lead to a shared sense of responsibility for student success across the school building and enhance the school's culture. Students benefit from collaboration by receiving coordinated and specially designed developmental, individual, and instructional support (Ketterlin-Geller et al., 2015).

When children begin school, they identify with new peers and teachers and adopt new reference groups and classmates as they assume new roles as students. As new students, children embrace new academic challenges such as learning to read; developing new academic standards by which to judge themselves and others, often based on school norms, and learning new school and teacher expectations, for example, the rules which govern acceptable classroom behavior (Harper, 2016). Thus, it is necessary to develop appropriate working cultures for collaboration to be created and nurtured in schools. This study provided insight into how the prevalence or the lack of teacher collaboration affects successful early childhood classroom transitions. This research also shed light on possible challenges that impeded teacher collaboration and

encouraged educational leaders and administrators to discuss how to address such challenges in school settings influenced by a wide range of institutional (e.g., school curriculum and leadership) and socio-cultural factors (e.g., educational policy) (Yuan & Zhang, 2016). It is from this perspective that the study was carried out in order to understand teachers' practices of, and perspectives on, collaboration and professional development opportunities in their workplace.

### **Research Questions**

Having an interest in the field of education and improving the practice of education leads to asking researchable questions, some of which are best approached through a case study research design (Merriam, 1988). The following research questions guide the case study research design:

1. How do early learning teachers collaborate to prepare students for transitions to classrooms? Effective collaboration occurs when professionals voluntarily participate and have mutual goals to provide a coherent educational program to support student's academic achievement (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017)
2. How do teachers collaborate with families to create a positive transition experience for students? Families provide the social, cultural, and emotional support that children need to function successfully at school. It is; therefore, imperative that family points of view about transition to school and the establishment of the family - educator partnerships, their experiences, insights, expectations, and aspirations are recognized as being critical to designing and implementing effective strategies for ways of working that will benefit children, families, schools, and communities (Rogers, 2018).
3. How are teachers utilizing transition strategies to ensure a smooth classroom transition for students? Transitions are important because children who experience continuity with

earlier educational experiences show increased motivation, improved relationships with peers and adults, and higher achievement (Harper, 2016).

### **Definitions**

1. *The Office of the Administration for Children and Families Early Learning and Knowledge Center* - categorizes children ages 0-2 as Early Head Start children and children ages 3-5 as Head Start children (Head Start, 2019).
2. *School readiness* - possessing the skills, knowledge, and attitudes necessary for success in school and for later learning and life. Children are ready for school, families are ready to support their children's learning, and schools are ready for children (Head Start, 2019).
3. *Early Learning Educator* - any professional working in Early Learning and Development Programs, including, but not limited to, center-based and family child care providers, infant and toddler specialists, early intervention specialists and early childhood special educators, home visitors, related service providers, administrators, Head Start teachers, Early Head Start teachers, preschool and other teachers, teacher assistants, family service staff, and health coordinators (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).
4. *Early learning* - programs that provide education for children outside their own home before kindergarten (Early Learning Coalition, 2019).
5. *Teacher collaboration* - two or more people combine their resources to achieve specific goals over a period of time (Yuan & Zhang, 2016).

6. *Transitions* - Transition refers to the process of change that encompasses the events and experiences that occur when a child moves from one setting to another (Harper, 2016).

### **Summary**

The goal of this chapter was to provide an overview of the study. Chapter one discussed the EHS and Head Start program history the theoretical framework, and the social background to teacher collaboration. It also provided details on how the study aligned with the researcher's philosophy, the research problem, purpose, significance of the study, research questions, and definitions of words used in the study. Overall, the purpose of this case study was to examine how EHS and Head Start teachers collaborate to create successful transitions for students from classroom to classroom.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

### Overview

Every year, children transition in and out of early childhood programs and classrooms. Whether moving from home to an early education program or from one early education setting to another, transition presents children and families with opportunities and challenges (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). Transition marks the time when children are separated from a familiar routine and environment and placed into an environment of uncertainty, changing roles, and expectations (Harper, 2016). Transitioning to a new environment can be exciting and interesting, but also challenging and stressful for a child (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). This transition is influenced not only by the child's readiness for school, but also by a combination of family, peer, school, and community contexts, and the relationships among these contexts (Curle et al., 2017).

A successful transition involves communication among the individuals and agencies most closely involved with the child prior to and following school entry. In fact, best-practice recommendations for facilitating a smooth transition to school emphasize strategies for increasing communication between home, school, and early childhood settings (Curle et al., 2017). Smooth transitions are important because children who experience continuity with earlier educational experiences show increased motivation, improved relationships with peers and adults, and higher achievement (Harper, 2016). Developmental research indicates that from infancy, children develop emotional connections and attachments to familiar adults. Trusting relationships with familiar adults provide children with security, comfort, and a strong base from which to explore new environments and learn (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020).

Since teachers work closely with children, teacher's support throughout the transition process is vital and should be planned and intentional by implementing collaborative practices in advance and consistently. Collaborating to create well-planned, respectful practices can help make transitions a positive experience for all children and families, as well as for teachers who work with them (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). Although teacher collaboration has become an encouraged practice, this study addressed how early childhood programs implemented effective transition support for children and families based on the collaboration of the involved teachers. The limited literature on the importance of early childhood educators collaborating to ensure children experience smooth classroom transitions justifies the need for further research. The purpose of this chapter was to provide a context for the research and to demonstrate its importance based on the problem demonstrated via the literature as well as the need or gap in the literature. Chapter Two is comprised of an overview, a theoretical framework section, and related literature to the gap in the literature.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Developmental approaches to learning processes have evolved over time, and these differences are reflected in developmental and learning theories. This study's foundation is grounded in the sociocultural theory, also known as the social interaction theory, that was proposed by theorist Lev Vygotsky (1978). The sociocultural theory contributes to understanding how children see the world and their own experiences. From a sociocultural perspective, understanding a child's culture is an integral part of young children's learning. Vygotsky believed that the internalization of culture occurred with sign systems, which caused behavioral transformations and formed the bridge between early and later forms of individual development (Podmore, Sauvao, & Mapa, 2003). For teachers, having an understanding of

children's cultural and language experiences is part of fostering an effective learning relationship (Podmore, Sauvao, & Mapa, 2003). Since teachers serve students from various backgrounds, understanding students' backgrounds is critical for effectively teaching both academic material and the behaviors and expectations of the school (Slavin, 2015). For Vygotsky, development of individuals is conditioned by the society and culture that surrounds the individual (Demirbaga, 2018). He recognized that learning takes place in social contexts and encouraged educators to create social learning settings that maximize student learning and promote a positive environment. Sociocultural theories also hold that psychological phenomena are formed as people engage in the collective, socially organized, activity (Vygotsky, 1978). The sociocultural theory implies that serious attention must be paid to the concrete social structures in which both children and adults develop.

The emphasis on teacher collaboration in this study is based on the understanding that learning is socially situated and constructed in interactions with others (Amentorp & Madden, 2014). While Vygotsky's theory focuses on how educators should create classroom environments to maximize learning for students, the theory can be used to maximize learning and understanding for teachers as well. Vygotsky (1978) implied that collaborative or cooperative dialogue helps individuals internalize information and apply it in real-life settings. When teachers collaborate, they are creating a social environment that allows them to learn from one another. When a teacher is intentional in learning a student's culture and background, they can plan how to teach and support children's developmental and academic needs, which can lead to maximizing student learning. Moreover, sociocultural theory's key tenets include the development of shared knowledge through participation in joint activities (Vygotsky, 1978). The joint activity of teacher collaboration and transitions provide a context from which to explore and



understand teacher to teacher and teacher to child experiences across classrooms (Traum & Moran, 2016). According to Vygotsky, the role of the teacher is to equip the child with cultural tools that help solve problems and contribute to mental development (Demirbaga, 2018). As teachers are the first point of call for a child while at school, it is logical that they act as the primary support for children as they adapt to formal schooling (Skouteris et al., 2012). To best aid in transition, it is proposed that a meaningful collaboration be developed between teachers, with a relationship based upon mutual trust and respect, to help guide the child and family through the transition and help the child get acclimated to a new classroom.

Overall, Vygotsky's sociocultural theory argued that learning stems from the exchange of ideas and interactions. This research extended the sociocultural theory by promoting collaborative learning amongst teachers. Creating an environment where educators share tools, plan, and exchange helpful information will consequently lead to innovative ideas, intentional teaching, and intentional support for students as they transition to the next step in their developmental and academic experience. Goddard, Goddard, and Tschannen-Moran (2007) stated that when teachers have opportunities to collaborate, they build on their distinctive pedagogies and instructional development. The foundation of the sociocultural theory emphasizes the importance of teachers learning with, and from, one another to ensure they are effective in supporting their students' learning and development.

### **Related Literature**

For much of the 20th century, most teachers worked alone behind classroom doors with little interaction with their colleagues. In recent years; however, teacher collaboration has emerged as an important strategy to drive improvement, informed by research showing how on-the-job interactions can boost teacher development and effectiveness (Spillane & Shirrell, 2018).

Schools across the United States are adjusting their professional cultures and workplace practices in response to creating formal opportunities for teachers to learn from one another and work together through shared planning periods, teacher leadership roles, and professional learning communities (Spillane & Shirrell, 2018). Now, more than ever before, teachers and schools, departments and institutions, and systems and communities are embracing the value of collaborative structures in support of teaching, learning, and collective development (Gale, 2016). Working with others can enhance creativity, improve reflection, increase respect for others, promote team celebration, and enhance self-efficacy. Just as children are no longer expected to learn information passively, teachers cannot be expected to depend entirely on workshops and lectures to develop their practice (Morel, 2014). Because many believe in this pedagogical approach, creating support structures and frameworks to make it possible are present in institutions today. The following literature analyzes various factors of teacher collaboration and early childhood transitions.

### **Teacher Collaboration**

Collaboration, according to Rubin (2009), is a “means of aligning people’s actions to get something done” (p. 16). Collaboration leverages diverse perspectives and skills and can promote creativity and productivity. In addition, collaboration is a skill that is valued by employers as well as civic and social organizations (Morel, 2014). It is tied to greater job satisfaction, and it is an effective learning practice, especially for adult learners. In fact, researchers assert that collaboration is a viable means for educational reform and an integral component of the reform process (Jao & McDougall, 2016). Collaboration underpins the success of school improvement initiatives as it involves educational stakeholders focusing on the development of collective goals and responsibility. It creates opportunities for each participant

to become an interconnected part of a unit that works toward common goals and hence, heightened the sense of collegiality, equity, trust, and mutual respect (Jao & McDougall, 2016). Reflection on practice as an element of teachers' professional development is promoted by various professional organizations, including the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards (NBPTS, 1987) and by researchers (Holmstrom, Wong, & Krumm, 2015).

Holmstrom et al. (2015) stated,

Teachers must be able to think systematically about their practice and learn from experience. They must be able to critically examine their practice, seek the advice of others, and draw on educational research to deepen their knowledge, sharpen their judgment, and adapt their teaching to new findings and ideas. (p. 104)

However, one hundred years ago, a teacher might have collaborated her whole life with only a few hundred people whom she knew and developed relationships with over a lifetime. Today, through technology, educators come in contact with hundreds of people from around the globe every day (Morel, 2014). Fifty years ago, teaching required an individual to get along in his or her geographic community; today, teachers are expected to communicate instantaneously with parents, leaders, and colleagues at home and around the globe (Morel, 2014). Information about best practices in the classroom is instantly available to all stakeholders, and community members expect their teachers to stay up to date with current research and to implement innovations in their own classrooms almost immediately (Morel, 2014). The increasing complexity of teaching students to develop skills for a future society that one can barely imagine requires teachers to be learners every day (Morel, 2014). Furthermore, because teacher collaboration has grown to be a necessary practice in today's classrooms, further research is needed to determine how Head Start

teachers collaborate to ensure smooth transitions for students to result in awareness and fill the gap in the literature on collaboration and transitions.

### **Forms of Collaboration**

Previous research has shown that collaboration can take various forms in teachers' daily practice, and the overall purpose of such practices is to provide teachers with an open and safe platform where they can freely exchange their ideas, share useful teaching resources, and find ways to improve their teaching effectiveness (Yuan & Zhang, 2016). Some schools take on a collaborative culture where teacher collaboration has a positive impact on school effectiveness, so it can become a governing principle of educational reforms, and one of the main factors that affect the teacher collaboration and interaction between teachers can be determined as school culture (Shakenova, 2017). Fullan and Hargreaves (1992) identified a collaborative culture as an organizational environment where staff exchange ideas; it is one of the main activities of teachers' daily work. Collaborative culture can also appear in everyday activities, organizational events, and ceremonies, during the exchange of ideas and experience, and analysis of teaching practice (Shakenova, 2017).

Collaboration can also take place in various forms depending on student needs, the amount of available resources, teacher experience, and knowledge, and nature of the school. Examples of such collaborative structures include school-wide collaboration (e.g., all faculty from a school form the collaborative team), grade-level collaboration (e.g., a home teacher is paired with a special education teacher), subject-area collaboration (e.g., teachers who teach the same subject-area come together to form the collaborative team), multi-classroom collaboration (e.g., teachers in the same building wing or division), and cooperative teaching (e.g., co-

teaching, a form of instruction in which two teachers team together to teach a course) (Jao & McDougall, 2016).

### **Child Transitions**

Preparation for school is one of Head Starts' main goals for the disadvantaged families they serve. Children from disadvantaged backgrounds often show a lag in school readiness at kindergarten entry: initiating an achievement gap that grows over time and contributes to large, long-term disparities in educational attainment, employment, and earnings (Bierman et al., 2014). During the infant and toddler years, many children and their families experience a transition. However, not all transitions are equal, and everyone experiences them differently (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018). Big transitions can include the birth of a baby or joining or leaving a program, and smaller daily transitions might include changing activities in a classroom or beginning or ending a home visit. Every day there are many small transitions for infants and toddlers. Educators and families must think about how many times a day very young children start an activity, stop an activity, wash hands, eat, go outside, go inside, go to sleep, wake up, and so much more (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018). Transitions can also include going from in-home care to care outside of the home, moving from family childcare to a center-based program, changing centers, or going from one classroom to another in the same center (Doudna et al., 2015). Because transitions are such a huge part of every infant and toddler's day, it is important that educators make the best of them (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018). In addition, children's transitions and early encounters with school are important in relation to their knowledge about school and how they make sense of school.

Previous research indicates that starting school is crucial to how children perceive school and how children's school life starts can have an impact on their school performance (Lago, 2017). Major findings that relate to children in transition and are supported by a moderate and large extent of evidence include high-quality child care and developmentally appropriate classrooms for young children and are associated with better academic outcomes, work habits, and social adjustment after the transition to the next setting (What Works Clearinghouse, 2008). Various ecological factors (e.g., socioeconomic status, family psychosocial factors) are associated with long-term academic achievement and positive social outcomes for children after their transition into school (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020).

A close positive teacher-child relationship during and after transition is also associated with better cognitive outcomes for children. Teachers and directors view social skills as being more important for children's school readiness than academic skills (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). Lastly, a match between sending and receiving environments and teaching skills which are related to the requirements of the next environment results in more successful adjustment and positive outcomes after transition for young children (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020).

Transitions can be some of the most frustrating times of the day for families, caregivers, and especially very young children. They rely on adults to provide a sense of safety and continuity as their environment, caregivers, and activities change. Vygotsky (1994) explained, "When we study the role the environment plays in the development of a child, it is an analysis from the point of view of the child's emotional experiences" (p. 341). Family and childhood experiences are analyzed from the context of the given social situation of development (SSD). SSD relates to the external environment that gives dynamic conditions for the individual's

development (Quiñones, Li, & Ridgway, 2018). The individual develops in a given social situation and experiences new formations (movements, crises, and changes) through his or her own interactions with others. Personal characteristics, attitudes, and points of view appear in these emotional experiences and are important to consider when analysis of the environment takes place (Quiñones et al., 2018). This is where educators step in to ensure students and families are supported, prepared, and ready for new environments.

In addition, research suggests that nearly half of typically developing children experience difficulty with the transition to school in the absence of any significant risk factors (Harper, 2016). Children with special needs are at an even greater risk for successful transitions. Areas of concern during transition most often cited by families are socio-behavioral in nature, including getting used to a new school (structure, routines, and people), following directions, and behavior problems, information about their child's teacher, and the school program (Harper, 2016). When adults provide as much stability as possible, along with intentional planning, children will be better able to cope with life's little and big transitions (Merrill, 2010). During transitions, children need to learn about the new environment, daily routines, and the people who are part of the new setting. The ability to remember people and events, to explore and experiment, and to predict what will happen next helps children adjust during transition (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020.).

Cognitive skills also contribute to the way children respond to transition, and the transition experience itself may be an opportunity to develop these skills further. When a transition occurs that involves a move to a new setting, young children are aware of changes in usual routines or caregivers (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). Children's memory skills help them recognize differences between familiar and unfamiliar people, objects,

actions, and events. Their memories of previous experiences help them understand new experiences and learn rapidly about their environment (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). By fostering a safe and secure relationship with children, teachers can provide them with the confidence to explore, discover, and learn about their new environment (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). Successful transitions are highly dependent on whether a child feels safe and trusts the adults who care for them. The child's sense of safety and trust builds on their family's trust in the program (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). When families have positive feelings about the setting, they can help the child feel more confident about the setting, and the child can develop trust in the teacher and can be ready to engage in learning (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). This team approach may encourage families to become more involved in their children's education, which may pave the way for the children to have positive learning experiences and later school success (Doudna et al., 2015). Besides, a child who feels safe and secure does better socially, emotionally, and educationally (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020).

To ensure students have smooth transitions, teachers should collaborate with the child's family, their co-teachers, and student's previous and future teachers to effectively support students and their families throughout the transition process. Skouteris et al. (2012) reiterated that the teacher's role in ensuring a smooth transition is an important one; however, an effective transition incorporates not just the child and teacher, but also the child's home and family.

### **Partnering with Families**

The transition to school has been identified as having the potential to provide opportunities for adult family members to establish relationships of collaboration with educators to support the learning and well-being of the children (Rogers, 2018). While the school



community must work to put programs in place to allow for a smooth transition for students, parental support and collaborative efforts are needed in order to be successful. The systematic inclusion of families in activities and programs that promote children's development, learning, and wellness includes approaches and strategies used by early childhood educators to form ongoing, mutually beneficial, and meaningful reciprocal relationships with families (Koralek, Nemeth, & Ramsey, 2019). When families are involved in their child's learning and development they can grow as nurturers, mentors, and guides for their children (Koralek et al., 2019).

Research indicates that effective transition services include practices that are centered on children and families, individualized to address children's and families' diverse backgrounds, development, strengths, and needs (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). Besides, when schools do not consider family and cultural needs in designing and implementing school transition support programs, families' dissatisfaction with the schools and their concerns regarding their children tend to increase (Yim, 2018). School leaders should be dedicated to promoting continuity within and across early education settings, focused on creating and maintaining collaboration between families, programs, and early education partners. They are also aligned with individual program goals and Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS) (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020).

The value of the concept of partnership with parents is based on the belief that good working relationships, clear and reciprocal communication and common goals between parents and professionals are crucial to the successful delivery of effective services to children (MacLeod- Brudenell & Kay, 2008). There has been increased attention to the family as a key contextual factor having a strong influence on their child's kindergarten transition experiences

(Kang, Horn, & Palmer, 2016). The impact of active involvement of families in their child's education is well documented. For example, children whose families are more involved at school from kindergarten to fifth grade demonstrate higher literacy levels in fifth grade than those children whose families are not involved (Kang et al., 2016). A study conducted by Galindo and Sheldon (2012) reported significant associations between family involvement at school and children's math and reading gains even after taking other factors into consideration. Family involvement has also been documented as having a positive influence on children's readiness for kindergarten. That is, higher family involvement at home is reported to facilitate the child's school readiness (Kang et al., 2016). Therefore, viewing transition as a set of processes and relationships, as individuals move from one context to another or change their role in educational communities has led to a growing understanding of the opportunities and challenges involved (Rogers, 2018).

Contributing factors to both the opportunities and the challenges of transitions include the characteristics of the child; family perspectives and circumstances, connections between home, prior-to-school and school settings, educator attitudes, and current political agendas (Rogers, 2018). Successful transitions are also highly dependent on whether a child feels safe and trusts the adults who care for them (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). The child's sense of safety and trust builds on their family's trust in the program. Families who signal positive feelings about the setting and the teacher to the child help the child feel positive, too. The child feels more confident about the setting, develops trust in the teacher, and is ready to engage in learning. In addition, families living in complex circumstances often face challenges in establishing relationships with their children's schools. The resultant lack of connection and communication means that educators are unaware of family circumstances, their

values, and the ways in which they engage with their children's learning (Rogers, 2018). When parents feel as though they are part of the school community, their expectations of their child also increase (Lohmann, Hathcote, & Boothe, 2018). Starting these partnerships early in a young child's education is crucial to their educational success in later years. By involving the family in planning and collaboration, the family's access to vital information relating to successful treatment outcomes and individual support systems increases (Lohmann et al., 2018). Learning about and connecting with children and families are the essential first steps in creating smooth transitions as children and families move in and out of a setting.

Frequent, regular communication with families will also nurture secure, positive relationships. It will also help children and families feel comfortable in a new setting. Developing mutually respectful relationships is the critical first step on the child's road to success. Teachers can also share information with families and children on what to expect to help build a sense of familiarity and confidence and decrease any potential concerns (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). Providing information and materials about useful resources can reassure families that there are supports available in their community. Once the foundation for the relationship is built, and teachers provide information to the families, then teachers can include families in the transition planning. Besides, families experience the transition along with their child, so collaborating with families to create well-planned, respectful practices can help make transition a positive experience for all children and families, as well as for others who work with them (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020).

Recognizing families as children's most important teachers and advocates is central to planning with families (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). Therefore, planning should always be a conversation in which families and staff make decisions together.

Depending on a program's policies and a family's schedule, transition planning with families can consist of informal discussions, a written plan, or both. Creating a clear transition plan with families promotes continuity of services and includes steps to prepare the child along the way for the upcoming changes (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020).

Furthermore, teachers and family service workers can also experience loss when a child or group of children transition out of their setting (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). Knowing this can help staff prepare themselves, as well as the children and families, for the transition. Programs can use professional development, reflective supervision, and coaching opportunities to assist staff to prepare for and plan post-transition strategies. For example, staff may want to send a letter to wish the child and family well after they have moved on (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). Overall, transitions in and out of a program can be made easier for children and families to manage when collaborative and well-planned transition services are in place. When planning is inclusive, it can create responsive, individual transition plans that facilitate each child's adjustment to their new learning environment and make it a positive experience (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020).

### **Transition Practices**

Although there is no formal operational definition of transition practices, scholars have identified common practices related to the transition to kindergarten (National Center for Early Development and Learning, 1996). Early Childhood program policies describe how a program will carry out transition practices. For example, a common policy is "all families will receive a home visit prior to their first day in the program." Transition policies reflect the program's core values related to transition and inform decisions about practice (U.S. Department of Health and

Human Services, 2020). Policies include guidance about how the program will establish partnerships with families and collaborate with sending and receiving programs. Policies also address how programs can support children and families as they transition from one program option to another within the program. Transition practices are the daily interactions and activities informed by program policies that support children's transition in and out of the program. They are implemented by teachers, caregivers, home visitors, and family service workers. Working with a team, program leaders establish policies that lay the foundation for collaborative transition practices (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). Some researchers categorized these engagements in terms of when the practice occurred (e.g., before or after the school year begins) or if the practices were implemented in an individualized or whole-class format, while other scholars have categorized transition practices by the type of parent involvement teachers would like to encourage, such as efforts to increase parent involvement at home and at school, or general communication between home and school (Puccioni, 2018). However, Puccioni (2018) shares that the most common practices include sending informational resources to parents, telephoning parents, and inviting parents to attend orientations back-to-school nights and coordinating efforts with preschool programs.

Research on the potential impact of school-based transition practices on student outcomes in kindergarten is sparse, but the existing evidence of the effects of transition practices suggests that transition practices can have positive impacts on both academic achievement and nonacademic outcomes, the intensity of the practices likely matters, and some practices appear to matter more for different subgroups of students (e.g., by socioeconomic status) (Little, 2017). Furthermore, while Head Start is often equated with childcare, Head Start programs go far beyond most child care programs in terms of scope, regulations, and training (Schilder &

Leavell, 2015). Schilder and Leavell (2015) noted that Head Start programs have the HSPPS, which is a list of regulations that specifically address transition services requirements for grantees and is found in Part 1302 Subpart G Transition Services (Head Start, 2018). A few of the key transition services standards required by programs include: collaborating with parents to implement strategies and practices that support the successful transition out of EHS beginning transition planning six months before the child's third birthday to meet the needs of the child and family, collaborating with parents to support the successful transition of their child, implementing strategies and activities in the Head Start learning environment to promote successful transition into kindergarten, and undertaking strategies and activities to support families who have decided to transition their child to other early education and pre-kindergarten programs (Head Start, 2018).

It is important that Head Start administrators and teachers know the standards to ensure their practices for transitions from EHS to Head Start, Head Start to kindergarten, and between programs are in compliance. The standards call for family and community collaboration and implementing strategies and practices that support successful transitions (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). Transition practices that build and strengthen relationships between families, preschool, and elementary school are considered the primary means of supporting a child's entrance into school (Ahtola, 2016). Partners include families, staff, and other early education programs and elementary schools.

Program leaders play a pivotal role in establishing policies and practices that lay the foundation for effective transition services. Collaboration between all partners involved in the process is key. Program leaders serve as the bridge between all partners to ensure ongoing communication and collaboration (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020.).

Program leaders may ask, what kinds of policies and practices foster a collaborative approach to transition? How can we strengthen transition services through continuous improvement? How can we ensure that all staff are prepared to offer children and families effective support through transitions? (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). These questions can guide directors, managers, and specialists in establishing program policies and practices that promote a collaborative approach to smooth and effective transitions.

### **Transition Strategies**

Transitions require young children to put forth great amounts of effort, physically, emotionally, socially, and cognitively. All areas of development are needed to be able to transition (Mincemoyer, 2016). To prepare children for transitions, teachers need to teach children how to cope with and understand the concept of change daily. Transitions are a part of life, but if students are not taught properly or have positive experiences with transitions, it can be a challenge for the children, parents, and teachers. Ineffective transitions can affect children, parents, and teachers in numerous ways, but knowledgeable adults can guide children in dealing with the change by showing that the loss of the old will be balanced by the anticipation of something new in their lives (The Effects of Transitions, 2014).

Educators should want students to experience smooth and effective transitions versus ineffective transitions. Ineffective transitions can be abrupt without preparation or warning, sudden, and unsupportive. Some transitions are prone to be unpredictable, such as when a child is sick and cannot go to school. Unpredictable transitions have an inconsistent timing that is unknown to the child and their family. However, predictable routines make transitions easier for children and families (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020). Very early in life, children learn to anticipate routines, consistency, and like knowing what happens next.

Familiarity helps a child feel safe, cared for, and secure. Stability and continuity help children gain self-confidence and the capacity to manage transitions effectively (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2020).

Mantzicopoulos (2005) concluded that the quality of the Head Start classroom contributed to the adjustment of Head Start children to kindergarten, and their findings demonstrated children's participation in transition activities prior to kindergarten correlated with lower teacher-child conflict, and less teacher-child conflict was related to better school achievement. Moreover, the implementation rate of transition practices is positively related to the teachers' perceptions of the importance of these practices, and teachers who consider these practices important report more active implementation of them (Ahtola et al., 2016); therefore, teachers should establish a personal level of trust and rapport with families before school even starts, if possible. Parental trust in teachers is built up through parent-teacher interaction and is; therefore, dependent on each teacher's individual characteristics and teaching practices (Doudna et al., 2015). A strong transition system is built on a supportive and aligned infrastructure, positive relationships, and effective communication helps programs implement individualized transition plans. Transition plans modeled after Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), often include preparing families, visiting programs, providing individualized support for children, and helping families find community resources and support, as needed (Doudna et al., 2015).

A transition strategy is a support that makes it easier for children to adapt to the transition and it can be provided before, during, or after the transition (Bakkaloglu & Ergin, 2020).

Transition strategies can operate in several ways. Some early care and early learning programs have established guidelines that teachers use to support and plan for children and families going through transitions. For example, individualizing transitions can be tailored to the child's



learning styles and needs. When it comes to experiencing transitions in the classroom, infant teachers can give infants warning when things are about to change. Even a very young infant may feel more comfortable if someone gets on their level and says, “Are you ready for a clean diaper?” instead of swooping down to lift them to the changing table. If children say “no” or indicate that they are not ready, let them know that they have a few more minutes to play, and then it will be time for a new diaper (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018). Teachers can give toddlers a few minutes’ notice before it is time to change activities. They can take a moment to let toddlers know, “You have five more minutes to play, so finish up what you are doing.” Then, “You have 2 minutes left to play; we’re just about to clean up.” Even before they have a real sense of time, these warnings will prepare toddlers for transitions and leave them more likely to cooperate (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018). For children who need a little extra help with transitions, teachers should interact with children on their eye level to make sure they have their attention and let them know it will be time to move on to something else soon (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018). Besides, when each child’s schedule is individualized, it is much easier to meet the needs of children within a group care setting (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2018).

In addition, reviewing other programs’ recommendations for transitions can also be a helpful way for administrators and teachers to begin establishing their own transition guidelines (Doudna et al., 2015). For example, many programs include the following features in their transition guidelines: involving family members, beginning several months before the transition, exploring the availability of, and need for, a variety of community-based child development services including Head Start and early childhood special education specialists, addressing child and family issues that can interfere with the child’s transition, implementing teacher

collaboration and planning time, including the child's health status and developmental level, child and family progress, and current and changing family circumstances in transition meetings (Doudna et al., 2015). Various mutual activities between schools, such as joint events and collaborative teaching, help to familiarize students with the school or classroom environment and people, and reduce the abruptness of the change (Ahtola et al., 2016). Additional transition strategies that some programs have in place include passing on useful information about school entrants, group dynamics, or the special needs of some children. Additionally, cooperation of administrators, teachers, and other professionals reduce discontinuities in concepts, expectations, curriculum, pedagogy, and discipline between preschool and elementary school when effective transitions take place (Ahtola et al., 2016).

In addition, some teachers or programs create their own transition plan and use transition charts or checklists to follow and communicate with their colleagues on how they can work together and create goals to ensure the child has a smooth process. A Head Start slogan shared in the Head Start community states, "if it wasn't documented it didn't happen." Some method of written documents or forms provide structure, accountability, and focus. Also, team members can return to them to update them as needed (Conderman, 2016). Lastly, once a transition system is established, administrators, teachers, and families work together to execute a plan for each child. Well-planned and focused transition practices have been shown to lead to better learning and adjustment in school (Ahtola et al., 2016).

### **Benefits of Teacher Collaboration**

Collaboration is widely viewed as a prolific strategy to promote professional growth and to advance systematic changes in schools (Jao & McDougall, 2016). Collaboration has a positive influence on some aspects of learning, such as increasing teacher efficacy, professional

development, and learning opportunities, responsibility for work, reflection on instructional practice, and reducing work overload (Shakenova, 2017). Research has found that teacher collaboration can support teacher learning (Jao & McDougall, 2016). In addition, Stearns Elizabeth, Banerjee, Mickelson, and Moller (2015) found that the more teachers collaborate on student learning, the more satisfied the teachers are with their working conditions, and that the presence of teacher professional community moderates the relationship between teacher autonomy and teacher job satisfaction. Practicing collaboration models its importance for the students who will be called upon to collaborate in an increasingly complex economy and society (Morel, 2014).

In addition, studies have suggested that teacher collaboration also builds a teacher's self-efficacy. Teacher self-efficacy is the belief teachers have in their ability to impact student learning. Self-efficacy includes teacher confidence in instructional, management, and collaboration skills (Epstein & Willhite, 2015). A study of early childhood teacher self-efficacy suggests that staff collaboration, student engagement, and consistent opportunities to participate in decision-making contribute to self-efficacy (Guo, Justice, Sawyer, & Tompkins, 2011). In a study of 48 early childhood teachers in 38 centers, including Head Start and state-funded PreK, student engagement and teacher experience did not appear to contribute to teachers' self-efficacy (McGinty, Justice, & Rimm-Kaufman, 2008). Teacher collaboration and being able to impact decision-making did correlate significantly with self-efficacy (Epstein & Willhite, 2015).

In a collaborative environment, teachers build their lessons and curriculum cooperatively and meet to talk about progress in student learning in their schools. This collaboration allows teachers to eliminate redundancy in, and increase compatibility across, parts of the curriculum to take collective responsibility for student learning and to interactively develop the best strategy

for teaching (Banerjee, Stearns, Moller, & Mickelson, 2017). Collaboration facilitates access to the general curriculum through the sharing of instructional supports between the general education teacher and special education teacher or teacher of English Language Learners (ELLs). In gifted education; however, collaboration is an opportunity for the gifted education teacher to share his or her expertise to support high-ability students within a content area so that students might accelerate beyond the general curriculum and or develop their strengths and talents in a domain (Mofield, 2020). Through collaboration, notably peer-coaching, gifted education teachers can share instructional strategies whereby the collaboration is a professional growth opportunity for the general education teacher to learn about appropriate differentiation features for high-ability students. Through focused, sustained, data-driven collaborative work, general education teachers and gifted education teachers can work together to achieve shared understanding and plans for instruction (Mofield, 2020).

Teacher collaboration encourages accountability and motivation. If teams set shared goals, and all team members feel like their contributions are valued, it is only natural that members will feel a sense of accountability to complete tasks assigned, reach the goals set, and be motivated to do so (Jao & McDougall, 2016). Teacher collaboration also fosters collegiality. When colleagues collaborate, professional relationships will be strengthened as a result of shared experiences, achieving successes, and working through challenges as a group. In their study, Meirink, Imants, Meijer, and Verloop (2010) considered different levels of interdependence, from least to most, when examining teacher collegiality. The results of their study showed that collaboration and teacher learning were closely interconnected. Similarly, another benefit of teacher collaboration is that it establishes a learning community (Jao & McDougall, 2016). Of course, the ultimate benefit of teacher collaboration is that it can improve student achievement.

Research has shown that the efforts of teachers that result in collaboration may have a positive impact at the student level (Jao & McDougall, 2016). Students can learn coping skills and learn that they will be supported in new and unknown situations. Moreover, working with others to share ideas, take a point of view, defend a position, give and accept feedback, achieve consensus, and apply knowledge to a common goal leads to improved teaching and learning (Morel, 2014). Collaborative teams provide teachers with a sense of professional well-being, encourage teachers to continue their commitment to student learning, help teachers design continuous learning and school improvement initiatives, and support teachers with new knowledge and skills (Conderman, 2016). In fact, decisions made by multiple individuals who openly share data, opinions, and experiences are almost always better, more innovative, and longer-lasting solutions than those made by a single individual (Conderman, 2016). Thus, collaboration between teachers has more benefits than drawbacks. The benefits of teacher collaboration can be determined as professional growth, morale and material support, reduction of work overload, increase in teacher reflection and effectiveness, and reduction in teacher absenteeism (Shakenova, 2017).

### **Strategies for Effective Teacher Collaboration**

Despite the advantages of teams for teachers and students, the disadvantage is that not all teacher-based teams are effective. An important factor in successful collaboration is to create a collaborative team in which members share common teaching contexts (Jao & McDougall, 2016). The good news, however, is that most teams have the potential to be effective, or at least improve their effectiveness. Effective teams promote collaboration and productivity while ineffective teams avoid accountability, lack commitment, fear conflict, and lack trust (Conderman, 2016). Most teams collaborate more effectively if members apply some basic, yet

important strategies. First, although teachers constantly cite a lack of time as a reason for not engaging in more professional development initiatives, effective professional development requires an investment in time as much research has found that one-off workshops are ineffective models for professional development (Jao & McDougall, 2016). With this being said, school administrators should ensure teachers have planned time set aside to have collaborative meetings consistently. In addition, the participating members should agree upon a common goal. Having a clear plan of action can help teachers work together to achieve success (Masterson, 2015). As it pertains to collaborating to support students' transitions, teachers should establish transition goals for the child and share them with the child's guardian to encourage ongoing communication and provide clear expectations for all parties involved. Jao and McDougall (2016) describe the importance of shared goals in a community of practice and describe it as a group of individuals with shared interests who collaborate to support individual or group learning. This shared goal may have a content focus that all team members are striving to improve upon. The goals of the team may also align with team members' beliefs and/or school and district initiatives and policies.

Third, to support active participation in the collaboration process, Little (1990) suggested that the tasks should be distributed among team members and encourage active participation of all members. When team members feel accountable towards the team and invested in meeting the team's goals, members will be more apt to participate in the process. For example, one teacher may go with the child during the transition process to visit the new classroom weeks in advance at a specific time of the day, and the other teacher will plan and implement individualized activities during the free-choice time to build on the child's cognitive skills. As each member brings his or her own strengths and experiences to the process, collaboration

requires that participants contribute their own means of expertise and effort to the activity as a form of a shared goal in mind (Jao & McDougall, 2016).

Ultimately, teachers must be expected to fulfill classroom tasks, keeping a safe classroom environment where learning can flourish; designing engaging and meaningful lesson plans, implementing fun activities and various ways that many students' learning styles can be utilized, grading essays or tests in a fair manner, and striving to give prompt and constructive feedback to achieve deep learning (Brevetti, 2014). The various teaching tasks are significant to good teaching and may be difficult for new teachers and even veteran teachers; thus, educators should embrace a formal system of mentoring for the profession of teaching. New teachers need support and guidance from veteran teachers on how best to keep grades and maintain consistent discipline practices in a classroom. Veteran teachers need assistance to bring technology into classrooms and to use contemporary practices that allow students to break away from traditional textbook-based learning. A mentoring system holds the idea of sharing, helping, and caring through a collaborative group of teachers. Outstanding teaching performances rely on collaboration and recognition of the power of sharing ideas and being a teaching community to all students (Brevetti, 2014).

### **Challenges in Collaboration**

Nevertheless, there are challenges to implementing collaboration. In order to maximize the potential of teacher collaboration in promoting student learning and teacher development, it is of great importance to examine the challenges that impede teacher collaboration (Yuan & Zhang, 2016). First, teacher collaboration is intentional work, which can become time-consuming and labor-intensive, and challenges teachers' autonomy and preference for working alone. Although collaboration between educators is becoming more common in schools, the

skills to become an effective collaborator are not all intuitive skills of collaboration and entail responding to difficult situations, effectively communicating with various individuals, and developing shared problem-solving competencies (Pellegrino, Weiss, & Regan, 2015). The challenges in finding time to collaborate have frequently been cited as one of the top barriers in collaboration (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017). Time is a shared resource that is commonly mentioned as a scarcity, and within the educational literature, educators have indicated that there is limited time for collaboration due to increased paperwork, responsibilities, and activities (Leonard & Leonard, 2003). In attempts to create time for collaboration, teachers and principals have agreed upon the importance of aligning schedules with predetermined time blocks in order to jointly prepare lessons, to have more in-depth conversations about what has and has not worked in the classroom, and to examine current data while determining the need for additional data (Da Fonte & Barton-Arwood, 2017).

Second, teacher collaboration entails overcoming disciplinary barriers and respecting other colleagues' expertise, which is difficult for teachers from different disciplinary backgrounds (Tiongson, 2018). Each teacher comes to the classroom with a unique set of strengths and experiences; as such, co-teachers may have different perspectives about behavioral expectations, child guidance, or classroom routines. One may have a more easygoing personality, while the other may have a "take-control" approach (Masterson, 2015). One may share the home language or cultural background of the children, and the other may have a more extended history at the school. One might like to adopt new practices but is not sure how to suggest changes. In some cases, co-teachers share the same strengths but may not be sure how to divide the responsibilities. Even between the most caring adults, there are times when issues arise that need to be addressed.



Third, administrative concerns such as inconsistent communication between departments, and challenges in scheduling coordination are hurdles to collaboration (Friend & Cook, 2013). Pragmatic concerns may discourage even willing teachers from collaborating, due to lack of available support, especially from leaders (Tiongson, 2018). Teacher collaboration needs to take place in a supportive environment. For school leaders, they need to provide sufficient time, space, incentive mechanisms, and communication structures to support collaborative work among teachers (Yuan & Zhang, 2016). It is essential that department heads play a leading role in fostering a genuine collaborative culture in their work contexts. As indicated in Yuan and Zhang (2016) study results, the head of school successfully transformed the teachers' attitudes towards critical feedback from passiveness to positivity. Thus, department heads need to work with teachers to develop effective communication tools so that teachers can feel free and safe to raise meaningful questions and express different views in their joint professional activities. In a hierarchical school system, it is also critical for department heads to serve as the liaison between teachers and school management (Yuan & Zhang, 2016). With the assistance of a smooth communication channel, teachers and school leaders can make concerted efforts to employ both internal and external resources and maximize the effectiveness of teacher collaboration (Yuan & Zhang, 2016). In discussing the conditions needed for teacher learning, Meirink et al. (2010) argue that, if teams are to move from just sharing, to joint work, then their leaders and coaches need to stimulate them "to experiment with alternative teaching methods in their practices in such a way that that it contributes to solving a shared problem (p. 170)."

Fourth, lack of professional development of how to execute effective teacher collaboration and or implement a transition plan may hinder teacher collaboration. Some teachers are thrown into a position without proper training or coaching on how to complete

numerous tasks. Various research on teacher dialogue suggests that teachers do not reflect on practice together because they either do not know how to reflect or do not know that reflection is a useful tool for their learning (Holmstrom et al., 2015). In addition to a lack of teacher knowledge for engaging in collaborative reflection on practice, research suggests other explanations for why collective reflection on practice is rare. There may be deficiencies in the school context that create an inhospitable school culture or incoherent organization that can prevent teachers from productively engaging in collaborative work (Holmstrom et al., 2015). Besides, a school's culture simply reflects what its members collectively value and believe about the world and their place in it (Schein, 1985).

Studies have found that organizational cultures that fail to promote collaboration instead encourage teacher isolation, which contributes to teacher dissatisfaction (Banerjee et al., 2017). A school's culture should include critical and interactive elements such as shared expectations of behavior, the nature of professional development, mutual respect, and orientations toward collaboration and learning (Peterson & Deal, 1999; Speck, 1999). Peterson (2002) identified two forceful and opposite school cultures: positive and toxic. Positive cultures reflect norms of common purpose, continuous inquiry, and shared practice while toxic cultures thrive where there is a lack of purpose, collaboration is discouraged, and there are hostile relations among staff (Leonard & Leonard, 2003). Toxic cultures can defy individual efforts toward educational improvement, and because of their entrenchment, can even stymie collective reform efforts. Authentic teacher collaboration, which is directed toward student learning, is unlikely to occur within the realm of a negative school culture. As Wagner and Masden-Copas (2002) assert, the primary goal of continuous school improvement will not be realized "unless teams of teachers improve together" (p.43).

The new challenge involves what is included in the collaborative work, in particular, teacher reflection on practice, and supporting teachers in doing so. Despite the consensus that reflection on practice supports teacher learning, schools vary in their support for this type of professional development activity even while they support the structure teacher collaboration that enables it. Many schools promote the idea of teachers working collaboratively, yet many teachers and school leaders struggle with a collective reflection on practice (Holmstrom et al., 2015).

### **What Early Childhood Programs Can Do**

To ensure smooth and effective transitions for students and families, early childhood program leaders should analyze current practices and/or what they need to practice. Early learning leaders can form a collaborative team or a transition team of parents, teachers, administrators, and community staff whose members are directly affected by the transition (The National Center on Parent, Family, and Community, 2013). Childcare leaders can include team members that represent the different educational, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds of the community to help develop forms and activities that are accessible to everyone. School leaders should invest time in establishing and maintaining a collaborative school environment.

Leaders have a variety of responsibilities to develop and nurture teacher collaboration. First, leaders must spend substantial time on setting up teacher teams and establishing a school schedule to support meetings. However, once team structures are established, a leader's work continues (Edvestors, 2014). Second, leaders and experienced staff can train staff teachers on how to engage with families through transitions. Baker (2018) states that professional development for early childhood educators is an essential component of supporting a professional early childhood workforce. Yet research on ECE professional development

frequently centers on narrow fidelity data, while teachers' individual voices and teaching contexts are only rarely considered in order to understand teacher experiences with professional development initiatives (Baker, 2018). To ensure teachers are well-equipped in building relationships and engaging with families, professional development programs for staff should be conducted consistently (The National Center on Parent, Family, and Community, 2013).

Third, leaders should assemble a transition panel and host a panel discussion session with families. Convene a panel of experts who can address the specific strengths, questions, and needs of the program and community. Panelists can include parents of current or former kindergarten students, teachers from schools and ECE programs (including Head Start), administrators, and representatives from programs that support the unique needs of families (e.g., early intervention for children with special needs) (The National Center on Parent, Family, and Community, 2013).

Fourth, help families learn how to advocate for their children and access the appropriate resources. Staff can provide information to families about how to access extra support for themselves and their children from the infant classroom to kindergarten and offer opportunities for families to share their children's strengths and challenges with their new school. Lastly, develop community partnerships to address children's needs for transitions. Leaders should pursue partnerships with the local elementary school leaders. Working with partners in the community can help ensure children's physical, mental, and emotional health needs are met as they transition to kindergarten. Partnerships can, and should, be mutually beneficial. For example, during transition events, partners from "out-of-school time" organizations can talk to families about the importance of engaging children beyond the school day and use the opportunity to enroll students in their programs (The National Center on Parent, Family, and

Community, 2013). Similarly, libraries can use the partnership as a new avenue to help families learn about their community's educational programs (The National Center on Parent, Family, and Community, 2013).

### **Summary**

All children face some form of transitions which can be positive or challenging for many children and families; however, with intentional, collaborative strategies from teachers and their administrators, transitions can become an easier and smooth experience. A gap in the literature exists on early childhood teacher collaboration and child transitions. This study used the sociocultural theory as the foundation to explain the importance of teacher collaboration and may add to early childhood research to improve reflection and practice on how teacher collaboration supports smooth classroom transitions in early childhood settings.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

### Overview

Early learning educators play a major role in EHS and Head Start programs by building children's development, guiding children's learning, and preparing students for the next step through intentional planning and effective implementation of teacher collaboration. Teacher collaboration is a prime determinant of school improvement, and professional literature has provided strong evidence that collaboration works (Piercey, 2011). Although productive teacher collaborations have been identified in previous studies, there are few descriptive accounts explaining the detail of these collaborations and specifying conditions that enabled teachers to learn from each other (Gray & Ward, 2019). The purpose of this case study was to explore how EHS teachers collaborate with other educators to strengthen their teaching practices, build their knowledge, and support them in preparing students for their transition to another classroom. Case studies have often been viewed as a useful tool for the preliminary, exploratory stage of a research project and as a basis for the development of the 'more structured' tools that are necessary for surveys and experiments (Rowley, 2002).

A case study is a research strategy that often emerges as an obvious option for students and other new researchers who are seeking to undertake a modest scale research project based on their workplace or the comparison of a limited number of organizations. The most challenging aspect of applying case study research in this context is to lift the investigation from a descriptive account of 'what happens' to a piece of research that can lay claim to being worthwhile, if only modest addition to knowledge (Rowley, 2002). The purpose of Chapter Three was to present the procedures, research design, and analysis for the research pertaining to the present case study. This chapter provides the reader with the details of what occurred during the execution of the

research.

### **Design**

For this study, a qualitative case study was implemented because a qualitative study provides details of the process and enables researchers to understand how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In this study, the goal was to gain a deeper understanding of how teachers are collaborating to support students' transitions to the next level. Decades before the terms "qualitative research" or "qualitative inquiry" became popular, anthropologists and sociologists were asking questions about people's lives, the social and cultural contexts in which they lived, and the ways in which they understood their worlds (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Over time, researchers in many fields outside of the traditional disciplines of anthropology and sociology, such as education, health, administration, social work, etc., began to adopt qualitative methods. Today there are hundreds of books, journals, and guides on various aspects of qualitative research (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Case studies allow researchers to conduct an in-depth analysis of a case and to retain a holistic and real-world perspective while observing such varied topics as individual life cycles, small group behavior, organizational and managerial processes, neighborhood change, school performance, international relations, and the maturation of industries (Yin, 2018). Creswell (2018) defined a case study as a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information such as observations, interviews, audiovisual materials, and documents and reports. A qualitative approach was appropriate for this study because this case study provided an in-depth

understanding of a real-world case o in various EHS and Head Start programs and involved important contextual conditions pertinent to the case (Yin, 2018). Case study research has a long, distinguished history across many disciplines and is familiar to social scientists because of its frequent application in psychology, medicine, law, and political science (Creswell, 2018). An example of the historical use of the case study approach is found in the study conducted by Hamel, Dufour, and Fortin (1993) who traced the origin of modern social science case studies through anthropology and sociology. They cite anthropologist Malinowski's study of the Trobriand Islands, French sociologist LePlay's study of families, and the case studies of the University of Chicago Department of Sociology from the 1920s and 1930s through the 1950s as antecedents of qualitative case study research (Creswell, 2018). Presently many rely on Yin's (2018) current features of the case study approach that espoused both quantitative and qualitative approaches to case study development and discussed explanatory, exploratory, and descriptive qualitative studies.

The design approach used was a collective case study (Creswell, 2018). In this study, a collective case study approach was appropriate because the researcher selected multiple case studies to illustrate the issue (Creswell, 2018). For example, some teachers at one early childhood program may implement different collaborative practices than others to lead to findings on how teachers are preparing and implementing various transition strategies and supporting students with their transitions. Case studies may include multiple cases, in which multiple cases are described and compared to provide insight into an issue (Stake,1995). A case study researcher might examine several schools to illustrate alternative approaches to school choice for students (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).



A qualitative study was also chosen due to data being collected in the field at the site where participants collaborate and multiple methods were used, such as interviews and focus groups rather than relying on a single data source (Creswell, 2018). This design was chosen due to it being a suitable method for a more thorough examination of teachers' experiences with collaborating with other educators and the impact of the collaboration on students' transitions. The procedure for conducting and implementing a case study can include several procedures such as determining if a case study is appropriate for studying the research problem; identifying the intent of the study and selecting the case or cases, developing procedures for conducting the extensive data collection drawing on multiple data sources, specifying the analysis approach with which the case description integrates analysis themes and contextual information, and reporting the case study and lessons learned by using case assertions in written form (Creswell, 2018). Overall, a qualitative case study approach supported this study in exploring teacher collaboration to ensure students were supported for their transition.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do early learning teachers collaborate to prepare students for transitions to a classroom?
2. How do teachers collaborate with families to create a positive transition experience for students?
3. How do teachers utilize transition strategies to ensure a smooth transition for students?

### **Setting**

The setting for the research study was in Washington, D.C. at six childcare programs that serve children from the age of six weeks to five years old. Washington, D.C. population consists of 705,749 people, and has a racial demographic breakdown that is 46% White, 46% Black,

0.6% American Indian, 4.5% Asian, 0.1% Native Hawaiian, and 11.3% Hispanic or Latino (U.S. Census Bureau, 2019). There are also 362 center-based child development centers in Washington, D.C. (DC Office of the State Superintendent of Education, 2020). At the child-care centers, teachers are required to have the Child Development Associate (CDA) credential in infant, toddler, and preschool education, and they have different ranges of professional development and years of experience in early childhood teaching. The settings were chosen based on recruiting childcare programs that implement teacher collaboration and transition practices. The organizations are child-care centers that are required to follow the Office of the State Superintendent guidelines and ensure they are within compliance with the child-care and Head Start regulations. The organizational structure was as follows: each childcare center had an owner who manages the center director; the center director managed the assistant director, the teachers, administrative staff, bus driver, and food service manager who prepared the students meals throughout the day.

### **Participants**

An important step in the research process is to find people or places to study and to gain access to establish rapport with participants so that they will provide solid data (Creswell, 2018). However, in a case study, the researcher identified the case, the bounded system, or the unit of analysis investigated. Merriam (1988) stated that within every case there probably exist numerous sites that could be visited, events or activities that could be observed, people who could be interviewed, or documents that could be read. The researcher thus needs to consider where to observe, when to observe, whom to observe, and what to observe (Merriam, 1988). Moreover, sampling in field research involves the selection of a research site, time, people, and

events where the informants are chosen for being able to provide data that are most relevant to the study.

For this case study, the sample of teachers consisted of 12 early learning teachers that teach infants, toddlers, and preschoolers at various childcare centers in Washington, D.C. However, if a participant chose not to continue and to ensure the maximum requirement is met, the researcher allowed up to 15 teachers to participate. The teachers were chosen by intentionally sampling a group of people that could best inform the researcher about the research problem under examination (Creswell, 2018). Purposive sampling is based on the assumption that one wants to discover, understand, and gain insight; therefore, one needs to select a sample from which one can learn the most (Merriam, 1988). A mixed sample of male and female teachers of different ages, ethnicities, and teaching experience were welcomed. Pseudonyms were also used to ensure anonymity and confidentiality of all participants.

The researcher contacted numerous childcare directors and teachers in Washington, D.C. via email in an effort to recruit at least four teachers at three centers by using the My Child Care DC online directory, sharing the information word of mouth, and Facebook teacher groups as a recruitment guide. The email, message, or post included a recruitment letter and a recruitment flyer that included the details of the research, purpose, participant expectations, and the study process. Feedback from the directors and teachers helped the researcher identify centers that implemented teacher collaboration and transitions and identified early learning teachers to select as members of the case study. Once written approval was received from the directors, and teachers completed and sent their consent forms, the researcher contacted the teachers and directors to explain the next steps.

## Procedures

After identifying a research problem and building a problem statement, procedures for conducting the study included obtaining permission from the childcare center administrators and then approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix A) by completing the application, permission request (see Appendix B), and retrieving site approval (see Appendix C). To ensure approval from the IRB, the researcher ensured all of the necessary paperwork was submitted including the application and supplemental documents such as permission request letters, recruitment materials, consent form (see Appendix D), and any instruments used for the study. For data collection, other experts with experience in early childhood education and teacher collaboration reviewed the interview questions (see Appendix E) and focus group questions (see Appendix F) to ensure clarity of questions and wording. The anchoring in the literature, and the expert review, was conducted prior to the proposal to ensure the piloting requirements were completed after the IRB approval was received to collect data (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Once the IRB was approved, the additional steps included reviewing the literature to see if anything needed to be changed and to ensure the literature specified a purpose and research questions. Participants were elicited for the study by gathering data from early learning teachers at childcare centers that had the case that was most relevant to the study. Data collection was conducted through interviews, focus groups, and documents. The data was analyzed by examining notes and generating themes to lead to a conclusion by using a transcription service and reporting the research that addressed the “how” or “why” questions concerning the phenomenon of interest by documenting the findings (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In-depth details about the data collection process are explained in the Data Collection section.

### **The Researcher's Role**

My role as the “human instrument” in the study was to lead and conduct the study. The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I ensured that I do not have a personal or work relationship with the participants to avoid bias and ensure the safety and confidentiality of the participants and their data in order to support teachers in participating and sharing their experiences with teacher collaboration. My role in the setting was as an observer and note-taker. Qualitative researchers collect the data themselves through examining documents, observing behavior, and interviewing participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). However, the human instrument has shortcomings and biases that can have an impact on the study (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The bias that I brought to the study was having past experiences working with teachers who are from Southeast Washington, D.C., and assuming all teachers from specific areas share similar teaching practices. To address potential bias, I consistently practiced self-reflection through journaling, I reflected on any biases that could influence how I viewed the data or conducted my analysis, and to ensure so, I had someone follow-up and peer-review the data to minimize any possible bias throughout the process. As opposed to trying to eliminate these biases or subjectivities, it is important to identify them and monitor them in relation to the theoretical framework and in light of the researchers own interests, to make clear how they may be shaping the collection and interpretation of data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

### **Data Collection**

A critical aspect of qualitative inquiry is rigorous and varied data collection techniques. Before data collection can take place, Yin (2018) shared that preparing for data collection can be complex; and if not done well, the entire case can be jeopardized. Before data collection can

take place, preparation for collection must begin with training for a specific case study, developing a protocol for the study, screening candidate cases, and conducting a pilot case study (Yin, 2018). Yin (2018) asserted that success with these five preparations would ensure that data collection will proceed smoothly. Once these steps are addressed, case study evidence can come from at least six sources: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observations, participant observation, and physical artifacts (Yin, 2018). Using these six sources calls for researchers to master different data collection procedures.

### **Interviews**

After teachers from various childcare centers responded to the recruitment flyer, agreed to participate in the study, and approval was received from the IRB, the researcher scheduled the interviews through a scheduling website known as Calendly. The researcher provided a link for each participant via email to choose a time slot to conduct their interview. Once the participants chose a day and time, they received a confirmation email, and the researcher was also informed of the scheduled interview via email. The researcher conducted what Yin (2018) referred to as a shorter case study interview; rather than occurring over an extended period of time or over several sittings, many case study interviews may be more focused and take only about one hour. The interview took place over the phone and was recorded for accuracy (with prior consent). Audio recordings provided a more accurate rendition of an interview than the researcher writing notes (Yin, 2018). The questions were peer-reviewed and tested prior to implementation for reliability, one-hour was allotted for the interview, and the researcher stayed respectful of the interviewee throughout the process.

The data were collected from teachers who collaborated with their co-teachers to prepare for student transitions. This process was done by asking open-ended questions to gather data that

led to descriptions of the experiences and an understanding of the common experiences of the participants (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). This process also allowed the researcher to learn and understand teachers' experiences in-depth with teacher collaboration. The researcher also corroborated views by asking about them in more than one way or on more than a single occasion in hope to receive a consistent set of responses (Yin, 2018).

In addition, standard open-ended questions were used, which means respondents were asked the same questions and they reduced interviewer effects and bias when several interviewers were used (Patton, 2002). The various types of questions permit evaluation users to see and review the instrumentation used in the evaluation and facilitate organization and analysis of the data (Patton, 2002).

#### Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself and share what age group you teach.
2. How many years have you been teaching infants and/or toddlers?
3. How long have you collaborated with other early learning educators?
4. Based on your knowledge, what is teacher collaboration?
5. Please share your overall experience with teacher collaboration with other early learning educators.
6. What situations have influenced or affected, in a positive or negative way, your experiences with teacher collaboration?
7. How do you include the child's family in the transition process?
8. If I attended a teacher collaboration meeting with you, what would I observe?
9. What effects have teacher collaboration had on your ability to implement effective transition strategies?

10. How do teachers develop goals during collaboration meetings?
11. What does a typical classroom transition look like for a child at your childcare center?
12. What does the program currently do to support teacher collaboration?
13. What would you like to see more of at your child-care center when it comes to teacher collaboration?
14. What additional information can you add about your own collaborative experiences?
15. This is the last question; I truly appreciate the time you've given to this. What do you think needs to be improved when it comes to teacher collaboration and classroom transitions at your center?

Questions one through three are considered background and demographic questions to help the interviewer locate the respondent in relation to other people and asking open-ended rather than a closed-ended manner elicits the respondent's own categorical worldview (Patton, 2002).

Question four encouraged the teachers to share their knowledge of teacher collaboration.

Knowledge questions inquire about the respondent's factual information, what the respondent knows (Patton 2002). In addition, Question five is an open-ended question that encouraged the teacher to expound on their experience with collaborating with other early learning educators.

Question six compelled the teachers to share whether they have had a positive or negative experience with collaboration. This question helped the researcher learn how and why teachers implement transition practices.

Questions seven sought to learn how teachers communicate and provide support to families as they prepare the children for the transition. Question eight encouraged the teachers to share what their teacher collaboration meeting includes. This question helped the researcher learn what practices the childcare has in place. Question nine was to see if teachers were using



their collaboration with teachers to plan and guide their transition strategies. Question 10 explored whether goals were set during their collaboration meetings or not. This helped the researcher learn when transition goals were set. Question 11 aimed to learn more about the transition strategies that educators use to support children with their classroom transition. Questions five-11 inquired what a person does or has done to elicit behavior, experiences, actions, and activities that would have been observable had the observer been present (Patton, 2002). Furthermore, Questions 11 and 12 invited the participant to provide insight on what could improve the teacher collaboration practices. The teacher's answers supported future recommendations to educational leaders and administrators on how to improve teacher collaboration practices. Questions 11 and 12 were also aimed at understanding the cognitive and interpretive processes of people asked about opinions, judgments, and values. Answers to these questions indicated what people thought about some experience or issue. They denote people's goals, intentions, desires, and expectations (Patton, 2002).

Lastly, when concluding the interview, the interviewer provided some closure for the interview, and left the respondent feeling empowered, listened to, or otherwise glad that they participated (Harvard University, 2013). The last question was also called a one-shot question (Patton, 2015), designed to give the participant one further opportunity to offer valuable insight. This one-shot question also served as the closing question (Patton, 2015), giving the participant freedom to add to what had already been said and kept him or her in the role of expert on his or her own experience.

### **Focus Groups**

The focus group procedure called for one to recruit and convene a small group of persons (Yin, 2018). Focus groups are advantageous when the interaction among interviewees will likely

yield the best information, when interviewees are similar and cooperative with each other, when it is time to collect information is limited, and when individuals interviewed one-on-one may be hesitant to provide information (Creswell & Poth, 2018). For this study, the researcher recorded and moderated two discussions virtually with at least six people by asking a small number of questions for teacher collaboration and transition practices at the childcare centers, to elicit responses from each person in the group (Yin, 2018). The focus groups provided interaction among interviewees, collection of extensive data, and participation by all individuals in a group (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

#### Focus Group Questions

1. Why do you think teacher collaboration is vital for students to have smooth classroom transitions?
2. What procedures are in place at your center that either facilitate or detract from productive collaboration?
3. Through your teaching experience, what are some effective strategies that educators can use to support children in having a smooth classroom transition?
4. For those of you who collaborate with others to support children's classroom transitions, what processes are in place at your childcare center to ensure the child's family is involved?

Question 1 encouraged the participants to share their knowledge on the importance of teacher collaboration and child transitions. Question 2 helped the researcher learn the procedures in place that encourage or fail to support teacher collaboration. Question 3 was to learn more about the teachers transition strategies that they use to support children with their classroom transition. Lastly, the focus group concluded with Question 4, which encouraged the teachers to share their

processes on family involvement and classroom transitions. Once the discussion was complete the researcher shared and summarized the teachers answers and allowed teachers to either confirm or correct the researchers understanding of their perspectives to ensure the information was accurate. The researcher then thanked the teachers for their time and informed them of the next steps in the data collection process.

### **Document Analysis**

Since teachers use various documents, documents that teachers use to share with other teachers were analyzed. Based on the Family and Educational Rights and Privacy regulations (FERPA),

An educational agency or institution may disclose personally identifiable information from an education record only on the condition that the party to whom the information is disclosed will not disclose the information to any other party without the prior consent of the parent or eligible student. (U.S. Department of Education, 2011, p.31)

With prior approval, transition plans were collected. Transition plans were reviewed to observe the center's use of documentation to prepare and document their steps in conducting transitions. This documentation was chosen to help the researcher learn how the teachers communicate, learn the center's collaboration systems, and learn additional information that was shared amongst the educators. Overall, the documentation helped support this case study by retrieving stable documents that were reviewed repeatedly, having specific documents that contain the exact names, references, and details of an event and having broad information that can cover a long span of time, many events, and many settings (Yin, 2018). Although centers use different types of transition forms, the researcher reviewed the transition forms to examine the centers' communication efforts between teachers and the child's parents or guardians, documentation for

when and if a child visits a classroom before their classroom transition, any goals or individual plans for the child's new or current teacher, and planned transition activities.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis for the research study included organizing and preparing the data for analysis using the data collection method. Case study research can free researchers from being constrained by overly restrictive rules; researchers can analyze data by having a combination of procedures, such as examining, categorizing, tabulating, testing, or recombining evidence (Yin, 2018). The data analysis steps for this case study included scheduling and recording interviews with the participating teachers to learn more about the childcare's collaboration practices and transition practices, conducting the focus group, and retrieving transition documents.

Each interview was recorded with a voice recorder on a laptop, and the interviews were transcribed using Word Transcription. Once the interviews were recorded, transcripts were reviewed from each interview for analysis. After conducting interviews, transition documents were analyzed and focus groups were conducted on Zoom.

In addition, once the interviews were complete, I entered the information into different arrays, reflected on different themes, made a matrix of contrasting categories (e.g., infant transition to a toddler classroom versus toddler transitions to preschool, etc.), tabulated the frequency of different events (e.g., how often transitions took place, how often teachers communicated to support transitions), and arranged the information in chronological order (the transition plan steps at each center) (Yin, 2018). To effectively code the data into themes, NVivo was used, which is a qualitative data analysis (QDA) computer software package designed for research. The software allows users to classify, sort, and arrange information; examine relationships in the data; and combine analysis with linking, shaping, searching, and

modeling. A code in qualitative research is a word or phrase that summarizes or captures the essence of a portion of data. Coding is the analytical process of categorizing data. Christians, Clifford, and Carey (1989) suggested coding is the data analysis process that breaks the text down into the smallest units and reorganizes these units into relatable stories.

In NVivo, coding is the process of gathering related material into a container called a node. When a node is opened, one can see all the references in the project coded to the node. There are several types of codes in NVivo. Theme nodes are codes that represent the themes or topics that one finds in their data. Relationships record the connection between two project items, and sentiment codes are positive and negative nodes created by auto coding of sentiment. NVivo supports deductive (pre-set coding scheme, often based on emerging themes from a literature review) and inductive (codes generated while examining the collected data) approaches to coding. Inductive approaches to coding were used for this study in an effort to develop codes that led to themes.

The researcher read through the data, coded the interview and focus group data line by line, put similar codes into the same categories and moved them around in order to find out a way that reflects the best analysis. By analyzing and sorting the codes into categories, the researcher was able to detect consistent and overarching themes for the data. The categorization of data reflected themes and supported the researcher in explaining the data. The researcher then attended to all the evidence collected, investigated plausible rival interpretations, addressed the most significant aspects of the case study, and demonstrated a familiarity with the prevailing thinking and literature about the case study topic (Yin, 2018).

To verify the validity of the data and analyze each set of data, at the beginning of the study, biases values, and experiences were clarified, so the reader could understand the

researchers' position from which the researcher was conducted (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Next, evidence was corroborated through triangulation with multiple data sources, by reviewing interview notes to see how they aligned with the HSPPS and early childhood theories to make use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

After corroborating the evidence, participants' views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations were solicited, which is considered member checking. Member checking provided a way for the researcher to ensure the accurate portrayal of participant voices by allowing participants the opportunity to confirm or deny the accuracy and interpretations of data, thus adding credibility to the qualitative study (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Lincoln & Guba, 1986; Stake, 1995). Member checking was conducted by sharing the interview transcripts with the interviewee and focus group participants to review for accuracy to ensure the information was credible and trustworthy. Stake (1995) asserted participants should "play a major role in directing as well as acting in case study" research (p. 115). Lastly, from a reviewer's lens, a peer that is familiar with the research or the study, reviewed the data and research process. Lincoln and Guba (1986) define the role of the peer reviewer as a "devil's advocate," which is an individual who keeps the researcher honest, asks hard questions about methods, meanings, and interpretations, and provides the researcher with the opportunity for catharsis by sympathetically listening to the researcher's feelings.

### **Trustworthiness**

In qualitative studies, trustworthiness is more obscure because it is put in different terms. Trustworthiness addresses credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability. Since qualitative researchers do not use instruments with established metrics about validity and

reliability, it is pertinent to address how qualitative researchers establish that the research study's findings are credible, transferable, confirmable, and dependable (Statistics, 2019). To ensure trustworthiness in this study, the researcher exposed subjectivity to the participants and future readers. The researcher's background was described, including what led to a career and research topic to build trustworthiness. Member checks were utilized to check the accuracy of the study, and triangulation was conducted, which included corroborating evidence from different individuals, types of data, or methods of data collection in descriptions and themes in qualitative research (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

Data triangulation helped strengthen the construct validity in the case study (Yin, 2018). Patton (2015) encouraged researchers to conduct data triangulation by collecting information from multiple sources that can corroborate the same finding. The use of evidence from multiple sources increased confidence that the study rendered the event accurately (Yin, 2018). The methods used were helpful and important because they increased the validity of the researcher's findings, helped the reader consider how various data sources can be used in tandem when planning the study, and enabled the researcher to use the evidence of corroboration as insights in the interpretation and writing (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In addition, enriched interviews addressed above supported the crystallization of data (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). Lastly, self-reflection journals were used in the study to note and assess the researcher's subjectivities within the research process. Reflecting on subjectivity assisted the researcher in interacting with participants and limiting personal influences in the study.

### **Credibility**

Credibility refers to the extent to which the findings accurately describe reality. Credibility (the qualitative counterpart to internal validity) can be established using multiple

approaches, such as checking the accuracy of the data and interpretation with participants in a project or through developing themes and codes using multiple data sources (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). To ensure credibility in this study, the accuracy of the data was checked by peers, and triangulation was implemented by testing one source of data against another looking for patterns of thought and behavior and focusing in on key events (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Credibility is also how confident the qualitative researcher is in the truth of the research study's findings which boils down to the question of, "How do you know that your findings are true and accurate?" Researchers must ensure their findings are accurate, or the research is not effective (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Yin (2018) addressed internal validity by providing the following case study tactic: do pattern matching, do explanation building, address rival explanations, and use logic models. All of these tactics are necessary to avoid threats to internal validity.

### **Dependability and Confirmability**

Dependability and confirmability are similar to reliability in quantitative studies and deal with consistency, which is addressed through the provision of rich detail about the context and setting of the study. Dependability enables one to repeat a study by using overlapping methods and in-depth methodological descriptions of the admitting biases and assumptions and acknowledging limitations in the study's methods (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019). It is the extent that the study can be repeated by other researchers and that the findings would be consistent. To follow this procedure in case study research means studying the same case over again, not just replicating the results of the original case study by studying another case (Yin, 2018). To ensure dependability and conformability, this case study's procedures were as explicit as possible, so someone can conduct the study as if someone else were doing the same study. Therefore, an inquiry audit was used in order to establish dependability, which required an



outside person to review and examine the research process and the data analysis in order to ensure that the findings were consistent and could be repeated (Statistics, 2019). The overall goal of reliability was to minimize the errors and biases in the study (Yin, 2018).

### **Transferability**

Lastly, transferability (external validity) is how the qualitative researcher demonstrates that the research study's findings are applicable to other contexts. In a case study, external validity deals with the problem of knowing whether a study's findings are generalizable beyond the immediate study (Yin, 2018). To ensure external validity, it will start with the form of the questions. Yin (2018) asserted, "The form of the questions can help or hinder the preference for seeking generalizations that is striving for external validity" (p. 45). The form of the initial research questions ("how" and "why") could directly influence the strategies in having external validity, and in this collective case study, the logic was replicated to ensure external validity. Each case must be carefully selected so that it predicts similar or predicts contrasting results but for anticipatable reasons (a theoretical replication) (Yin, 2018). Explicit attention was given to the potential flaws, and any analytic generalizations from the case study were discussed. To ensure transferability, details on the procedures at each childcare center was provided and supported with other recent research to follow-up on the information provided.

### **Ethical Considerations**

To ensure confidentiality of the teachers and any additional information, participant pseudonyms were utilized, and data from interviews, focus groups, documents, etc. were locked in a filing cabinet during the study so no one but the researcher could access it for the duration of the study. The researcher will have the data in a locked filing cabinet for three years and will shred and discard all of the data collected after three years. The participant researcher remained

open with the other participants in the study. Being honest and overt with participants demonstrated positive rapport initiatives and transparency in the research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Member checks allowed participants to review their written responses in interviews for accuracy before final drafts were submitted. In addition, teachers choosing not to participate during the study or at the last minute were addressed at the beginning of the research by reaching out to more than enough participants at the beginning that could be contacted if other participants decided to decline (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019).

### **Summary**

The goal of this chapter was to outline the research methods used to answer the research questions. Chapter three provided a thorough analysis of the procedures, research design, study participants, data collection methods, and how to analyze the data in order to conduct the qualitative case study. A qualitative case study was used to explore an in-depth understanding of a real-world case or cases in various EHS and Head Start programs on teacher collaboration practices to prepare students for classroom transitions. Teachers contributed to this study by sharing their collaboration practices.

## **CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this collective case study was to examine how early learning teachers collaborate to create successful transitions when it is time for a student to transition to the next classroom. This chapter provides information regarding data analysis and the findings from this study. Data were collected utilizing interviews, focus groups, and documents. The interviews included 15 open-ended questions, and the focus groups included four open-ended questions. Documents were created by each childcare center administration to support transition planning as transition services are a requirement from the Head Start Program Performance Standards (HSPPS). This chapter begins with demographic information for the participants. Quotes from participants are presented verbatim, and a description of the documents are followed by codes and themes and results from the study. This chapter concludes by providing answers to the research questions.

### **Participants**

The participants for this study were 12 early learning teachers that teach infant, toddler, and or preschool children at an early learning childcare center in Washington, D.C. These participants represented years of experience in the field of early childhood education ranging from one year to over thirty years. The study consisted of one male and eleven females, and all of the participants were African American. The insights and perspectives of the teachers added clarity and understanding to the investigation of how teacher collaboration and classroom transitions correlate. All of the 12 participants completed the interviews, and 10 participants participated in the focus groups. There were two focus groups which consisted of four attendees for the first focus group and six attendees for the second group. All of the participants were

given pseudonyms to protect their identities. Participants were solicited using purposive sampling.

### **Ms. Gains**

Ms. Gains is a toddler teacher and has been teaching for 16 years. She has a vibrant personality and values teacher collaboration. She shared that she has had more good experiences with teacher collaboration and supporting students with their classroom transitions than negative.

Ms. Gains shared that:

My positive experience is being a part of different programs that help me become a better teacher and learner. So example, like the Quality Improvement Network Hub program as well as I'm a part of the Fellowship program with my school, and I meet with teachers every Monday and some different sites and different areas, so I deal with different teachers at child care centers as well as teachers in a school system, so umm it's good to be able to learn from other people, piggy back, give your opinion, some people are understanding of where you're coming from and understanding what you're saying. My negative, I really don't have much of a negative, even if people don't want to take in what others are saying, you know, don't want to be a, what's the word? Like people don't want to...you know some people are stuck in their ways, they don't want to change but that really doesn't affect me too much, it can be very nerve wrecking, but stuff like that doesn't really bother me. I know how to work around things, so I really don't have too much of a negative. I have more positive than anything.

Ms. Gains loves collaborating with other educators and is committed to doing the best for her students.

### **Mr. Hayes**

Mr. Hayes has been teaching infants and toddlers for six years and has collaborated with other educators for eight years. He strives to be a good male role model in the children's lives, as for some, Mr. Hayes is like a father figure to them. In the interview, he expounded on teacher collaboration and how educators can collaborate on various topics such as, "how to create lesson plans together, practice diaper changing strategies, hand-washing strategies, and toothbrushing strategies." In addition, being in school to pursue his Associate of Arts (AA) degree in education has taught him the importance of staying positive in order to work well with others, brainstorm ideas and being open to asking questions such as, "What does this look like in your center?" and feeling confident in sharing how he implements strategies in his classroom. Mr. Hayes reiterated the importance of staying positive when collaborating with other educators and helping students' transition. He shared, "When you communicate with the child what to expect, and you stay positive, it will help them transition smoothly."

**Ms. Mayor**

Ms. Mayor is a teacher of two- year-olds and has been teaching infants and toddlers and collaborating with educators for 20 years. Ms. Mayor loves to learn and connect with other educators. She discussed the importance of teachers staying mindful of being the best for the child. She shared that she had a negative collaborative experience with another teacher where a teacher was not ready for a child to transition out of the classroom, and Ms. Mayor felt the teacher needed to be more considerate of what was best for the child. She also reiterated the importance of communicating consistently by sitting down with other early learning educators and discussing what the child likes, and their dislikes to gain more information on their needs. Ms. Mayor explained, "When a child comes to my classroom, and the child becomes upset, I would know how to console the child from what the teacher had told me when they were

collaborating." Consistent communication, learning how to be helpful, and doing what is best for the child is what Ms. Mayor believes is most effective in helping a child have a successful transition.

### **Ms. Jordan**

Ms. Jordan is an infant and toddler teacher that has been teaching for 13 years. She participates in the various professional development training opportunities offered at the school to help build her early childhood knowledge. Ms. Jordan brought a lot of attention to individualizing planning for each child and providing support to families in her interview. During collaboration meetings, she shared one might observe teachers sharing information about the kids or individualized planning for each child. Teachers share observations to talk about the areas that the child may need the most support in order to come up with individualized planning and collaborate with each other. In addition, prior to the transition, she normally talks to the parents and inform them that their child is of age to transition. She shared that teachers have parent-teacher conferences with parents to let them know how they are planning to transition and inquires if the family needs support. Teachers also connect with the family services team to support the families with resources. Ms. Jordan's view on collaboration includes sharing information, individualized planning, and family support.

### **Ms. Neal**

Ms. Neal is a toddler teacher who teaches two to three- year- old's. She is also pursuing her AA degree in preschool education and has been teaching infants, toddlers, and preschoolers for 30 years. Her experience also includes teaching in the public school system. Through 30 years of teaching, Ms. Neal shared the pros and cons to teacher collaboration. One pro was

working as a team, for example, as one child may have a problem another teacher might work better with that child so:

We'll say, "Ms. so and so" and she'll say, "I got it." We try to work as a team and find out what's going on with the child and if I'm not there, I leave instructions, so we try to work together to ensure she's doing the same thing for the child to help them move on to the next grade.

In addition, an unfortunate con she shared was connecting with teachers who really do not have a heart for the children, "Some teachers are just there for the money and umm, then that is when it becomes a problem, their mind isn't on the good of the child. You realize this teacher does not really care about the child, whether they progress or not." Ms. Neal is a team player and firmly believes teamwork is the key to teacher collaboration. She concluded her interview with, "If you don't work as a team, it's not gonna work."

### **Ms. Raul**

Ms. Raul teaches infants and toddlers and has been teaching and collaborating with educators for over 20 years. Ms. Raul is an advocate for teacher collaboration, not only with co-teachers, but specialists, families, therapists, etc. When asked about how collaboration has supported her transition strategies, she shared:

It's very positive because I feel that two are better than one, so working with collaboration and when I say collaboration not only co-teacher but your supervisor, your coach, umm your learning team, you get ideas that maybe you didn't get in the moment because sometimes the children do things at home that we have no idea that they can do or have a hard time doing. So, working in collaboration is a very big piece in the infant and toddler environment and learning abilities.

She believes repetition and consistency with children and building goals with families are vital to start creating a great environment for the child to develop and learn.

### **Ms. Brighton**

Ms. Brighton teaches older toddlers and has been teaching and collaborating with educators for over 20 years. Ms. Brighton is a huge supporter of cohesiveness amongst educators. She believes teacher collaboration should not stop between teachers whose students will transition to the next classroom or next level. For example, if a child has been enrolled in the school since infancy, teachers from every developmental and age level should collaborate to learn how they supported the student's development so that the transition will be effective and consistent for the children. She also noticed many families do not utilize the various resources provided to them due to lack of knowledge or fear of stereotypes, so she strives to be the bridge for not only her students but families as well.

### **Ms. Claiborne**

Ms. Claiborne is new to early childhood and has been teaching infants and toddlers for one year. Although she is new to the field, she has an eager spirit of learning and has gained different experiences with teacher collaboration. She has realized that teaching styles are not always similar and has learned to accept that some teachers are different in their teaching practices. Some teachers may be more structured, and some are more lax in their teaching structure. If a child is not used to being on a routine, a lax structure can affect the child transitions and experiences if they are going to a classroom that is more structured. She encouraged teachers to gain knowledge of the classroom structure that the child is coming from and meet the child where they are developmentally by learning more about them. In addition,



she expressed a deep understanding of the importance of teacher collaboration and classroom transitions by sharing:

Teacher collaboration for me is working together and also sharing ideas and methods, so children can learn how to adapt to their environment as well as learn new knowledge, but it's also in effort to help them grow, and teaching each other how we can help students develop properly.

Ms. Claiborne has gained an understanding that although there are teachers with different teaching styles, teacher collaboration is still possible if the student's best interest is the goal.

### **Ms. Paiton**

Ms. Paiton teaches pre-k children ages four to five and has been teaching and collaborating with other educators for five years. She is confident in her philosophy on an effective transition. One teacher collaboration discussion led the teaching team to an issue, which was time management. They noticed that their classroom transitions were taking too long. Children would become confused because the transitions would last for weeks going from one classroom to another, or teachers would make the farewell stressful for the children, so they collaborated and brainstormed on what might be better for the students. They decided instead of drawing the transitions out longer, they should conduct it in a week, and they discovered it was a better plan for the students. Ms. Paiton's perspective on the transition process is for teachers to be mindful of how impactful a transition can be for a child and taking that into consideration when collaborating and preparing a child for a classroom transition.

### **Ms. Douglass**

Ms. Douglass is a teacher of infants, and she has been teaching and collaborating with educators for three years. Ms. Douglass has a calm demeanor and uses it to nurture and cater to

her infant students and prepare them for the toddler stage. She participates in various professional development training opportunities offered at the school to help build her early childhood knowledge. She emphasized fairness and how important that was to her when working with other educators. Also, she has found that coming to an agreement during collaboration can be helpful in order to support classroom transitions and stay focused on what is best for each individual child. In order to have effective teacher collaboration, she mentioned, "One must be open-minded, really listen to what the other person is saying, and accept that your way is not the only way."

### **Ms. Austin**

Ms. Austin teaches pre-k children ages four and five and has taught toddlers and preschoolers for over 30 years. She also has experience in various early childhood sectors within the Washington, D.C. metropolitan area. Ms. Austin has a vibrant personality and is confident in her expertise. She also loves sharing her wealth of knowledge on her teacher collaboration and classroom transition experiences. It is important to her to collaborate with her co-teachers. She shared jokingly when she first started teaching, she did not know they were collaborating. She reminisced on a time when teacher collaboration was not as popular as it is now, but now she reiterates, "When you have other educators in the classroom there should be a lot of collaboration going on." When collaborating with others, her mindset is, "Teamwork, goals, getting to know a person, strategizing, improving our work, getting the child to the next level, sharing visions and goals, consistency, and ownership."

### **Ms. James**

Ms. James is an infant teacher and has been teaching and collaborating with educators for five years. To support her teaching practices, she participates in professional development days,

planning time, and staff meetings monthly. Ms. James is soft-spoken but provides precise understanding and expectations when it comes to her teacher collaboration and classroom transitions. When asked what situations have influenced or affected her experiences with teacher collaboration in a positive or negative way, she shared, "When there's no cooperation, that affects the collaboration when working with someone who doesn't want to cooperate." She provided straight and to the point answers and echoed the need for teachers to be open-minded so that everyone can be on one accord and work together for the good of the students.

### **Results**

The research results from this qualitative case study were derived from analysis of data collected from interviews, focus groups, and documents. Early Head Start and Head Start teachers were interviewed and asked to participate in one of two focus groups. In order to lead to results, interview and focus group data were coded into categories to support the process of analysis. Research participants were also asked to provide any transition documents or guidelines that were used in a classroom transition to support the data analysis. By analyzing and sorting the codes into categories, six consistent and overarching themes emerged.

### **Theme Development**

There was a total of 12 research participants from six early childhood programs in Washington, D.C. Data collection began with scheduling interviews through a scheduling website known as Calendly. The researcher provided a link for each participant via email to choose a time slot to conduct their interview. Once the participants chose a day and time, they received a confirmation email, and the researcher was also informed of the scheduled interview via email. Each interview consisted of 15 interview questions in an effort to learn about early learning teacher collaboration and teachers' classroom transition practices that supported

students with classroom transitions. All of the 12 participants participated in the interviews, and 10 participants attended the focus groups. One of the participants had a medical emergency and could not attend either of the focus groups. Another participant informed the researcher that they were not going to be able to attend and was unable to reschedule. Each interview took place over the phone, was recorded with a voice recorder, and the interviews were transcribed verbatim using Microsoft Word Transcription. Once the interviews were recorded, the researcher listened and reviewed the transcripts from each interview for analysis. At the end of each individual interview, participants were asked to provide a copy of any transition documents (if they used any) that they used in preparation and planning for a classroom transition. Only three out of the six early childhood school transition documents were provided. Within a week of each interview, the researcher provided the transcript to the participants to member check; participants were asked to engage in member-checking to ensure the accuracy and completeness of their statements made in the report (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Once all of the interviews were completed, and the participants approved their interview transcript, the researcher conducted two focus groups via Zoom. The focus groups were also scheduled through Calendly. Participants were informed a week in advance that two focus groups would take place and were encouraged to attend one. Two focus groups, with a maximum of six participants each, were scheduled to solicit the views of each person in the group (Yin, 2018). One focus group consisted of four participants and the other six participants. Each focus group entailed an open discussion on four open-ended questions in an effort to encourage collaboration and gain a deeper understanding of teachers' collaboration and transition practices.

After the data collection process was complete, the researcher began data analysis by reading each interview transcript multiple times and completing the coding process using NVivo. Preliminary creations such as arrays, displays, and tabulations helped move the researcher toward a general analytic strategy (Yin, 2018). The analytic process consisted of highlighting each interview line and providing descriptive codes for each line in NVivo to aggregate and directly interpret patterns and themes within each case and across each case (Stake, 1995). The researcher then went down the elaborate list of codes, searching for patterns, frequencies, similarities, and differences, which led to putting each description into sub-themes. After reviewing the sub-themes, the researcher narrowed the sub-themes into themes by pondering emerging questions. For example, if a code was respectful interactions with one another (i.e., subtheme respectful interactions), and another was candid communications among stakeholders (i.e., subtheme candid communications), the researcher narrowed that data down by asking, "what are these codes portraying as a whole," which led to "Fostering Relationships" as the theme (Yin, 2018).

Data from each collection method were clearly and meaningfully integrated into theme development. Codes are presented in a meaningful table to demonstrate how they were organized to inform themes. Table 1 provides a detailed list of the codes that led to six themes.

**Table 1**

*Codes Leading to Themes*

Codes	Themes
Avoid misunderstandings and conflict Meet regularly to plan next steps for students Brainstorm ideas Develop goals, discuss met goals, progress towards goals, and goals needed Review child data Work together to collaborate on transitions Ask questions and provide advice Reflect on what is working and what is not Current teacher and new teacher meet Discuss a student's likes and dislikes	Communication Amongst Educators

Build relationships with family Conduct home visits and parent teacher conferences Create transition plans with the family Seek advice and feedback from family Keep parent informed of progress	Communication with Parents and Guardians
More communication on expectations More consistency amongst teachers More family involvement More time to plan More open-mindedness amongst teachers Unaware of a transition document	Improvement Needed
Helpful feedback Learn from others Consistent communication for the better of the child Positive affect on collaboration practices Gain tips to improve skills	Positive Teacher Collaboration Experiences
Administrators encourage collaboration Teacher mentorship Professional development, planning time, and monthly meetings Educational resources provided Teacher incentives Weekly meetings	Program Support
Transition documents Meet regularly Communicate consistently Include family Communicate with child Transition steps	Transition Strategies

**Theme 1: Communication Amongst Educators.** All of the participants expounded on the importance of communication in order to have effective teacher collaboration and successful classroom transitions. Some favored communication because of positive collaborative experiences, but Ms. Mayor shared, "To me, it always goes back communication, communication, communication, it is because I have had a negative experience where the teacher I guess she wasn't happy at the fact that the child was leaving her class and coming to mine." Due to her experience, she learned the importance of communication. When communication is present, it can help participants avoid misunderstandings and conflict, which helps make teacher collaboration effective and a positive experience for teachers. In addition, all of the participants asserted, in order for communication to take place, they meet regularly to plan, whether it was

during nap-time or a set planning time. Ms. Raul shared, "We meet weekly to plan for each individual child and based on observation in according to the screening that we do with the children. We meet and plan the next steps that we need to for each individual child." Some shared they meet weekly, and others meet daily. If Ms. Austin and her team see something, instead of just holding it, "We try to meet an hour each day to do our lesson plans and things like that if we see something, try to write it down so when we do meet with each other we do not forget it." It was evident that teachers' meetings were taking place, and when asked to expound on the topics that were discussed during these meetings, various topics were shared. One that stood out the most was the importance of discussing the child. For example, Ms. Claiborne highlighted:

If both teachers have experience with that child we'll both bounce certain things that we've observed from that child off of one another while asking certain questions, ask them are they progressing in the classroom with you and then we'll also you know just ask about the home life if anything has changed during that time. Pretty much asking each other what did you notice within this child, have things been different that you notice, and if they've been moving up with their developmental needs at all.

Ms. Mayor gave a similar response:

I sit down with the new early learning educator and discuss what the child likes what he or she dislike, to get more familiar, even though I would do it with the parents but I will get some more information, more feedback from the other educators to see what is best and see how we can help the child with success and transition to the next class.

Most of the participants shared similar insights on the importance of learning the child in order to support the child with the next steps, and meeting with the new teacher regularly.

Goal setting was another prevalent response, and participants shared different methods that they use to discuss goals. Ms. Paiton provided an example of setting goals to help her two-year-old's transition to the three-year-old classroom:

So we start them on potty training, if they're going to the three-year-old's class and they are not fully potty trained yet, we'll start working with them on potty training like a couple months before they go to the 3 year old class by discussing the steps, practicing during toilet time, and sending activities home to the parents, so they can be prepared for the teachers that will receive them and learn toilet skills.

Goal setting for Ms. Douglass and her colleagues include discussing where the child is currently by comparing observation notes and assessments and discussing if the child meets the widely held expectations for their age before transitioning. Moreover, Ms. Raul and her team ask each other questions such as, "What did you see, what did you discuss with the parents, is it anything we need to work on, what goals have the child met, what's the next steps that we're going to take for this particular child, what will this look like?" Participants revealed that goal setting can be conducted in various ways.

One of the most profound responses concerning the theme of communication amongst educators was asking one another questions. Group reflection also helped lead the teachers to answers in order to support students in their transitions. Asking questions for Ms. Austin was more team focused, "I saw that you couldn't get this, how can I do this, let's do it like this the next time, how could I have done a little better, or why didn't I do this, but you have to be flexible, know your children, know your team and say okay this is not working." As for Ms. Mayor, asking questions and reflection was more child focused, for example:



I'll ask, what can we do that she likes there that we can do in another area. So say if we notice that in the dramatic play area she likes sorting and counting the fruits and vegetables, so we can have a game we'll do something to help her and show her sorting in different areas that will build her horizon of different areas that she can play in. Also, if we notice that a child is feeling a certain way and say I notice something right before nap time, such and such starts to get upset, so what can we do to help them feel better when it's time for a nap? And what we'll do, come up with an idea that will help them to make them feel better, and maybe sometimes all they need is a little bit of soft music and someone sitting next to them. We will come up with strategies or something to provide that we found out is best for the child.

In addition, one of the participants shared that her questions are team and child-focused at times, but they ask questions to learn about the teachers teaching styles to be mindful of what the child was accustomed to or is transitioning into. Ms. Claiborne shared:

So one thing that I have noticed is some teachers is just totally completely different. Some of us we may be a little more structured or some are much more lax and that's one thing that I have noticed that will you know kind of effect like you know how like I help a child transition, so if the child isn't used to you know being on a routine that'll really affect the child transition but if anything was collaborating with other teachers is just more so you have to gain a better knowledge of how that child structure was in that first classroom.

Asking questions was approached differently and eluded that teachers ask different types of questions based on what is needed for the team and best for the child.

**Theme 2: Communication with Parents and Guardians.** Out of all of the themes, all of the participants expressed similar thoughts on their efforts and the importance of the theme of communicating with parents and guardians. Ms. Raul shared, “It’s one of my best things, I feel like, the first thing that I try to do is establish and build that relationship with the family, get to know them in order for me to get to know the child.” Building relationships was a subtheme that was shared often. Ms. Mayor expounded on how some parents might not feel as comfortable because its new for them too because they are meeting a new person by saying:

It's kind of hard on the parent too, so I try to ease that and be the person that I am, which is a warm, loving person you know, communicate with the parents and make them feel better about me. So I ask them if they have any questions, just making myself aware and tell the parents I am there for them as well as I am for their child.

In order to build relationships with families, Early Head Start and Head Start programs are required to conduct home visits and parent teacher conferences throughout the school year. Some of the participants shared planning home visits and parent teacher conferences as a method to build partnerships with their students’ families and share information concerning the child’s future classroom transition. In the first focus group, Ms. Brighton expounded on how she utilizes home visit meetings to share transition information with the parents and learn from her student’s parents. She shared,

During a home visit, we sit down and talk about it together. We get advice from the parent and ask, “what you think can help make this transition with your child smooth,” like Ms. Paiton said, give them things beforehand, like this is the overall bio of the next classroom. So talk to the parent, try doing this with your child “Hey, don't forget your new classes coming up, this is what they're doing,” so we can give them songs that we're

going to be singing in a new classroom... like when you want to move to another activity so while you at home, try to implement it at home, so when they come to the classroom, they'll be familiarized with some of the songs, some of the words that we're using... give scheduling on how the transition is going with the class and then also piggyback in about a week, and ask "Have you seen anything different with your child? Have your child been singing their songs or doing anything that he or she has been learning, and if it's not going so well, let's reinvent, come back and let's talk about it some more."

In the second focus group, Ms. Gaines also expressed:

At my center, we do home visits, so during the second home visit, when we're meeting with the parent, I will also bring up the new teacher that the child will be going to so the parents can understand this is the process and this is about to be a transition, this is the new teacher, and then that teacher as well can share some concerns, you know, communicate converse back and forth.

Ms. Austin added, "Before the pandemic we would visit a kindergarten classroom with the parents but now we have to do more hands on like home visit and parent teacher conference meetings with parents via Zoom meetings to let them know that this transition is taking place."

In addition, some participants shared how they include the parents and guardians in the transition process and seek the child's family's advice. Ms. Jordan shared how she starts talking to parents about their child's classroom transition by saying, "So we normally talk to the parents and let them know that their child is of age to transition, umm we have conferences with them to let them know how we were planning to transition and obtain their permission using the permission form." Ms. Raul added:

After doing my observations, I listen to the parents, observe the child screening then that gives the opportunity to build the plan that we create for the child based on all the resources, screenings, observation, what parents bring to the table then share with them, this is what I have created and try to build a plan so they can try to implement them at home.

Ms. Gaines also shared:

I get their feedback most of the time. A lot of the time when it's time for a transition they don't want them to transition, but I talk everything through with them, I make sure they are comfortable. I help them become comfortable if they're not comfortable and I explain all the steps with them, and I also input them into the transition action plan as well. And then I get their feedback on like different things you could do, like what do you think will make it suitable for your child and you when you do this transition cause nine times out of ten it really isn't the children its honestly the parents not the children because throughout the building the children already know the teachers and classrooms its more of the parents trying to get a feel, okay now I gotta open up to this other adult and learn this other adult.

Lastly, another subtheme was keeping parents informed of their child's progress. Ms. Neal shared, "Working together is teacher collaboration, and we all have to keep the interest of the child in mind and keep the parents informed of what's going on, you don't get much out of the child if you don't have the parent cooperation." Mr. Hayes tries to include families as much as possible in the child's classroom transition. He shared that they do "ASQ's with the parents and send daily notes on the child's day to show that you care about their child's development."

In focus group two, Ms. Neal stated:

We always have to observe and document the child's every move or what takes the child to the next level. We also send pictures and daily notes to the parents to let them know how the child's day was and keep them informed, and the parents inform us how the child was the night before. We ask open questions and try to keep an open end or telephone line so they can always call to find out what's happening with their child and always try to keep the parents informed and involved. We also have pictures of the child's family in the classroom to help the child feel comfortable, and we welcome diversity in the class.

Ms. Paiton added:

We also send a packet home to let them know what the child may need in the new classroom because you know classrooms vary, they come in from a two-year-old class to a three-year-old class, and they need different materials, so we normally have a meeting with the parents, and they give them a transition list and then a transition schedule.

**Theme 3: Improvement Needed.** The researcher sought to learn about the participants' perspectives on improvement among their school's teacher collaboration and classroom transition methods. Out of all the themes, the theme of improvement needed had the lowest amount of codes revealed due to the majority of the participants sharing more positive than negative experiences concerning their transition systems, but some shared suggestions towards teacher collaboration. At least half of the participants shared that teachers need to be more open-minded and passionate about what they do. When asked, what can be improved, Ms. Douglass shared:

I would like to see more open mindedness not that it's not there, but you know, I just think basically that teacher collaboration you need to go in with an open-mind and really

listen to what the other person saying and your way is not the only way and as far as transition it could be a little more organized.

Ms. James echoed her response by stating, “Some teachers need to be more open.” Ms. Neal took it even further by asserting:

You can get teachers who really don’t have a heart for the children, some teachers are just there for the money and umm then that’s when it becomes a problem their mind isn’t on the good of the child. You realize this teacher doesn’t really care about the child, whether they progress or not.

When asked a follow- up question on why they thought teachers need to be more open-minded, Ms. Douglass shared:

If you have an idea and the other teacher doesn’t want to listen, they just want their ideas to be heard and it's all about what they want. Not treating you as an equal and that's a problem for me.

Another subtheme that most of the participants agreed on was more planning time. Most early childhood programs don’t have a lot of extra staff to relieve teachers for specific planning times, so teachers conduct planning during the children’s nap time or on professional development days. Some of the participants like Ms. Gains shared, “As far as collaboration for teachers I think we probably need more time, because technically, when it does come to collaboration with other teachers we're really doing a lot of things on our own personal time, if that makes sense.” Ms. Jordan responded with,

I just think we need more planning time, that’s it as far as planning with the teachers and for transitions with the kids I would say because each child is different, sometimes kids need a little more time to transition.

Some of the other participants discussed the need for more consistency amongst teacher collaboration and communication on expectations with parents. For example, Ms. Austin recommended, “Being consistent with it, just a little more consistency, sometimes teachers may forget that a child is transitioning over or you may have to remind them, but overall I think it has been okay on my part and successful.” In addition, Ms. Claiborne recommended better communication by stating:

When it comes to communication just let the parents know what to expect, let the parent know your child is going to be moving on to this classroom so you should be expecting to see your child do this. You should help them at home and have better communication with the parents because we can’t do it all ourselves as teachers and a lot of it still happens at home, print out more handouts, and should provide homework because they’re so young and still need routine when they go home for the week. When COVID happened a lot of them regressed.

Ms. Raul echoed Ms. Claiborne by suggesting involvement from the families, “Sometimes we would like to have more help in the classroom because we don’t see the support coming from home. If you’re doing something here and doing something different at home it can be confusing for the child, so more involvement.”

Another subtheme that emerged was the inconsistency and lack of transition documents. Research participants from three out of the six childcare centers provided a transition document, plan, and or checklist; however, the others did not have a plan for a few reasons. When asked for a copy of their transition documents, if the classroom transitions were documented, and asked to expound on the type of document used, most of the participants' responses were vague, and or uncertain if one existed. Ms. Douglass shared, “I believe so, I believe they do have something

like that.” Ms. Austin stated, “That's just something that we implement I haven't seen a document, but I can ask administration if there's one but normally that's how it's done. It normally takes a week for them to transition.” Ms. Paiton said, “I believe so yes,” or some participants answered yes, but could not provide a document.

**Theme 4: Positive Teacher Collaboration Experiences.** In order to gain an understanding of teachers' collaboration practices, the researcher asked about the participants' experiences to better understand their logic and collaborative practices. More positive collaborative experiences were expressed than negative. Most of the participants shared that teacher collaboration provided them with helpful feedback, and they have learned from others. Ms. Jordan shared, “I've had good experiences with getting different information and inputs on the way that teachers do things within their classroom and other centers that they work in.” Ms. Paiton's experience has been, “Great, I think it's awesome. It's definitely a big help to have you know somebody else's input, especially if you know you need extra eyes, extra hands, or whatever the case may be. So, it is definitely a great thing.” Ms. Paiton also expounded on how teacher collaboration led her to a new strategy for implementing classroom transitions.

So for me, it helped me in a way because at first we started off doing it a different way but when we collaborated we said maybe this would work better. And that was a better way to do the transitions instead of drawing it out longer and things like that. We used to have a longer transition, but we let it flow don't hold it out, too long, so that was a better plan for us.

Ms. Douglass also shared, “For me it's been good for the most part because some things that you don't think of another teacher will pick it up and they're like, “Oh yeah,” so you get ideas and



you learn from that experience.” Ms. Raul took it beyond collaboration amongst teachers by stating that her experience has been:

Very positive because I feel that two are better than one, so working with collaboration and when I say collaboration not only co-teacher but your supervisor, your coach, umm your learning team you get ideas that maybe you didn’t get in the moment because sometimes the children do things at home that we have no idea that they can do or have a hard time doing.

Ms. Neal shared how teacher collaboration is supportive for educators and students, for example, she stated:

A lot of teachers are very interested in how was he, or what do you think he needs. We’re always open to tell the next teacher how to help the child. If a child is in a class and we see the child is doing a lot of crying we give each other ideas, some children are shy or don’t open up as fast.

Ms. Mayor raved about her team’s collaboration by expressing:

I mean I really can’t say too much about this question because I think we do an awesome job as far as communicating with each other when it comes to children because we want the best for them. I think we already do an awesome job because we have an open line of communication where we speak to each other professionally, ask questions about the child, what’s going on next, going back to what I said about communication, so we already do that.

In addition, Ms. Claiborne provided insight on the benefits of like-minded educators collaborating when she stated,

So for me, my experience with teacher collaboration, it works when you find a teacher that is just as creative as you, so if the teacher doesn't seem to be as open you know to doing certain activities or having fun in the classroom, then you know that kind of style will stop you, you know from interacting with them and wanting to gain knowledge or getting ideas from them so I tried to find teachers that have the same similar teaching style as me.

**Theme 5: Program Support.** When participants were asked about administrative support, the data analysis revealed teachers' perspectives on how their administrative teams supported their teacher collaboration and transition practices. The majority of the participants shared that their administrators encouraged teacher collaboration by conducting consistent meetings to check-in and share updates. Ms. Gains shared:

Our director she will send out like emails and texts in the chatgroup for us, but prior to that we did actually get to have a meeting at least once a week, sometimes mostly but for sure once a week to sit down and get everybody opinion on things and see how things are going, see how things are coming as well as teachers our- self will take the initiative and you know ask hey, do anybody wanna meet up this particular day at this particular time so we can discuss some things or see what's working good or what's not working well and what can we do to help the situation.

Ms. James shared that her administrative team supports them, “by having PD days, and we do have planning time, and meetings once a month.” Mr. Hayes also shared similar experiences, “We have meetings on a regular basis, and we speak on teacher collaboration throughout the building...so it won't be no miscommunication between anyone.” In addition, at one of the

centers, the director provides incentives to encourage teachers and acknowledge their hard work.

Ms. Neal shared:

We have conferences, professional development days, and if the director sees you doing something outside the box they give something called a XX award to let them know they are going the extra mile and they work with us, and we have to go to conferences, go to classes, continue with our schooling, keep bettering ourselves so we can be better for the kids.

She also raved about how her leadership supported teamwork and set a platform for it to take place amongst the team. Ms. Neal asserted:

Our director is big on teamwork even if I get an incentive, the teacher that works with me gets an incentive. It is team collaboration with the teachers. Some teachers can talk to parents better, and some know how to do paperwork, so we take turns and I have had teachers that left a lot of work to one person to do but this group now is a team. I think teamwork is the key to teacher collaboration, if you don't work as a team it's not gone work.

Ms. Raul also praised the support of her centers' administration and access to resources by sharing:

Our program has a very good education team, each center has a coach that we get support from twice a week or if have a question on the curriculum. With the curriculum there's always something new to learn, and they always provide the materials we need, training, so it's a good team that they have created to support the teachers.

In an effort to support new teachers, Ms. Claiborne explained how her center had a buddy system in place by sharing, “So we have a teacher that's been working here longer than the one that has come in and they're the ones that have like mentored us.”

**Theme 6: Transition Strategies.** One of the transition strategies that was shared during the interviews was transition documents that teachers used to support clear communication among their colleagues and student’s parents and guardians and to provide clarity on what the student’s transition will include. Five out of the 12 participants provided one or all of the following: transition checklist (see Appendix G), a transition plan form (see Appendix H), and or a transition permission form see Appendix I). On the first page of the transition plan, general information the teacher will fill out for the child and family is included, whether the child is receiving developmental services, the student’s classroom placement, and goals for the child from the parent and teacher. In addition, Ms. Gains explained how the next portion of the transition plan is where the teachers would discuss and document the goals from the current or new teacher perspective, document the parent goal that they desire for their child, then document the transition activity that the teacher and parent will do with the child. The plan also has space for the teachers and or parents to document the activity that will occur, who needs to be involved, challenges, and who is responsible for follow-up. The parent or guardian, teacher, and family engagement specialist (if applicable for the school) will all sign the document. Some centers have family engagement specialists that work closely with the families and provide support with various needs. As it pertains to the transition documents, Ms. Gains informed the researcher that some teachers ask the family engagement specialist to join the collaborative meetings to ensure the family is supported throughout the process. In addition, Ms. Jordan explained her center’s transition checklist as a, “Guide for teachers to be aware of what to do

next.” The checklist provides clear steps, roles, and expectations for the center director, existing teacher, new teacher, and or family engagement specialist. Ms. Jordan also shared, “I find the checklist most helpful because when I’m not sure of what to do, I pull out the checklist to help me stay on track.” Lastly, to ensure the family is on board, Ms. Jordan provided a sample of their permission form for transferring, which seeks parents’ and guardians’ permission to transfer their child to another classroom. Ms. Brighton shared that, “After the center director informs the parents of the transition in advance, I use the permission form during my home visits when I plan to discuss classroom transitions with my students’ parents and guardians.”

Additional codes that were detected to support teachers’ transition strategies included meeting regularly, communicating consistently, and including the family. Ms. Raul shared, “it’s important that we meet regularly to plan for each individual child based on observations and screenings. We meet and plan the next steps that we need to for each individual child to prepare them for the transition.” Ms. Gains shared how consistent check-ins with her students’ new teacher led her to new ideas to help her students adjust to her new classroom. For example:

I think it's called *Are You My Mommy?* Or are you my mom or something? She used that book cause one little girl was very close to her mom. So I had a child that was just like that, and I gave that book to that child to use when they was transitioning to the other class, and umm you know it helped a lot cause like we knew she was transitioning and the next day she knew okay I’m gonna grab this book and Ima take it with me to the other class, it gave her like a tool to feel comfortable with.

Ms. Claiborne also stated:

So with us it’s communicating consistently and effectively between both teachers, but the teacher that the child will be, you know, moving on to, so we’ll ask them “what are ya’ll

doing in the classroom to help us better prepare them to move on to the next room with you all”, like what are some things that you notice, but we just try to go over each other's routine and just get them on to that schedule and help them, you know prepare.

Ms. James expounded on consistent communication regarding how they include the families in the conversations, “So we talk about what goals that they have already met and if they are meeting them, then we talk about the parents, ask them have the parents been working with them at home or has the parent said anything to you about their child's developmental needs or have they been meeting goals.” Ms. Neal shared the importance of bridging home with school, so not only does she discuss the family with her colleagues as a transition strategy but, “We also have pictures of the child’s family in the classroom to help the child feel comfortable, and we welcome diversity in the class.”

Another code that some participants reiterated was the importance of communicating with the child. Ms. Gains expressed that she, “Makes them aware that they'll be transitioning to another classroom, so let’s try to go visit the classroom and visit the other teachers.” Mr. Hayes perspective was if teachers are positive about the transition it would help the students be positive and interested in going. You just “communicate with the child, let the child know, you’ll be going over here for a few moments to get them comfortable because getting them comfortable will make the transition smooth with the new teacher.” Ms. Brighton also elaborated on how she communicates the transition to her students,

So if a child go into the next classroom we kinda provide them the things that the teachers are doing in the next classroom and therefore we communicate to them ,’Okay you're going to the big class now and this is what they're doing in the big class’, but by doing that, we collaborate with the teacher that the child will be entering in that

classroom and ask them what's a good way when they transition their child into another setting.

In order to implement the transition, participants' responses revealed a wide range of transition steps that teachers implement at their childcare center to transition a child to a new classroom. Some participants shared that their classroom transition process starts six months in advance with various steps, and most of the participants shared that the transition only takes a week to implement. Ms. Douglass explained, "The first couple of days, they'll go for about two hours the third day they'll go till lunch, fourth have nap there, then they'll stay the full day." Ms. Raul steps include:

We start transition early like six months prior, so we start sending the child maybe for 15 minutes, and if possible, we let the teacher follow the child. We try to do it in the morning when the child is more alert and listening to music so the child can start getting to know the other teachers in the next six months, so I think that's an important thing we do at our center. When we go outside for a nature walk, I say, let's try to see what the other teachers are doing so they can get to know them and get comfortable so when they move, they already know them.

As for Ms. Austin:

Our transition takes about a week, so a child would have breakfast in her class, and then she'll go to the transitioning class for circle time, but when circle time is over, she gets to go back to her class for the rest of the day. Day two she will go for circle time, and then she will also go for small group or routine of the day until that fifth day, then she will go the whole day in the classroom.

Ms. Neal noted:

At our school, when we transition the child, we know the child's going to be moving in for the next month. We might give them a week, half-day in that classroom. The child will come to us in the morning and then maybe around 10 o'clock we give them time to go there to the new teacher and get familiar with them, and then they go back to their room for lunch, or maybe they'll eat lunch in there, and then they'll come back from nap time, and they do that for about a week until they really get used to the new teacher.

Ms. Paiton also remarked that:

A typical transition for our center is the first day they'll come for an hour the second day stay until through breakfast, the third day they'll stay through lunch and then the next day they'll stay till nap and then the next day they'll spend the entire day. By Friday of that week their normally in the classroom.

Ms. Jordan also expounded on the resources used and what support looks like in the classroom in an effort to prepare the students for their transition. She stated:

We talk to the child about transitioning from our classroom to the new classroom. We put it on our lesson plan on how we will transition the child. We read books, take the child to the new classroom, introduce them to the teachers and children. We also involve the parent, talk to the parent, take the parent there, and then the first week, the children transition past a day. They'll go to the new classroom after breakfast and stay until it's time to eat lunch and come back to the old classroom. The last day they will do a whole day, but as there coming back, we do different activities and talk them through the transition.

Ms. Claiborne also provided details on how teachers implement certain steps and prepare students for what's to come by adding:



They would go, you know like maybe either in the morning before lunch or after lunch to go spend you know the rest of that day in the newer classroom so they can get used to this the other children that are in there and also their routine, so it's typically like a half day that the child would spend in the classroom but nothing full term and then also, so with us we have toddlers, and then they would then move on to the two year old room, in the two year old room they drink from an open face cup, so they're learning how to use the potty and independently washing hands.

### **Research Question Responses**

The purpose of this collective case study was to examine how early learning teachers collaborate to create successful transitions when it is time for a student to transition to the next classroom. The interviews, focus group, and document analysis attempted to answer three research questions. The following research questions guided this study.

**Research Question 1:** The first research question for this study was, “How do early learning teachers collaborate to prepare students for transitions to a classroom?” In each interview, the researcher asked each participant what teacher collaboration meant to them or how it was implemented at their childcare center. Ms. Paiton asserted, “Collaboration is working together to come up with a plan that works for the children, helping each other you know find ideas, sharing ideas.” Ms. Douglass shared, “When you come to an agreement on what’s best for each individual child. Working together to an agreement on what’s best for the children. Ms. Jordan explained teacher collaboration as, “Communicating with your team partner. Other teachers within with whichever center or school you work in about children in your classroom, children that may be transition to them.” Ms. Raul expressed, “Collaboration is working together as a team and bringing together other members, that are involved in the child’s environment, you

know, so we can plan better for the needs of each individual child.” For Ms. Brighton collaboration means:

Teachers working together and also sharing ideas as well as other methods, so children can learn how to adapt to their environment as well as learn new knowledge and gain new knowledge, but it's also to help them grow, teaching each other how they can transition and still develop the proper way in the classroom at least.

The responses to this question shed light on the participants' understanding and knowledge of teacher collaboration, which led to learning and understating their collaborative practices. There was consistency in the participants' views concerning teacher collaboration. When asked to expound on how they implement these beliefs towards teacher collaboration, the theme of communication amongst educators was the overarching theme that evolved. When asked what her collaboration looked like, Ms. Gains stated:

You would observe a lot of communication, a lot of people being open, a lot of feedback, a lot of people getting things uh, what's the word? Lifted off their chest I guess, like a weight off their chest. Umm you'll see people networking, probably. Umm Yeah, I think I said already, you know, learning from one another.

Ms. Mayor expounds on how her collaboration is all about communication by emphasizing:

I'll go back to communication. Like I said, communicating with them. Doing what's best for the child. Let's say a child is transitioning. What I would like to do is sit down with that other early learning educator and sit down with her and discuss what the child likes, what he or she don't like, to get more familiar, even though I would do it with the parents but I will get some more information, more feedback on the other educators to see

what is best and see how we can help the child with success and transition to the next class.

In addition, Ms. Brighton shared how they plan collaborative meetings during nap time by stating:

We collect observations on each child, so we'll know how to plan. During our lesson plan, we check first everybody lunch time. Do you mind taking a little bit of time off your lunch hour? Do you mind if we sit and we eat together, and we talk about it? but we do the same thing, we collaborate during nap time, because that's pretty much the best time unless you have a professional development day and they give you that time to collaborate with your team. So, I agree with Ms. Austin that's pretty much the best time to do it. And now that the job has given us, laptops, we do it too if we're at home on Microsoft Teams we'll email each other, let's get together, tomorrow at one, and let's collaborate, let's talk about it. And then we go from there.

It is during those scheduled meetings teachers discuss various topics, including child transitions. Ms. Jordan explained, "We go back to our checkpoints, our ASQ, observations, and we individualize with each child and also group plan." Ms. Douglass provided more details on how transitions are discussed by stating, "Well we see where the child is at now by comparing child observations and we discuss where we're trying to get them at before transitioning, and we work towards that goal with the child, parent, and the teacher."

In addition to teachers communicating regularly, scheduling meetings, and discussing various topics that support them in supporting students' transitions, the program support theme emerged as a source of supporting teachers in collaborating. In many of the cases, participants shared how the program's administration provided helpful resources and encouragement for

teachers to collaborate. Ms. Paiton shared, “They encourage us to collaborate and they love us to work together by following up and checking-in.” Ms. Raul applauded her education team by sharing, “Each center has a coach that we get support from twice a week or if we have a question on the curriculum. With the curriculum, there’s always something new to learn and they always provide the materials we need, training, so it’s a good team that they have created to support the teachers.” Ms. Austin followed up with more administrative compliments:

Our education master teacher allow us that time to go through the day by reflecting on what could have been, how could I have done a little better, or why didn’t I do this but our master teacher encourages us to be flexible, know your children, know your team and say okay this is not working. We do a real good job with collaboration because everybody has something to empower another person.

**Research Question 2:** The second research question for this study was, “How do teachers collaborate with families to create a positive transition experience for students?” The theme, communication with parents and guardians and transition strategies provided clarity on how teachers collaborate with families in the transition process. Teachers conduct home visits and parent-teacher conferences to keep parents informed. Participants also shared how they sought feedback from parents and assisted parents in the ongoing communication with teachers and other school personnel so that parents can participate in decisions related to their children’s education. In a focus group, Ms. Brighton shared, “We have a home visit. We sit down, we talk about it together. We get advice from the parent and ask, “what you think can help make this transition with your child smooth.” She also shared that she “includes families in the transition by sending steps that I do in the class or perhaps a video to the parents to follow suit and ask for

their ideas.” Ms. Mayor provided additional details on how she collaborates with the families by stating:

I say tell me about you, ask them about themselves and then ask them about the child.

What do they do at home when it's time to do something else or when it's almost time to go to bed or a time to clean up or ask the parent what they do. I ask what do they do when she gets upset, what do you do to console her? How do you console her? Umm, just getting more information from the parent.

In addition, Ms. Austin described their efforts to communicate with parents before the pandemic:

Our parent teacher interactions are awesome even though they can't come in the building now but prior to the pandemic we had an open door policy and we informed them that they go into the next classroom and we set goals for the next classroom. What we try to incorporate in school we want to send it home and bridge the gap from home to school.

Mr. Hayes pointed out how he keeps the families informed daily before and after the classroom transition takes place. He stated, “We implement the families in on everything by sending daily notes where we keep the families informed of what their child learned.” Ms. Claiborne also provided a detailed description of how she collaborates with families through:

Non- stop emails and also just updating them on their progress letting the parent know you know just how they're moving in the classroom, letting them know if their progressing as fast as they should, so with that we make sure we have a clear open line of communication with the parents by sending them emails or any pictures showing them what we're doing in the classroom but letting them do the same activities that we do here

at home and then I'll send the same activities home with the parents just so they can practice while they're away from the school setting.

As it pertains to the theme of transition strategies, under the code transition document, the transition checklist revealed how one of the school's directors will inform the teacher six months in advance that the child will be transitioning to a new classroom and the teacher will schedule a meeting with the parent to discuss the transition plan. Ms. Raul explained that:

The form we use is combined in education and explains the next steps of where they're going. It's the plan we do for the six months prior moving out of the class or to the next school. It also defines the parent's goals.

Ms. Gains also shared how she includes the families in the transition action plan by sharing, "I help them become comfortable if they are not comfortable, and I explain all the steps with them, and I also input them into the transition action plan as well." On the transition plan, parents are also asked to share their goals that they desire for their child to achieve as they transition to the next step. Also, for one of the participants' schools, on the transition checklist document the school staff schedule a, "My School DC Night" where the school staff invited various local education agencies in before the pandemic, now provided virtually to share information about various public schools and helpful information. This is all in an effort to support family engagement and learn strategies and activities that promote successful transitions to kindergarten for children, their families, and the elementary school. Lastly, Ms. Jordan explained the permission for transferring document as a document that ensures the parents are aware and in agreement with their child transitioning.

**Research Question 3:** The third research question for this study was, "How are teachers utilizing transition strategies to ensure a smooth transition for students?" The participants that

shared their transition documents use their documents as a strategy to ensure a smooth transition for the students. Ms. Jordan provided details on how the transition plan, checklist, and permission form helped her stay on track and be aware of what was needed for the students' transition. In addition, many of the participants shared various transition steps that they implemented to prepare a child for their transition. Ms. Raul starts her transition six months in advance, and Ms. Austin didn't share any preliminary steps but expounded on what the child's transition looks like in a week. For example, in Ms. Raul's school, they follow the transition checklist and prepare families and children six months in advance by following the various steps on the transition checklist that eventually leads to the child transitioning into a new classroom. As for Ms. Austin's school, she shared that:

Our transition takes about a week, so a child would have breakfast in her class, and then she'll go to the transitioning class for circle time, but when circle time is over, she gets to go back to her class for the rest of the day. Day two, she will go for circle time, and then she will also go for small group or routine of the day until that fifth day, then she will go the whole day in the classroom.

In addition, participants shared how they use child observations, child screenings, information that they learn from one another, and the use of books to support their practices and students with the transition. Ms. Raul opined, "After doing my child observations, I listen to the parents, review the child screening then that give us some the opportunity to build the plan that we create for the child based on all the resources, screenings, and observations." Another strategy some participants shared was utilizing each other's knowledge and expertise. Ms. Gains explained how she, "Learns from other people, so somebody might have told me they did this specific strategy, so I was open to listening to my teammates strategies." Ms. Douglass also

learned from her colleagues and realized, “Some things that you don't think of another teacher pick up and they're like “Oh yeah”, so you get ideas and you learn from that experience.” Lastly, during one of the focus groups, Ms. Jordan and Ms. Gains both agreed how implementing reading children books before, during, and after the classroom transition helped them in transitioning their students. Ms. Gains shared *Are you My Mother?* and Ms. Jordan shared *I Love You All Day Long* and raved at how it helped their students become acclimated to their new environment before and after their transition. Ms. Gains asserted, “Once you learn your student’s needs, likes, and dislikes, you can try different books and encourage families to read it to them at home too.”

### **Summary**

The purpose of this case study was to learn how teachers collaborate to support children in transitioning to the next classroom in an early childhood program. This chapter presented the data and results of the study based upon the 12 participants’ responses to both interviews and focus groups questions along with an analysis of classroom transition documents. The research questions found in Chapter Three served as a reference to analyze the data. Using the collected data, the codes were developed into six overall themes. The following six themes emerged after completing the data analysis: (a) communication amongst educators; (b) communication with parents and guardians; (c) improvements needed; (d) positive teacher collaboration experiences; (e) program support; and (f) transition strategies. Pseudonyms were used to maintain the confidentiality of the participants. Additionally, the responses were written in narrative prose to accurately portray the participants’ viewpoints.



## **CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION**

### **Overview**

The purpose of this collective case study was to examine how early learning teachers collaborate to create successful transitions when it is time for a student to transition to the next classroom. Chapter Five presents a comprehensive summary and discussion of the findings along with the implications in light of the relevant literature and theory. The methodological and practical implications are discussed as well as a presentation of the study's delimitations and limitations. The chapter concludes with recommendations for future research.

### **Summary of Findings**

This collective case study was designed to determine how early learning teachers from various early childhood centers in Washington, D.C., collaborate to create successful classroom transitions for students. Data were collected from 12 teachers who participated in interviews, focus groups, and provided documents for analysis. Once collected, the data were coded through the use of the NVivo analysis software. The following six themes emerged after completing the data analysis: (a) communication amongst educators; (b) communication with parents and guardians; (c) improvements needed; (d) positive teacher collaboration experiences; (e) program support; and (f) transition strategies. Each theme led to clarity and understanding of the study's research questions.

The first research question asked, how do early learning teachers collaborate in order to prepare students for transitions to classrooms? This question sought to examine whether teachers were collaborating in an effort to support students' classroom transitions, and if so, how. Although one participant expressed a negative teacher collaboration experience, all of the

participants believed teacher collaboration was essential, and it was up to the teacher to make the best of it for their students. When asked why teacher collaboration was vital when transitioning students to the next level, teachers' responses focused on the importance of working together and keeping the child's needs at the forefront of their practices. Through the interviews, focus groups, and documents, it was evident that teachers were collaborating. The findings showed that teachers collaborated to brainstorm ideas, discuss the child's likes and dislikes, develop transition goals, review the child's family goals, review assessments and child observations, and discuss the transition steps. Most of the teachers agreed that they had program support from their administrative teams by scheduling meetings and providing opportunities to share viewpoints, providing professional development training, providing resources that help teachers with their instruction, and planning time during nap time. All of the teachers also expressed that they were intentional in scheduling meetings amongst their classroom teams and communicating weekly and daily to discuss a child's transition. Details were provided on what the meetings included, such as open-ended questions, sharing resources and advice, learning their colleagues' teaching styles, and or exchanging helpful information. In addition, some participants provided their transition documents that they used to document communication of goals, plans, and transition activities discussed in their teacher meetings.

The second research question asked, how do teachers collaborate with families to create a positive transition experience for students? This question sought to learn how teachers included the students' families in the transition process. According to the Head Start Program Performance Standards (HPPS), a program must collaborate with parents of enrolled children to implement strategies and activities. This will help parents advocate for and promote successful transitions to kindergarten for their children, including their continued involvement in the

education and development of their child (Head Start, 2020). Teachers' responses were clear on understanding the importance of first establishing positive relationships and partnerships with families. Teachers also discussed practices that they had in place, such as scheduled home visits, parent-teacher conferences, daily notes, and transition meetings to consistently communicate with families and keep parents and guardians informed of their child's day-to-day activities. For parents whose students were transitioning to kindergarten, some schools offered a professional development event (i.e., "My School DC" night) to learn about local education agencies, schools in the community, meet school officials, and receive helpful resources. Teachers also shared transition documents that sought parents' permission to transition their child, an action plan that embedded the parent goals, and transition activities that the teachers and parent would discuss and implement throughout the child's transition process.

The third research question asked, how do teachers utilize transition strategies to ensure a smooth classroom transition for students? The previous questions sought preliminary practices that teachers implemented to support children and families through the transition process. This question sought an understanding of the strategies used to conduct the classroom transition. Typical classroom transitions take place when a child turns the transition age and is developmentally ready to transition to the next classroom. For example, most infant classrooms serve children who are six weeks to 12 months, when they turn 12 months, they would transition to the toddler classroom, which is typically 12 months to 24 months. Several teachers expressed that their transition strategies included transition steps such as visiting the classroom within a week or starting the transition process six months in advance with intentional preparation. For teachers who transition their students within a week, when a child turns a certain age the following week, teachers gradually help the child get acclimated to their new environment.

Teachers take the child to meet the new teacher, then they take the student to the new classroom to visit for a short amount of time at the beginning of the week, and by the end of the week the child will spend the entire day in the new classroom with consistent follow-up amongst the teachers and parents. For teachers who transition their students six months prior to a child turning a certain age, based on the participants feedback and the transition checklists provided, the center directors inform teachers of the students that will transition out of their classroom. Second, teachers schedule meetings with parents to inform them of their child's future transition and invite parents to a "My School DC" night. Third, teachers review the action plan components during a home visit or parent-teacher conference with parents, implement transition activities in the classroom (i.e., reading books, individuated activities, etc.), and conduct teacher meetings regularly to discuss the student's goals, assessments, and developmental activities, etc. Fourth, teachers conduct consistent, collaborative meetings, and one month before the transition, the teacher takes the child to visit the new classroom, and families are invited to join their child in their future new classroom. Lastly, the current teacher transfers all of the child's files to the new teacher and starts the child in the new classroom at the end of the six months with consistent follow-up amongst the teachers and parents.

### **Discussion**

This study was conducted to address the gap in the literature related to teacher collaboration and transitions and to examine how early learning teachers collaborate to create successful transitions when it is time for a student to transition to the next classroom. The following section established the contribution from the results of this study and the theoretical and empirical literature by shedding light on the relationship between the research findings and

the information documented in the literature review. This section includes how this study confirms previous research, contributes to the field of education, and extends previous research.

### **Theoretical**

This study's theoretical framework was centered on Lev Vygotsky's sociocultural theory, which emphasized how learning is constructed socially. His theory focused on individuals learning through interactions and communications with others and encouraged collaborative learning. Vygotsky advocated that learning gives direction to development through social interaction (Demirbaga, 2018). As shared in the literature review, this theory aligns with the study by supporting the principle that children need guided participation from teachers to maximize learning for students. A teachers' role is to help students access the world as a guide, and the achievement of the student depends on the quality of the mediation. This theory informs educators that children learn from a guide, and teachers should be intentional about supporting children's learning experiences and help them navigate what's to come. Effective support of classroom transitions requires teachers to create social learning settings that maximize students' learning and promote a positive transition experience for students. Teachers have to be intentional in helping students understand and cope with changes in their environment through intentional planning, consistent communication, and individualized support. This study's results revealed how students received guidance from the teachers during the process of transitioning to a new environment in an effort to build their knowledge, skills, and abilities to be successful and be prepared for their new environment. In addition, teachers also offered their guidance to student's families by including them in their transition plans and conducting ongoing communication.

As it pertains to teacher collaboration, grounding teacher collaboration within Vygotsky's theories of development seems most appropriate as the sociocultural theory indicates that individuals interact with one another socially to negotiate meaning (Jaramillo, 1996). When teachers collaborate, they are intentionally meeting to come to an agreement, an understanding, and or goals. Participants shared how they consistently met to discuss various topics such as student goals, the developmental stage of the child, transition goals, transition activities, and agreements for moving forward. Vygotsky (1978) emphasized the importance of goal-directed activities in his discussions of development. Not just any type of social interaction or collaborative endeavors will lead to development. If this were the case, there would not be so much concern on how to structure the teaching and learning process (Eun, 2008). Development would take place whenever two or more people engaged in casual interactions for students and teachers alike. However, in order for social interaction to lead to development, it has to be situated in activities that have a clear goal, such as joint problem-solving activities (Eun, 2008). In addition, this study also shed new light on the comparison of teacher collaboration and the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which is a Vygotskian concept most often investigated and cited in educational literature and is a space created between a more competent participant and a less competent participant. A metaphor developed to reflect the principles underlying the ZPD is scaffolding (Eun, 2008). Collective scaffolding is a type of scaffolded assistance with the modification that there is no distinction between the experts and the novices. In other words, the collective guidance and support are provided equally by all participants who are engaged in problem-solving processes that are beyond the ability of each individual. Teachers involved in a collaborative process follow the learning and development mechanism outlined in defining the collective scaffold. An effective collaborative team works together as equal partners in

interactive relationships, with both involved in all aspects of planning, teaching, and assessment (Pellegrino et al., 2015). The benefits that can come from having an effective collaborative team illustrates the crucial role that collaboration among peers play in the process of acquiring knowledge and skills. By conducting collaborative research and discussions, teachers engage in the formation of a collective scaffold (Eun, 2008).

### **Empirical**

This study also provided empirical evidence by revealing how early learning educators collaborate with one another to support children who transition from one classroom to another. Drawing on data from interviews, focus groups, and documents, the present study examined early learning teacher collaboration and transition practices used to support students' classroom transitions. Research on teacher collaboration and classroom transitions in early learning classrooms is limited in its scope. Previous research on teacher collaboration focused on elementary to the collegiate level; therefore, this study can extend on research and add insights to the early learning community.

First, collaboration amongst all participants involved in a child's learning is vital to support a child's classroom transition, even from six weeks to five years old. Students, families, teachers, and the school as a whole can benefit from working together to support student's transitions. Students can benefit by learning what support looks and feels like at an early age, learn coping skills, progress or master developmental stages, learn to understand and experience change, and become prepared for new experiences. During transitions, children acquire basic skills and understandings that serve as the foundation for further learning (Harper, 2016). As for families, when parents feel connected to the school community, their expectations of their child also increase. Securing that children are prepared to start school and ready to succeed is an

essential part of preparing families for the transition (Harper, 2016). Research has shown that how a family views transitions, coupled with the type and amount of support provided to a child, influences how the child adjusts to new situations (Harper, 2016). This current study supports this as participants commented on the understanding and importance of families having positive relationships with their child's teacher and having positive views on their child's educational journey and new environment. Besides, a child's education, both academic and social, is significantly improved through effective collaborations between families and schools (Lohmann et al., 2018). In addition, participants expressed and shared how their collaboration and transition practices were inclusive with the child's family through consistent communication and collective planning. When families are valued and know what to expect, they feel better prepared to engage in their children's learning. Offering a wide variety of opportunities for families to participate in transition activities contributes to positive long-term outcomes for children (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2020). Moreover, teachers also benefit from consistent collaboration as well. All of the research participants commented that they had positive perspectives towards teacher collaboration and saw the benefit in collaborating with their colleagues, students' families, and local education agency workers. Collaboration also built the participants wealth of information and appreciation for support. Participants bragged on their schools' high level of teamwork and how it added to their knowledge, instructional practice repertoire, understanding, and helped make their workload feel lighter because they knew they were not alone. It also helped them learn new teaching strategies, share their ideas, give and accept feedback, learn the importance of being flexible and open-minded, and increased their efficacy. Furthermore, participants believed that teacher collaboration also added depth to a school's culture. Since collective efficacy influences how educators feel, think, motivate



themselves, and behave, it is a major contributor to the tenor of a school's culture. When educators share a sense of collective efficacy, school cultures tend to be characterized by beliefs that reflect high expectations for student success (Donohoo, Hattie, & Eells, 2018). Participants expressed how their administration would encourage working together as a mechanism for developing teacher-led collaboration during nap-time or occasional professional development days. Research suggests that teachers use peer interactions for different purposes than team meetings, in that they have more in-depth conversations to solicit feedback and advice on their particular classroom challenges (Poulos, Culbertson, Piazza, & D'entremont, 2014). Thus, consistent collaboration amongst all parties offers more benefits than drawbacks.

Second, this study provided insight into how classroom transition systems looked different from school to school. Some schools had written transition plans with clear steps and some did not; some schools implemented different transition timelines (i.e. six weeks or a week), but all of the participants expressed various transition strategies they implemented in the classroom, and consistent informal or formal discussions focusing on transition planning. Furthermore, the HSPPS requires Early Head Start and Head Start programs to begin planning with families six months prior to their leaving the program to ensure all necessary arrangements are made for their children's next placement and to prepare their children for the transition (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2020). Planning a child's transition in advance encourages participation from parents and staff on the support of the child's developmental process. Also, a strong transition system built on a supportive and aligned infrastructure, positive relationships, and effective communication helps programs implement individualized transition plans (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2020). These transition plans often include preparing families, visiting programs, providing individualized support for

children, and helping families find community resources and support, as needed (Doudna et al., 2015). Learning how teachers utilized transition documents and implemented transition strategies in this study revealed the process, what teachers implemented to support students individually, and how they included families in the process. Creating a clear transition plan with families also promoted continuity of services, provided clarity and understanding for teachers and families, and provided a guide of what to expect and how to conduct the transition. Typical plans included steps to prepare the child along the way for the significant changes. Some transition plans include the name of the program, classroom, or school the child is transitioning to and the date the child will start. The plan can also include the child's records that will be sent to the receiving program or classroom with written permission, such as assessment records and activities that families and staff can do to ease the transition and help the child adapt to the new environment (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2020).

This research contributes new research for the early learning community by revealing how teachers are collaborating to prepare students for classroom transitions. This study can also encourage educators and school leaders who are not implementing transition strategies to acknowledge the importance of teacher collaboration and start implementing transition practices to support students transitions in early childhood. This research provides insight to Early Head Start and Head Start educators, families, and administrators that one size does not fit all as it pertains to transition styles. Implementing transition plans is not only an HSPPS requirement, but it should include intentional guidelines in providing individualized support for children and families throughout the transition process. Lastly, teachers and families can partner together to learn about each child's background, development, strengths, and needs; share information and resources, and plan supportive transition practices. Together they can create responsive,

individual transition plans that facilitate each child's adjustment to their new learning environment and make it a positive experience.

### **Implications**

The purpose of this section is to discuss the theoretical, empirical, and practical implications of this study based upon how early learning teachers collaborate to support classroom transitions. The research findings support Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, and the empirical evidence on teacher collaboration and classroom transitions.

Recommendations are also provided on early learning teacher's and administrator's roles in teacher collaboration and classroom transitions.

### **Theoretical Implications**

The sociocultural theory theorizes that social experience shapes the ways of thinking and interpreting the world. The participants of this study confirmed various benefits of teacher collaboration in an effort to support their student's classroom transitions, such as gaining new insights, and learning new teaching strategies. However, theoretical or empirical studies delving into how early learning teachers learn and develop within their work settings to support students' classroom transitions are rare or virtually non-existent (Eun, 2008). The theoretical implications of this study demonstrate the necessity of teacher collaboration to support students as they transition to the next classroom.

The sociocultural theory highlights how teachers' knowledge and skills might be developed collaboratively. To conceptualize how such learning could happen through collaboration, one could envision teachers as working in communities of practice, whether they interact on grade-level teams, in departments, or in whole faculty meetings (Levine & Marcus, 2007). Communities of practice form when individuals are engaged in a common enterprise

working toward shared outcomes. Communities of practice can also be organized in ways that either promote or hinder individuals' opportunities to see others' practices, talk together about what they are doing and why they do it that way, and learn new practices from observing others and beginning to participate in the practices themselves (Levine & Marcus, 2007).

In addition, according to Vygotsky (1978), the ZPD has an enormous influence on its parts and on the relations among those parts, as well as on the relation between the child and his or her environment. Vygotsky's (1978) notion of the ZPD development offers a basic insight regarding how internalization occurs and leads to the benefits of teacher collaboration. Students can master new skills, practices, or ways of thinking with the support of skilled teachers and through engagement with peers. The same can take place for teachers through teacher collaboration. Eventually, operations that one can do only with the help of other people or material supports become internalized for an individual (Vygotsky, 1978). For example, a girl can tie her shoes on her own, a student can use their fine motor skills to lift their pants while using the bathroom without assistance, or a new teacher can complete weekly lesson plans individually rather than needing assistance from the master teacher. If the aim is to help individual teachers internalize new approaches so that they understand, value, and can adapt such practices, Vygotsky's explanation of how external operations are internalized suggests the importance of creating spaces for teachers to talk and engage in practices together rather than seeking to control individuals and deprive them of opportunities to question or alter practices (Vygotsky, 1978). Teachers who are engaged in such collaboration and shared practice are more likely to value such shared practices and to invest greater energy in developing and sustaining them (Levine & Marcus, 2007).

Vygotskian theories allow one to understand why teacher collaboration is based on social interactions among teachers and why support systems are crucial in sustaining the effectiveness of teacher collaboration as a whole and supporting students' classroom transition. As teacher collaboration is founded on the belief that teachers continuously learn and develop just as their students do, it seems most appropriate to make connections between teacher collaboration and developmental theories of Vygotsky, and to derive theoretical implications to make this process of development most effective.

### **Empirical Implications**

The empirical implications of this study suggest that early learning teacher collaboration and classroom transition systems are needed in order to support students and families with classroom transitions. Previous research indicates that starting school is crucial to how children perceive school, and how children's school life begins can have an impact on their school performance (Lago, 2017). Moreover, preparing children for this transition can be beneficial to the student, family, and teacher. Intentional teacher collaboration can support teachers as they support their students developmentally and academically. Collaboration is an effective learning practice. Working with others to share ideas, give and accept feedback, achieve consensus, and apply knowledge to a common goal leads to improved teaching and learning (Morel, 2014). Just as children are no longer expected to learn information passively, teachers cannot be expected to depend entirely on workshops and lectures to develop their practice. There is also a strong need for consistent communication during the transition process to identify children who will need extra support during transition. Thus, transition practices that focus on teacher, parent, and child needs are recommended to help students be prepared for transitions and be ready for school (Griebing & Gilbert, 2020).

The literature also reveals that some early care and education programs have established guidelines that teachers use to support and plan for children and families going through transitions (Griebing & Gilbert, 2020; Lago, 2017).. These policies, as well as early care and education best practices, provide helpful guidance for the transitions that children experience during their early years. Reviewing other programs' recommendations for transitions can be a helpful way for administrators and teachers to begin establishing their own transition guidelines (Doudna et al., 2015). Once a transition system is established, administrators, teachers, and families should work together to execute the plan.

Research studies that focus on early learning teacher collaboration and classroom transitions are limited. Given the significance of the role of teacher collaboration that it plays in students being prepared for the next level, it is evident that additional research on teacher collaboration and transitions in the early learning sector should take place. This study emphasized the need to understand if early learning teachers are collaborating and what it entails in effort to support students and their families as they transition to a new classroom.

### **Practical Implications**

This study also provided practical implications for teachers, center directors, administrators, and other stakeholders involved in education. First, to ensure the school is effective in their efforts with teacher collaboration and classroom transitions, the first practical implication for early childhood center directors and administrators is to analyze what they are currently doing. Directors and administrators should also analyze what they need to do by conducting a survey using the HSPPS as their guide to learn what needs to be changed and or implemented. Based on the results, directors and administrators should establish transition policies and practices. Program policies should describe how a program will carry out transition

practices (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2020). Policies include guidance about how the program will establish partnerships with families and collaborate with sending and receiving programs. Policies also address how programs can support children and families as they transition from one program or classroom option to another within a program (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2020). In addition, transition practices are the daily interactions and activities informed by program policies that support children's transition into and out of a program or classroom. Once created, transition practices are implemented by teachers, caregivers, home visitors, and family service workers. Working with a team, program leaders should establish policies that lay the foundation for collaborative transition practices (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2020). An example of a practice could be a transition plan, manual, or checklist, which can be helpful to provide a clear guide and ensure everyone involved understands their role and expectations. Having transition systems and policies in place can have a positive impact on students' classroom transitions by stakeholders, administrators, teachers, and families having a clear understanding of their roles in the process. Clear communication on roles, policies, and procedures can ensure cohesive teamwork amongst everyone involved and ensure all are successful in carrying out the transition systems and practices effectively. Furthermore, effective transition policies and procedures are more likely to lead to consistent and smooth transition experiences for students.

Second, center directors, administrators, and stakeholders should form a transition team. Inclusive, diverse teams offer different viewpoints and engage stakeholders. They include program management, family members, direct service staff representatives, early education partners, and community stakeholders. Diverse teams include members from the cultural and linguistic backgrounds represented in the community (U.S. Department of Health & Human

Services, 2020). Transition teams can engage in continuous improvement efforts by linking transition services with program goals and HSPPS, establishing program policies to support transitions, preparing and engaging staff, and reviewing and improving transition policies and services regularly (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2020). In addition, center directors and administrators can also assemble a transition panel or a transition summit and host a panel discussion session of experts for family nights throughout the program year to address the specific strengths, questions, and needs of the program and community. Panelists may include parents of current or former kindergarten students, teachers from schools and ECE programs, administrators, and representatives from programs that support the unique needs of families (e.g., early intervention for children with special needs) (The National Center on Parent, Family, and Community, 2013). During these panel sessions, families can learn about the centers, and or new school transition systems such as transition manuals, plans, steps, etc. From a practical perspective, this study contributed to a better understanding of utilizing a diverse and collaborative team to achieve effective transitions for students. Creating platforms for diverse teams to come together and discuss classroom transition topics may have a positive impact on families by preparing them to become advocates of their child's learning and learn how to support their child through the transition process. Transition teams may also have an impact on student's classroom and transition experiences by working together to develop and assess transition services that respond to the backgrounds, strengths, and needs of children and families.

The third practical implication for center directors and administrators is to provide planning time for educators. Research participants shared that their typical planning times were during student's nap times, which can be helpful, but can be a hindrance as well. When a child wakes-up or if a child is not tired, this can affect a teacher's planning and collaboration time. In



addition, if a teacher is meeting with the students' future teacher and he or she is in another classroom, teachers cannot leave their classroom to ensure they meet the classroom ratio and meet with another teacher, which cuts down on the time they have to meet within work hours. Many teachers suffer from a demanding workload, which is an influential factor that eliminates the opportunity for co-planning (Alsarawi, 2019). The basic duties of the profession cannot be ignored or eliminated, but the additional duties that hinder planning should be negotiated. The school administration should provide teachers with sufficient time to plan lessons and discuss transition activities, etc. (Alsarawi, 2019). Teachers having consistent planning time can have a positive impact on students' learning experiences by allotting teachers time to collaborate, build upon their teaching practices, and conduct intentional decision making concerning student's developmental and academic needs.

The fourth practical implication is to provide professional development trainings for teachers specifically focusing on the school's transition systems and guidelines and discuss how they can collaborate to apply the systems smoothly. Professional development trainings may assist with communicating transition expectations that are clear and to help teachers to be aware of the school's transition documents. Trainings can also provide guidance for teachers on how to complete the transition documents, incorporate the families, and how to implement transition practices in the classroom. Since teachers work closely with students and their families, all teachers should be knowledgeable of the transition systems offered at the childcare center and how to implement them. Administrators should also consider providing professional development that not only highlights transition policies and practices but provide a forum for discussing culturally responsive strategies (U.S. Department of Health & Human Services, 2020). When teachers are provided professional development, they add more knowledge and

skills to their teaching practices, and they are more likely to implement what they learn in their classrooms with their students. Ultimately, professional development trainings can lead to teachers being more efficient in meeting the needs (developmentally and academically) of their students. Professional development trainings may also have a positive impact on the school and student's learning experiences by creating a culture of learning for teachers and learning various ways to help students achieve.

Overall, these findings should be considered and applied in early childhood centers to ensure the school is successful in their efforts with teacher collaboration and classroom transitions, and families are supported throughout the transition process. Also, administrators should be intentional in ensuring teachers have time to plan effective instruction and add value to their student's learning experiences, and ensure teachers are steadily learning by adding to their knowledge and perfecting their teaching skills. This research should be used to educate and inform early learning stakeholders, administrators, teachers, and families worldwide on how teacher collaboration is vital and can support teachers in implementing intentional classroom transitions for students.

### **Delimitations and Limitations**

Decisions were made to conduct this collective case study which resulted in delimitations and limitations. Delimitations are the boundaries set for the study. The limitations are those influences that were not able to be controlled, which impacted the results of this study. In this study, specific criteria were established to focus on the central phenomenon. This section discusses the delimitation and limitations present in this qualitative research study.

#### **Delimitations**

For this study, 12 early childhood teachers over the age of 18 were selected to ensure they were qualified teachers. Accredited early childhood programs require teachers to have a certain level of education, which rules out the option for participants under the age of 18 for this study. The total teachers were elicited to gain various perspectives and enough data to analyze teacher's collaboration practices effectively, and transition practices as some childcare centers conduct transitions differently. Second, participants that spoke, read, and understand English were elicited due to the researcher being an English speaker. Another delimitation to define the boundaries of the study was ensuring that the teachers currently had transition practices in place, which recruited a certain sample of teachers that had experience with collaboration and classroom transitions. The study's geographical location chosen to conduct this study was Washington, D.C. This location was chosen to learn how inner-city early childhood teachers are collaborating and preparing students for classroom transitions. In addition, a case study was chosen over other designs due to it being the suitable method for a more thorough examination of teachers' experiences with collaborating with other educators and the impact of the collaboration on students' transitions. A collective case study was conducted, in which the researcher selected multiple cases to show different perspectives on the issue (Creswell, 2018).

### **Limitations**

In this study, some limitations existed. First, the sample size of 12 participants was small. Although this sample size was acceptable for the methodology used, it provided a minimal view of how all early learning centers and early learning teachers implement teacher collaboration and classroom transitions. In addition, in early childhood education, females typically outnumber males, and in this case study, there was only one male teacher out of eleven female teachers.

Third, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, all of the early childcare centers in the district did not allow any outside people to come into the buildings, which hindered and changed the plans for classroom observations to be an option as a data collection method. Also, the recruiting plans had to change from visiting schools in person to utilizing social media platforms in order to find early learning teachers. Lastly, COVID-19 limited in-person interviews and focus groups. Interviews took place over the phone, and the focus groups were conducted via Zoom.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This collective case study intended to learn how early learning educators are partaking in teacher collaboration to support students with their classroom transitions. Additional studies on many aspects of early learning teacher collaboration and classroom transitions would narrow the gap in the literature and offer different perspectives. Participants for this study included 12 early learning educators from six different early childhood centers in Washington, D.C. Future research should include more early learning teachers from more early childcare centers to gain a broader understanding of what other schools and teachers are incorporating as it pertains to their teacher collaboration and classroom transition practices.

A quantitative study could measure how various transition strategies are effective in preparing students for their classroom transitions by analyzing students' developmental progress over time. Furthermore, it is important to consider how these skills promote children's future academic success and to consider the impact of different childcare experiences. Thus, it could help educators learn if certain transition strategies are more effective than others.

A qualitative study could also explore how early childhood teachers are preparing students with disabilities for the next step by utilizing their Individualized Education Programs

(IEP) and learn how teachers are collaborating with the children's family, specialists, and therapists.

Future research could also be directed toward early childhood literature that focuses on systematically and rigorously evaluated interventions designed to build collaborative relationships between teachers. This research could provide insight on practices in place or systems that need to be created to encourage collaborative relationships amongst educators.

An additional future direction for this line of research could be to investigate how ongoing professional development at the center level could be beneficial for early learning teachers as they support students and family's transition from classroom to classroom.

A final consideration for future studies could be exploring family's experiences with involvement in their child's classroom transition process. This study focused on teachers sharing their collaborative experiences and practices, but a future study could seek to gain insight on family's experiences when their child transitioned. This could help teachers and administrators become aware of family's experiences, their perspectives of the school's collaborative methods, support needed, and areas that need improvement.

### **Summary**

Chapter Five summarized the findings and interpretations of the research questions, which lead to implications for further research on how early learning teachers collaborate to support students with classroom to classroom transitions. The theoretical foundation for this research was the sociocultural theory by theorist Lev Vygotsky (1978). Through the use of interviews, focus groups, and document analysis the three research questions that guided this research were analyzed and discussed.

The findings from this study suggested that intentional teacher collaboration, the inclusion of students' families, and support from early childhood education (ECE) administrators are needed to conduct effective classroom to classroom transitions for students. Evidence from this research supports the contention that young children rely on trusted adults to guide them through transitions. To best aid this transition, it is proposed that a meaningful collaboration be developed between teachers, parents, and guardians. Communication among educators and families is necessary for supporting students developmentally and academically. Additionally, findings suggest the importance of teachers and families having a clear understanding of the classroom transition policies and practices; therefore, policies and practices must be created and implemented, which means administrators and ECE support staff must work cohesively to ensure students and families are supported throughout the process. Consequently, once established, transition strategies, plans, and steps can encourage a high-quality collaborative relationship and may result in a strong partnership that has a positive, lasting influence in the lives of children and families.

Overall, the first five years of a child's life are a critical period during which rapid growth and development take place. During this time, children learn important social-emotional, cognitive, and behavioral skills that set the stage for subsequent development and learning. Children also experience transitions early on, and through those changes, they can gain skills that prepare them for the next step. Children's environments have a meaningful impression on the processes by which they gain essential skills and abilities, and are very important to consider as they develop and learn; therefore, adults in early childhood can act as either a source of support and adaptation or contribute to potential risks. When adults provide as much stability as possible, along with intentional planning, children may be better able to cope with life's little and

big transitions. Working together, teachers, administrators, and support school staff can provide students with positive and supportive classroom to classroom transitions.

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## Appendix A IRB Approval Letter

### LIBERTY UNIVERSITY INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

November 13, 2020

Danielle Robertson  
Meredith Park

Re: IRB Exemption - IRB-FY20-21-58 Early Learning Teacher Collaboration and Classroom Transitions

Dear Danielle Robertson, Meredith Park:

The Liberty University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application in accordance with the Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP) and Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and finds your study to be exempt from further IRB review. This means you may begin your research with the data safeguarding methods mentioned in your approved application, and no further IRB oversight is required.

Your study falls under the following exemption category, which identifies specific situations in which human participants research is exempt from the policy set forth in 45 CFR 46: 101(b):

Category 2.(iii). Research that only includes interactions involving educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures, or observation of public behavior (including visual or auditory recording) if at least one of the following criteria is met:  
The information obtained is recorded by the investigator in such a manner that the identity of the human subjects can readily be ascertained, directly or through identifiers linked to the subjects, and an IRB conducts a limited IRB review to make the determination required by §46.111(a)(7).

Your stamped consent form can be found under the Attachments tab within the Submission Details section of your study on Cayuse IRB. This form should be copied and used to gain the consent of your research participants. If you plan to provide your consent information electronically, the contents of the attached consent document should be made available without alteration.

Please note that this exemption only applies to your current research application, and any modifications to your protocol must be reported to the Liberty University IRB for verification of continued exemption status. You may report these changes by completing a modification submission through your Cayuse IRB account.

If you have any questions about this exemption or need assistance in determining whether possible modifications to your protocol would change your exemption status, please email us at [irb@liberty.edu](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).



## Appendix B Permission Request

Thursday September 17th, 2020

Dear Educator/Director,

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research to better understand how early learning teachers are collaborating to support infants, toddlers, and preschoolers with classroom transitions. The title of my research project is Early Learning Teacher Collaboration and Classroom Transitions, and the purpose of my research is to learn how teachers collaborate to support children in transitioning to the next classroom in an early childhood program.

I am writing to request your permission to conduct my research with the teachers at \_\_\_\_\_ and contact the teachers to participate in my research study.

Participants will be asked to participate in a scheduled interview and focus group. Participants will be presented with informed consent information prior to participating. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please respond by email to the researcher's email address.

Sincerely,

Danielle Robertson  
Principal Investigator



## Appendix C Site Approval

Dear Danielle,

The staff of [REDACTED] have my permission to participate in your doctoral study. Please let me know if you need any additional support.

Warm Regards,

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

## Appendix D Consent Form

### Consent

**Title of the Project:** Early Learning Teacher Collaboration and Classroom Transitions

**Principal Investigator:** Danielle Robertson, Ed. S., Liberty University

#### Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. In order to participate, you must be 18 years of age or older and currently teach children ages 0-5 in an early learning/childcare center that has some transition and collaboration practices in place. Examples of these practices include using a transition plan and or transition documents, educating parents on their child's upcoming transition, partaking in transition/teacher collaboration meetings, and planning transition practices such as field trips to kindergarten classrooms, exchanging information with a child's previous teacher, or intentionally scheduling children to visit classrooms in advance, etc.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research project.

#### What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is learn how teachers collaborate to support children in transitioning to the next classroom in an early childhood program.

#### What will happen if you take part in this study?

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

1. Email transition documents to the researcher.
2. Participate in a 1 hour, audio-recorded, phone interview.
3. Review the interview transcript. The interview transcript will be emailed to you 1 week after the interview. It should take approximately 10 minutes to review the transcript. The transcript should be returned by email within 1 week of its receipt.
4. Participate in a 1 hour, audio and video-recorded focus group via Zoom.
5. Review the focus group transcript. The focus group transcript will be emailed to you 1 week after the focus group. It should take approximately 10 minutes to review the transcript. The transcript should be returned by email within 1 week of its receipt.

#### How could you or others benefit from this study?

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

Benefits to society include an increased knowledge of the importance of teacher collaboration to ensure students have smooth classroom transitions.

#### What risks might you experience from being in this study?

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

### How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports 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. Data collected from you may be shared for use in future research studies or with other researchers. If data collected from you is shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed before the data is shared.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential through the use of pseudonyms. Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer and in a locked filing cabinet. The data may be used in future presentations. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted, and all physical records will be shredded.
- The interview and focus group will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.
- Confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in focus group settings. While discouraged, other members of the focus group may share what was discussed with persons outside of the group.

### How will you be compensated for being part of the study?

Participants will be entered into a raffle, and once the study has been completed, 3 participants will be chosen to receive a \$50 VISA gift card for participating in this study. The gift cards will be delivered to the teachers at their assigned childcare center by handing it to the center's administrator at the front door.

### Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether 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 time without affecting those relationships.

### What should you do if you decide 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.

### Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Danielle Robertson. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at [REDACTED] and [REDACTED]. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Meredith Park at [REDACTED].

### Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

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](mailto:irb@liberty.edu).

### Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the researcher using the information provided above.

*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 and video-record me as part of my participation in this study.

---

Signature

## Appendix E Interview Questions

### Standardized Open-Ended Interview Questions

1. Please introduce yourself and share what age group you teach.
2. How many years have you been teaching infants and or toddlers?
3. How long have you collaborated with other early learning educators?
4. Based on your knowledge, what is teacher collaboration?
5. Please share your overall experience with teacher collaboration with other early learning educators.
6. What situations have influenced or affected (in a positive or negative way) your experiences with teacher collaboration?
7. How do you include the child's family in the transition process?
8. If I attended a teacher collaboration meeting with you, what would I observe?
9. What effects have teacher collaboration had on your ability to implement effective transition strategies?
10. How do teachers develop goals during collaboration meetings?
11. What does a typical classroom transition look like for a child at your child care center?
12. What does the program currently do to support teacher collaboration?
13. What would you like to see more of at your child-care center when it comes to teacher collaboration?
14. What additional information can you add about your own collaborative experiences?
15. This is the last question; I truly appreciate the time you've given to this. What do you think needs to be improved when it comes to teacher collaboration and classroom transitions at your center?

## Appendix F Focus Group Questions

### Focus Group Questions

1. Why do you think teacher collaboration is vital for students to have smooth classroom transitions?
2. What procedures are in place at your center that either facilitate or detract from productive collaboration?
3. What are some effective strategies that you have learned during your teaching career that educators can use to support children in having a smooth classroom transition?
4. For those of you who collaborate with others to support children's classroom transitions, what processes are in place at your childcare center to ensure the child's family is involved?

## Appendix G Transition Checklist

### Transition Checklist

Childs Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Birth \_\_\_\_\_ Date of Entry \_\_\_\_\_

Child Care Center Name \_\_\_\_\_ Transition Date \_\_\_\_\_

Type of Transitions:  Classroom to Classroom  Home to Center  
 PreK- Kindergarten  Center to Center

Time Frame	Action	Date Completed	Who's Responsible	Notes
6 Months prior to transition	Center Director/Manager will have conversation with child's teacher concerning transition		Director/Manager	
6 Months prior	Teacher will schedule meeting with parent pertaining to transition plan		Child's Current Teacher	
Twice a year	Plan a Parent/School Night		Family Engagement Specialist/Teacher Director	
2 months prior to transition	Collaborate/discuss child's individual goals from transition plan with parent and new teacher		Child's Current Teacher	
1 month before transition	Child visits classroom (parent encouraged to visit with child)		Current and New Teacher	
Quarterly	Collaboration on child's data/checkpoints (GOLD)		Current and New Teacher	



1 Week before	Ensure child's file is completed to be transferred to new classroom/school/program		Current Teacher	
Transition	Child starts in new classroom		New Teacher	

**Once complete please sign the document below:**

Current Teacher's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

New Teacher's Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Center Director/ Manager Signature \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix H Transition Plan Form

### Transition Planning Form

<b>Child's Name:</b>	<b>Center Name:</b>
Date of Birth	Current classroom Name:
Parents Name:	Current Teacher Name:
<b>General Information</b>	
Date of current ASQ:	Last TS Gold Assessment Date:
Does Child have an IFSP or IEP?	IFSP or IEP Date:
Was child referred for services?	Is child receiving services, if so where?
<b>Placement (please write yes or classroom name where it applies)</b>	
Child will be transitioning from classroom:	To Classroom:
Child will be transitioning from Site:	To Site:
Child will be transitioning from Early Head Start to Head Start:	
Child will be transitioning to Public School:	Charter School:
<b>GOALS</b>	
Child Development Goal:	
School Readiness Goal:	
Family Goal:	

<b>Goals</b>	<b>Transition Activity</b>	<b>When Does Activity Occur?</b>	<b>Who's Involved?</b>	<b>Challenges?</b>	<b>Follow-Up (date)</b>
Child Development Goal:					
School Readiness Goal:					
Family Goal:					

Parent/Guardian Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Current Teacher Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Family Engagement Specialist Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Center Director/Manager Initials \_\_\_\_\_

**Appendix I Permission Form for Transferring**

## Transition Permission Form

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

The parent/guardian of \_\_\_\_\_ (child's name) gives permission to transition him/her to be transitioned from \_\_\_\_\_ (Current classroom name) to \_\_\_\_\_ (New classroom name) on \_\_\_\_\_ (Date of transition).

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Printed Name \_\_\_\_\_

Relationship to child \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_