

“ACCOMPLISHING SOMETHING IMPORTANT:”  
EXPLORING HOW PARENTS OF TWO-YEAR-OLD CHILDREN PERCEIVE THE  
TRANSITION BETWEEN CHILD CARE CLASSROOMS

by

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## **Abstract**

For young children and their families, transitions between classrooms are a normative part of the child care experience, yet these types of transitions are seldom studied. In the United States, there are approximately 144,000 child care centers for children birth to five years of age (Child Care Aware, 2014). Nearly 60% of infants and toddlers participate in some form of nonparental child care arrangement (Iruka & Carver, 2006). In particular, how parents experience their child's transitions between classrooms within child care centers is not well understood. Children aged birth to three years face challenges when separating from trusted caregivers and forming new relationships. This study explored the unfolding of perceptions of five families as their children turned two-years-old and moved between a one-year-old to a two-year-old classroom in the same child care setting. Drawing from a systems approach, the parental perception of the transition was examined in relation to their children's experience. Structured interviews took place with families before, during, and after their children's transition to the new classroom. Mothers were interviewed in four out of the five cases, and one couple chose to participate in the interviews together. Families reported unique concerns such as worry regarding the child's adjustment or concern about how the child would be accepted in the new peer environment, based on certain factors of influence including past experiences with transitions and the temperament and behavior of their child in the child care setting. However, parents regarded the transition positively due to the perceived benefits of a classroom with older peers and advanced learning opportunities. Parents expressed this positive viewpoint to their children through conversations. Interviews suggested that the way parents perceived the transition was closely connected to the child's behaviors in the new environment as well as the quality of relationships formed with the teachers and peers. The findings indicate the importance of

individualizing the transition experience for families, remaining mindful of the family system during the transition, and implementing strategies to support the relationship building process.

*Keywords:* qualitative, transitions, two-year-old, early childhood education, parents

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## **Chapter 1 - Introduction**

For many young children and their families, classroom transitions are a normative part of the child care experience. Nearly 60% of infants and toddlers are enrolled in some form of nonparental child care arrangement in the United States (Iruka & Carver, 2006). During the first three years of life, it is common practice for child care centers to be structured in such a way that children move from classroom to classroom at various developmental or age-related milestones, often in response to state licensure regulations (Cryer, Wagner-Moore, Burchinal, Yazejian, Hurwitz, & Wolery, 2005). Children face many challenges as they experience these transitions between classrooms, which include developing new relationships with caregivers and peers as well as adapting to a change in classroom expectations (Recchia & Dvorakova, 2012). However, these challenges may be viewed as a learning opportunity for a child. Growth and development can occur as a result of the child seeking to meet the demands of a new environment (O'Farrelly, & Hennessy, 2014; Recchia & Dvorakova, 2012). Drawing from a systemic approach, there is mutual influence within a family with each individual's behavior affecting every other member (Christian, 2006; Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). So, as the child is often moved into a state of disequilibrium during the transition, the entire family is in the same situation and collectively trying to create a new state of balance, a new normal (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). One of the central purposes of this study was to expand the scope from primarily focusing on the child during studies about classroom transition to analyzing the larger system, including the parents, and identifying the interaction between components. Although the idea of transitioning a child to a new classroom is not a new phenomenon, examining the lived experience for a parent going through the process is unique.



## **Chapter 2 - Review of Literature**

There is extensive variation in the structure of infant and toddler classrooms between center-based child care programs. Early childhood education centers often offer multiple and separate classrooms for infants and toddlers, transitioning children between classrooms when they reach a specific age such as a one-year-old classroom, two-year-old classroom, or a developmental milestone such as when the child is able to feed one's self or to use the toilet independently (Cryer, Hurwitz, & Wolery, 2000). Although continuity of caregivers, or remaining with the same caregiver for the first three years of life, is considered best practice in early education, it is often represented only in theory rather than used in practice (Cryer, et al., 2000). The school-based model of moving children between caregivers is often established due to educator preferences in age groups, budgetary and ratio considerations (Cryer, et al., 2000).

### **Theoretical Influence**

The research literature surrounding transitions between infant and toddler classrooms (birth to age 3 years) is focused primarily on the experience of the child, but missing is the experience and perspective of the parents as they, along with their child, transition between classrooms. Changes such as this type of transition can potentially create confusion and upset the pre-established balance of a family system (Christian, 2006). Family systems theory suggests that the family is a structure of related parts, where a change in one part results in changes for other individuals in the family system. The family is understood by examining the interactions between parts. Theoretically, the parent is adapting to the new environment along with the child, and seeking to maintain a state of balance within the family system. The influence of transitions on the family system has not been examined in studies examining classroom transitions in the infant and toddler years.

Bronfenbrenner's bioecological theory provides a systemic perspective in which to understand the bidirectional interactions between the child and the various systems of environments and people surrounding the child during this time of transition (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). The child's primary relationships are in the microsystem, and these have subsequent effects on the child's development. In the present study, this includes the interactions between the child and parent and the child and caregiver(s). The mesosystem is the relationships between two or more settings, or two or more microsystems. In this study, the relationships between the child's parents and the child's caregivers are taken into account as influences on the child's development. Included in the child's exosystem are settings and events such as child care program policies related to classroom transitions, teacher education and turnover rate, as well as stresses affecting the parents and family, as each has the potential to indirectly influence the child. This model provides the systemic context in which to understand the influences on the child and family during the transition.

The classrooms for children of this age are typically characterized by relationship-based caregiving due to the significance of attachment relationships during the child's first three years of life (Recchia, 2012). Attachment theory proposes that the type of consistent interaction a child receives in the first few years of life will result in differences in the organization of their attachment style, and the type of bond formed with a primary caregiver is a model for the way a child approaches relationships throughout the lifespan (Ainsworth, 1989). Infant and toddler teachers understand the importance of establishing and maintaining secure relationships with the children in their care. One way these educators accomplish this is through primary caregiving, which is the process of one teacher being primarily responsible for the care and education of a child or particular group of children. Dalli (2000) found that through an attachment theory

perspective, a primary caregiver system worked to ensure the child's sense of security, and the lack of one might lead to a child's security needs being ignored or marginalized. The findings from the study suggest that primary caregiving is a tool that can enhance the young children's experience of starting child care, providing predictability and stability for the child and easing the adjustment period (Dalli, 2000).

### **Toddler Development**

The toddler years are generally considered to be the period of time when the child is 16 to 36 months old (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). This phase of growth consists of exploration with materials, people, and language as the child constructs his understanding of the world through play (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). The primary developmental task for the child at this time is forming a sense of self. Gaining an understanding of who he is closely connects to the toddler's desire for autonomy (Erikson, 1959). With the increase of language and communication, the toddler begins to verbally express his desires. For example, a toddler will often say "no" and refuse to comply with adult requests. Erik Erikson (1959) theorized this stage as one of accomplishing a sense of autonomy versus shame and doubt. Increasing physical, verbal, and mental abilities allow the child to do things for himself, but shame and doubt come from the awareness of adult pressures (Erikson, 1959). Ideally, the toddler emerges from this stage with a greater sense of autonomy versus feeling doubt in his own will and abilities (Erikson, 1959).

The toddler's need to be "big" is often in conflict with his need for close connection with a trusted adult (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). These attachment relationships provide the child with a sense of security, allowing him to construct a healthy sense of self (Ainsworth, 1989). In addition to caregivers, the toddler is also able to develop close relationships with peers who share his same interests, and begin to show preference for certain playmates. Piaget (1970) suggested

that cognitive growth occurs as individuals construct understandings through interactions with the outside world. The toddler is entering the developmental stage Piaget labeled as preoperational thinking, due to development of language and ability to mentally represent concepts (Piaget, 1970). He is continuing to grow these representational abilities between 18 months and 36 months, and represents mental images through actions or deferred imitation, language, and graphic images such as drawing (Piaget, 1970). In terms of physical growth, the toddler is emerging from a rudimentary to a fundamental phase of motor development (Gallahue & Ozmun, 2006). As he reaches two years of age, the toddler has gained significant control over his body and seeks to explore his movement abilities and potential, thus forming the groundwork for more complex motor movements during the preschool years (Gallahue & Ozmun, 2006).

### **Transitions**

For infants and toddlers, moving between classrooms often means children are separating from trusted caregivers and forming new relationships. It is understood that the typical immediate result of the transition to a new classroom for infants and toddlers is increased distress, shown in various ways based on individual characteristics of children (Ahnert et al., 2004; Cryer et. al., 2005; Datler et. al., 2012). It has been suggested that this distress shown when transitioning to a new classroom environment may be explained by the quality of the interactions and relationships between the teacher-child, the parental behavior at the time of the separation, and/or the separation from attachment figures (Ahnert et al., 2004; Cryer et al., 2004; Datler, et al. 2012; Xu, 2006). Recchia (2012) explored aspects of continuity and discontinuity in the relationships between young children and their caregivers throughout the transition process to a new classroom. The author found that adaptable and sensitive caregiving practices can lessen

some of the challenges faced by young children during the transition. The teacher works to “bridge the gap” between environments for the child by individualizing their practices.

Transition practices are used to bridge this gap between classroom environments, preparing and welcoming children into new classrooms. These vary from center to center and even classroom to classroom (Cryer et al., 2000). Some of the most common strategies include: talking about the move with the child’s parents; having the child visit the new classroom; talking about the move with the child; getting the child’s space in the new classroom ready; getting the child used to the routine of the new classroom; and having the new teachers visit the children in the old classroom (Cryer et al., 2000).

The challenges presented by these transitions can also be viewed as learning opportunities. A child’s development may be stimulated due to the task of adapting to a new environment (O’Farrelly & Hennessy, 2014; Recchia & Dvorakova, 2012). Recchia and Dvorakova (2012) studied the experiences of three toddlers transitioning between classrooms. The authors propose the transition moves the child into a position similar to Piaget’s state of disequilibrium. This is because the child is potentially developing as he or she seeks to adapt in the new environment. Early transitions can be understood as opportunities to build resilience for future transitions (O’Farrelly & Hennessy, 2014).

There is a need for specific research regarding the transition experience of parents of this age group to inform the transition strategies used by educators to “bridge the gap” for families. Reciprocal partnerships with families are a key aspect of developmentally appropriate practice in infant and toddler care (Copple & Bredekamp, 2009). This highlights the importance of examining how parents perceive this common type of transition with the hope of improving home and school partnerships. Lovett and Haring (2003) used parent interviews to understand

the parental perception and experience of families transitioning between early intervention services, and the authors were subsequently able to recommend strategies to support families going through these transitions. In the present study, an understanding of the parental perception of the transition experience, particularly parents of infants and toddlers whose transitions are known to be challenging and associated with distress, could serve to inform child care educators as they support other families going through similar, future transitions.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The goal of this study was to explore the parental perceptions of the classroom-to-classroom transition when their child was turning two-years-old (24 months). The overarching research question guiding this study was: How do parents perceive the transition experience from an infant to toddler classroom within the same program? Specific research questions included: How do parents perceive their role in the process? What factors contribute toward parents' perception of the classroom change? How do parental perceptions develop or change throughout the process?

This information will be meaningful for readers and educators as it provides an in-depth insight into how parents experience, process, and perceive the phenomenon of their child moving between classrooms. It is expected that how a child experiences the transition experience may be a significant component important in determining the behavior of the family as a whole.

## **Chapter 3 - Methods**

### **Study Design**

The aim of this study is to analyze the parental experience during their child's transition from an infant to a toddler/two-year-old classroom in the same program. Qualitative methodology was chosen to ensure the participants were able to share their voice and personal stories in an in-depth manner. I used the qualitative methodology of in-depth interviewing in order to gather detailed, descriptive information about the experience and the perspective of the parents. Each family participated in three 30-minute interviews: one before, one during, and one after their child's transition (see Appendix A). This design was created to examine the development of perceptions over time and capture the experience as it naturally occurs. The interview guides were piloted with a parent who had experienced a similar classroom transition with her daughter a year prior. The pilot enabled me to revise and refine questions to reveal the phenomenon being studied.

The classroom teachers completed questionnaires capturing their perspective of the parental transition experience; they also provided contextual information about the transition process (see Appendix B). I was operating under what Patton (2002) describes as a constructivist philosophy. The transition was researched within context as it was occurring, with the understanding that the participant's reality was being socially constructed. I took a phenomenological approach to this study (Patton, 2002). I explored the lived experience of individual families who were going through the transition process from an infant to a toddler/two-year-old classroom.

## **Participants**

Five families participated in this study from two child care centers. Four of the participants were sampled from Early Education Center #1, and one from Early Education Center #2. To participate in this study, the participant's child must have been preparing to transition to a two-year-old classroom. I worked with the center administrators to identify families in their program who fit this criterion. I then met with the classroom teachers of these families, explained the study, and asked them to provide the identified families with an informational handout (See Appendix C). The family contacted me directly via email if they were interested in being a part of the study.

## **Descriptions of Early Education Centers**

### ***Early Education Center #1***

Four of the five families were sampled from Early Education Center #1. Within the physical location of the center, there are three full-day infant, toddler, and two-year-old 'pods' in addition to multiple preschool (3-5 year old) classrooms. Each 'pod' contained an infant, one-year-old, and two-year-old room physically connected to one another. The infant and toddler classrooms practiced primary caregiving, which meant an adult was primarily responsible for responding consistently to the needs of a small group of identified children.

Four families were transitioning from a one-year-old room to a two-year-old room, and between the same two classrooms and teachers, Susan and Allison. The one-year-old room contained eight children, one lead teacher, Susan, one co-lead/full time assistant, Becky, and part time assistant teachers (all names have been changed for confidentiality purposes). The two-year-old room contained 14 children, one lead teacher, Allison, one co-lead/full time assistant, as well as part time assistant teachers. These teachers all practice primary caregiving, but Susan



mentioned that the teachers “try to get comfortable with everybody in the classroom” as well, so the children feel they can rely on more than one person. These classrooms were side by side, and connected by an opening between them that contained a teacher work area. There was a window in the wall through which children could view the children on the other side. The classrooms both opened up to a shared infant/toddler playground space. Both classrooms were typically outdoors at similar times.

The transition process in the Early Education Center #1 infant/toddler program begins a few weeks prior to the child beginning in the new classroom. The two-year-old teacher visits the child in the one-year-old room, and the child visits the new room briefly according to their comfort levels. The parents receive a transition letter two weeks prior to the transition that includes information about the upcoming transition and the date in which it will occur. A transition meeting is then held between the one-year-old teacher, parents, and two-year-old teacher. The two-year-old teacher provides information about the new classroom, and the parents have the opportunity to discuss questions they may have about the classroom environment.

The physical transition process at Early Childhood Center #1 typically occurs in three days. On the first day, the child visits for approximately an hour in the morning, on the second day the child visits in the morning and stays through lunch, and on the third day the child visits in the morning and naps in the two-year-old room. When the child has napped in the two-year-old room, he or she is considered an official member of that classroom. The transition usually takes three days, but the teachers may extend the process depending on the child’s level of adjustment. Prior to the transition, a parent meeting is held with both the one-year-old teacher and two-year-old teacher. They discuss the transition plan, individual needs of the child/family, and address

questions the parents may have. A transition packet is sent with the families, which contains information about the transition plan, new classroom environment, and teachers.

### ***Early Education Center #2***

One family was sampled from Early Education Center #2. In the infant/toddler program, there is one full-day classroom for children aged 6 weeks to 2 years, and one full-day classroom for two-year-olds. Two full-day preschool classrooms are also in the facility. In the infant/toddler classroom, Gretchen is the lead teacher, and she works with a full time co-lead/assistant teacher as well as graduate students, student teachers, and part time assistant teachers. The two-year-old classroom has a lead teacher, Jackie, graduate students, student teachers, and part time assistant teachers. The two classrooms are on different floors of the building and each has its own playground space.

The transition process is typically a week long in the infant/toddler program at Early Education Center #2. The week prior, the child walks though the two-year-old classroom along with Gretchen two or three times. These visits are approximately 15 minutes in length and are designed to establish familiarity with the physical environment. During the transition week, the child visits the two-year-old room along with an infant/toddler teacher on the first and potentially second day, and then visits independently on the following days. The specific transition plan may be slightly altered based on the needs of the child, but the basic structure remains the same. The infant/toddler teacher and two-old-teacher decide upon the transition plan together, and the plan is then shared with and approved by the parent(s). Gretchen holds a parent meeting prior to the transition to discuss the plan with parents. The parents are invited to take a tour of the two-year-old classroom with Jackie, separate from their child. This is a time for parents to get to know the new environment and also ask questions. Jackie schedules a home visit with the new family prior

to the child starting in the classroom full time; this is an opportunity for the teacher and family to get to know one another in a comfortable environment. Jackie provides a “transition packet” to the new family, which includes information on the classroom, teachers, a family information booklet, and developmental articles. The family also receives a “toddler book” to read with their child. The book contains the names and pictures of the children in the two-year-old room, as well pictures and descriptions of areas of the classroom.

### **Data Collection**

To collect the data about how parents experience the transition phenomenon, I conducted three in-depth interviews with each participant. The interviews prior to the transition occurred three days to two weeks before the child’s physical transition to the new classroom, the second interview occurred during the transition, and the third interview occurred two weeks following the child’s completion of the transition. In four out of the five cases, the mother participated in the interviews independent of her husband, and in one case both mother and father participated together. The interviews were conducted at the Early Education Center or the participant’s office at their place of employment. The first interview guide included questions about the child and his/her temperament, current and past experiences in full-day child care, feelings about the upcoming transition, and demographic questions including the parent’s age, occupation, education, temperament, family, and life satisfaction and stressors. The second interview, during the transition week, included questions addressing the transition process, personal relationships with new teachers, support provided to their child, benefits and concerns regarding the transition, and how the process was personally affecting the parent. The third interview guide addressed parents’ perspectives of the transition process as a whole, child adjustment and personal adjustment to the new classroom, opinions about the structure of their child’s transition, personal

support provided, reflection and evaluation of feelings prior to transition, and a role play question about how they would advise a parent whose child is transitioning between classrooms. Each interview included questions targeting parents' experiences, opinions, feelings and knowledge relating to the transition phenomenon (see Appendix A). The teacher questionnaires addressed the transition structure, observations of the experience of both the child and parent, and descriptions of strategies used to support the family (see Appendix B).

During the data collection process, I kept field notes and reflections related to each participant in order to practice reflexivity as well as maintain a sense of the experience as a whole. After finishing the data collection for a participant, I created a case summary. The summary included demographic information for each family, a chronological progression of their experiences and development of perceptions over time, and unique aspects of each case. I also included a separate section in each summary that included my personal interpretations. The research protocol was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board at Kansas State University #7184.

### **Data Analysis**

The interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. I immersed myself in the data by reading, re-reading, reflecting, and contemplating the words of the participants. I began with inductive analysis to identify potential categories and themes (Patton, 2002). I approached the data participant by participant, and I used my research questions as a guide to identify patterns. Responses related to each research question were marked using a color-coded system. I used this system to distinguish themes within and then across participants. I labeled each theme and included quotes supporting that theme from various participants.

Part of phenomenological analysis requires the researcher to attain “*epoche*” meaning to refrain from judgment, to abstain from or stay away from the everyday, ordinary way of perceiving things (Patton, 2002, p. 484). I practiced “*epoche*” during the data analysis process by “bracketing out” and separating specific quotations within each theme to “identify the data in pure form, uncontaminated by extraneous intrusions” (Patton, 2002). I interpreted the comment and then identified what each revealed about the essential nature of the transition phenomenon (Patton, 2002). By doing so, I was able to see the same data in a different view and thereby expand my understanding of each theme.

Having gone through this transition process many times from an outsider’s perspective as a two-year-old teacher, I experienced the natural response of attempting to fit the experience of the participants into what I already knew as I collected data. Prior to the study, I felt I had somewhat of an insider perspective based on this experience. When I experienced a shift in perspective I found I was not much of an insider after all. Removing my own viewpoints and assumptions allowed me to be able to look at the data for what it was aside from personal meaning I was attempting to place on it. Through the analysis process I continued to reflect on my own feelings and thoughts, all the while considering how my personal experience might be affecting the way I understand the experience of the participants (Daly, 2007). This reflexivity is a critical aspect of conducting qualitative research. Reflexivity is a way to continually “monitor my own subjectivity throughout the research process” (Daly, 2007, p. 206).

Two researchers, both experienced early childhood educators, were invited to participate in data analysis. Each reviewed the original transcripts. Guided by the research questions, each independently identified common themes that emerged within and across the interviews. We met to compare our individual analyses and further identify common themes. This confirmation of

themes added credibility to the findings of the study, as each brought variation in perspective yet identified reoccurring patterns across participants.

## **Chapter 4 - Findings**

### **Participants**

Parents who are participating in this study hold at least a bachelor's degree, and most have attained or are pursuing additional higher education degrees. Each of the five families is comprised of a two-parent household (mother and father) and all parents are either employed and/or full-time students. Each family who is participating has experienced at least one prior classroom transition, and three of the five the families have an older child in addition to their two-year-old. Three of the children transitioning between classrooms are female and two are male, and all are turning two years old at the time of the transition. The lead teachers at Early Education Center #1 have attained or are pursuing master's degrees in early childhood education or a closely related field, and the lead teachers at Early Education Center #2 both hold master's level degrees in early childhood education.

The following section includes participant summaries. These summaries describe the experiences of each participant chronologically. Included in each is information from both the parent interviews and teacher questionnaires. These summaries provide insight into the varied experiences of each parent as well as factors influencing their perceptions of the transition process.

#### ***Mark, Martha, and Mary***

Mark and Martha, aged 38 and 39, are the parents of Mary. They are originally from Argentina and speak Spanish as a home language. Mark is an associate professor and Martha is a research scientist. Mark describes himself as active and easy going, and Martha says she tends to express her emotions more than her husband.

Mary is transitioning to the two-year-old room immediately following the summer break at Early Education Center #1. Mary has a somewhat slow-to-warm temperament, but is fairly “easy going” according to her parents and teachers. Mary and her parents have experienced multiple transitions prior to this classroom change (transitioned into an infant room at Early Education Center #1 at 10 months of age, then transitioned out of care at 18 months to spend time with her grandparents, then transitioned back to child care at 21 months). Martha described the difficulty of the initial transition when her daughter was 10 months old, when Mary’s behaviors (crying, clinging, not eating well from bottle) indicated difficulty in adjusting during the first few weeks of being in child care.

During her transition to the two-year-old classroom, Mark and Martha express some concerns, wanting to ensure that their child is feeling welcome in the new environment. After the first visit to Allison’s two-year-old classroom, Allison informed the parents that Mary looked through the window into the one-year-old classroom and cried. The parents feel that she is in a state of “limbo” and does not feel she belongs to any group, which they think “makes her feel sad.” Mark and Martha are looking forward to Mary moving to “a more advanced group.” Allison has explained to them that the new classroom offers varied learning experiences, such as the “alphabet.” The one-year-old teacher, Susan, informed them that Mary is showing the teachers that she is ready to move on by “drawing circles.” Martha comments, “So with that and with all the things that she is doing at home, she is showing that she is growing and so I had no concern.”

During the final interview (two weeks after the last day of the physical transition), Martha explains that Mary’s transition is done, as indicated by her interactions and familiarity with new children in the classroom. Martha emphasizes multiple times that it was helpful to



remain informed about Mary's day and her emotions, and when she had this knowledge she was able to feel relaxed at work as well as effectively communicate with Mary about her day. She expresses the importance of maintaining a consistent home routine so that there were not changes in multiple areas of Mary's life at once. The parents wanted to ensure that Mary felt safe during the transition, and encouraged her to trust and get to know the new people by talking with her about them. This, her mother feels, played a major part in "helping her process the changes better."

### ***Linda and Larry***

Linda is the mother of Larry. She is 38 years old, and has a master's degree in Family Studies and Human Services. She describes herself as determined, and feels her son has taken after her in this regard. Larry has an older brother who is in preschool at the same child care center. Linda is pregnant and she and her husband are expecting their third child two months after Larry transitions to the two-year-old classroom.

Larry began child care at 6 weeks of age at Early Education Center #1. He transitioned to Susan's one-year-old room, and, coincidentally, Becky moved classrooms with him as she assumed a co-teaching position in the one-year-old room after being in the infant room. Linda, his mother, reports that Becky is his "favorite teacher" and is "very attached to her." She wonders how he will "do with this transition because he's technically had her for two years as a teacher."

When commenting on the upcoming classroom transition, Linda seems to view the transition experience as a developmental task. She says that by "learning how to deal with it (transitions) early on, [children] are more prepared for future ones." She speaks of excitement regarding the "older toddler things" that will "help challenge his learning a little bit more" as

well as developing new friendships, which she feels will be beneficial for Larry. To prepare for the transition, Linda mentions talking with her husband and deciding to focus on the benefits and positive things as well as preparing for how the transition “might affect his behavior.”

Each day he visits the classroom during the transition, Larry shows distress behaviors (crying, clinging, wanting to go see “Becky”). Linda says she had expected Larry to “do better” because of his smooth transition to the one-year-old room. However, as she has explained to her husband, “he’s older now, so he understands more about what’s going on and he has more connections, more attachment with those teachers because he has a better memory at this age.” Linda remarks, “I don’t want him to be thinking we’re ripping these people away from him that he’s developed this security with, in particular Becky,” and she wonders if he will be able to find other connections to replace that.

Two weeks later, Linda reflects on the transition experience and remarks that “it went fairly well...some hiccups and ups and downs” but as time has gone on “it gets better.” If she drops off Larry on the playground, Linda says he will frequently run back to Becky if he sees her in the shared playground space and “didn’t want to have anything to do with his new teachers.” Allison, the two-year-old teacher, confirms these occurrences. Linda attributes some of Larry’s distress to a lack of predictability because of classroom staff changes (teachers being sick or absent for a numbers of days in a row). There are still some mornings when Larry cries when Linda drops him off, and she emphasized the importance of maintaining a consistent drop off routine. Linda says that crying is “a natural part, a number of children do that too when their parents drop them off.” She mentions “talking up the new room” through discussions with Larry, in addition to his older brother praising him for being in a “big boy room.” Linda hopes these conversations are “helping him feel like he’s accomplishing something important and will be

more apt to be comfortable in that environment.” She thinks that Larry’s transition is complete at this point, due to him “having his own spot in that environment and finding his own place as far as fitting in with his peers.”

### ***Alice and Abbey***

Alice, aged 29, is the mother of Abbey. The family is originally from China, and speaks Mandarin as a home language. Both parents have earned doctorates in the United States. Alice is a biochemistry research associate. Abbey is the only child of Alice and her husband. They are both looking for new jobs after recently graduating with their Ph.D. degrees, and described their lives as somewhat unstable because of this.

Alice, her mother, says that Abbey likes routine and is wary of strangers and new environments. Abbey is enrolled at Early Education Center #1 and began child care at 9 months of age. Alice explains that Abbey “took a long time to adjust to the daycare” and “kind of refused” for a time. Alice struggled to focus at work during this time because her thoughts were on Abbey. Abbey has a strong relationship with Becky and “is like her shadow” in the classroom. Becky has been Abbey’s teacher for over a year, and the mother says, “I think she will miss Becky a lot!” Alice anticipates that “if she transfers to the two classroom, at first she will cry...maybe one or two weeks...but now she has more thoughts in her mind than when she was like nine months, now she knows we are working.”

During Abbey’s transition week, her mother comments that Abbey is “doing good...better than my expectation.” She thinks it is because Abbey is familiar with the kids and the teachers due to the classrooms being physically connected. Abbey asks to go over to the new classroom, and she once wandered over on her own when the doors were open between classrooms. The mother mentions multiple times that there has been “no crying.” Alice is still a

little worried about Abbey staying the whole day in the two-year-old classroom, but is not as worried as she was before the transition. Alice feels that Abbey will learn more in the two-year-old classroom, and says that Abbey is “growing and wants to explore more...I think she will learn more because I think they have like several times of story time.” The mother also mentions that Abbey “relied too much on [Becky] when she was in the toddler room,” but in the two-year-old classroom there are two teachers for thirteen children, and so “she may become more independent I think.” She feels this is a good thing “because at home, she relies on us a lot. So maybe it is good. Because later, she will need, she needs independence.”

Two weeks after the transition, Alice said the transition has been “kind of easy.” She attributed the ease of the transition to a change in Abbey’s personality. She says that after Abbey turned two, she “likes people more than before...even for strangers...her personality changed a bit, so she’s not scared about the new environment.” Alice thinks that recently, Abbey had become a “big girl” who can talk, express her feelings, assert independence, and play with others more readily and eagerly than in the past. She feels Abbey’s transition is complete because “I can feel she is happy and relaxed.”

### ***Brooke and Beka***

Brooke is the mother of Beka. She is 32 years old and works as an administrative assistant. Her husband is in the military and currently deployed overseas. They have an older son who is in preschool at the same child care center as Beka. Brooke describes herself as fairly easy going and laid back. Her family faces the ongoing stress of her husband being deployed. Brooke’s parents frequently visit to provide help and support.

Beka is enrolled at Early Education Center #1. Her mother, Brooke, describes Beka as a very happy, easy, go-with-the-flow, and feisty child. Brooke stayed at home with her two

children prior to enrolling both in full day care earlier in the year. She says of the initial transition, “I was a mess. I was devastated...I was sick to my stomach, cause I always feel nobody can take better care of my children than me...but after a few weeks it definitely got easier.” When she first started at the center, Beka “got a little agitated” during the first few days, but after that “she was fine.” Brooke says if there are any new student workers in the classroom, Beka “goes right to them” and easily forms new relationships.

When asked how she would describe Beka’s current experience in full day child care, Brooke mentions that “it’s a positive experience,” and “she’s definitely ready to go to the two-year-old classroom,” This is because she thinks Beka is “kind of bored in the one-year-old room” due to the environment being “not as active, they don’t do as many projects or anything like that.” Beka has been pushing some of the other children, which Brooke thinks is due to a combination of boredom and “terrible twos,” and Brooke is “ready to see some changes when she moves over.” When describing her feelings about the upcoming transition, she says:

“I’m really excited, especially cause I think there’s a little bit more of a teaching aspect, as far as you know letters, numbers, and things like that...I’m excited for her to learn more and make new friends, and maybe just a different overall experience there than maybe what she’s getting in the one-year-old class. So I’m excited, I’m definitely ready. We’re both ready.”

During the transition week, Brooke says that she has received positive reports about Beka’s experience in the new classroom. She has already made a connection with Beka’s new teacher, Allison, and says they “have a lot in common” (military families and same age children). She continues to express excitement about the transition and has no concerns about the experience. Brooke mentions, “...I’m so positive about it and excited about it. That helps her to

be excited and positive about it too.” Reflecting on the transition two weeks following it, Brooke describes the transition as a “really positive experience for her” and feels that the familiar faces and physical environment are the main contributors to Beka’s comfort level in Allison’s classroom. Brooke remarks that Beka’s older brother had a more difficult time transitioning to his preschool classroom, which was “harder for me than Beka’s. Beka’s I was excited about. I wanted it to happen, cause I knew that’s where she needed to be.”

### ***Paige and Pete***

Paige is the mother of Pete. She and her husband have an older son as well, who is in preschool at the same early education center as Pete. Paige works as an accountant for the three businesses owned by her and her husband. She describes herself as shy, reserved, easy-going, and compassionate. Her mother has recently moved close by to help support the family while Paige goes back to school.

Pete is enrolled in Gretchen’s infant/toddler classroom at Early Education Center #2. Pete spent the first year of his life at home with a nanny before starting childcare a month before his first birthday. He has remained in the infant/toddler classroom for a year. Paige is very pleased with his experience and remarks about the “tremendous amount of information” he has learned in the classroom. Paige says that Pete typically cries after she drops him off, but not if his father or grandmother brings him to the classroom. Gretchen says this is because Pete is very attached to his mom.

When discussing the upcoming transition, Paige mentions how excited she is and says, “I know that he’s getting bored with where he’s at because he’s getting older.” Paige says that Gretchen has informed her, “he’s getting bored, he’s tired of the baby toys.” Gretchen and Pete have walked through the two-year-old classroom together, informally. Gretchen spoke to Paige

about how “excited” Pete is to be there and together they have discussed his readiness to be in the new classroom. She has found the communication with Gretchen to be personally helpful: “I like the communication where she was not only transitioning him, but she was transitioning me too...It felt like she was getting me ready too.”

After a few days of visiting Jackie’s two-year-old classroom, Pete no longer wants to return to the infant room. At his second full day in the new classroom, Paige is surprised to find that he “just took off” instead of lingering and not wanting her to leave him, as he normally does. “I wasn’t expecting that,” she comments. Regarding the structure of the transition, Paige says, “it was nice that it was kind of like you’re dipping your toes a little bit instead of totally jumping in. It was more comfortable for us, more comfortable for him.” Paige was comparing their preference for the transition strategies being used with Pete, to their transition experiences at another child care center with Pete’s older brother. She sees the benefits of the new classroom as “its something different, something new, kind of matches his developmental level now.” Paige says the small steps of the transition process are helpful and the family is “feeding off of him and how he was taking it [which] kind of directed how we should react.”

When speaking to Paige two weeks following Pete’s physical transition to the new classroom, she mentions that the “honeymoon kind of wore off.” Pete shows some distress (clinging to mother) at drop off time in the two-year old classroom, but Paige says that overall “he seems to have gotten comfortable.” She noticed that Pete is “no longer bored...he’s being challenged again” which she feels has contributed to his positive transition experience. After getting to know the teachers, the mother is “more comfortable now that I know he’s in good hands, and now that I feel confident in the teachers.”

## **Identified Themes from Parent Interviews**

The summaries of the parental experiences provide the context and support for the identified themes that emerged across participants. This section presents the findings to the following research questions: How do parents perceive their role in the process? What factors contribute toward parents' perception of the classroom change? How do parental perceptions develop or change throughout the process?

### **How do parents perceive their role in the transition process?**

#### *The parents frame the experience for the child through conversations*

Parents place emphasis on what will appeal to their children's interests during conversations about the transition process, and in doing so, create a way for the children to interpret the transition. This form of communication addresses the question referring to how parents perceived their role in the process. Parents send the message that the transition will lead to exciting new opportunities in the child's eyes. For example, Brooke did this by "saying 'how exciting its gonna be because you'll see new things, you'll meet new friends, you'll have new teachers.'" All but one parent mentioned appealing to this desire by sending their children the message that the transition is important; it means they are growing up and becoming "big". This is a way for the child to not only gain an understanding about what is happening, but also to provide him or her with a sense of accomplishment. For instance, Linda remarks:

"We've talked about his big boy room and all the things he gets to do in that room...his brother helped too and said, 'Ooh you are in a big boy room just like me!' So hopefully that's helping him feel like he's accomplishing something important."

The transition is framed in a way to help the child feel important, as illustrated by Paige's comment: "We've talked about, 'you're going to the new classroom cause you're big, you just



had your birthday.’ He knows he’s a bigger kid and he’s going into a new class.” In the face of an experience that has the potential for children to feel as if they have very little choice or control, parents support them by adding meaning to experience and working to instill a sense of pride the child about what they are accomplishing.

### ***Parents provide information to the child***

Participants feel that providing their child with information about the changes occurring due to the transition helps him or her process the experience. Mark and Martha reported conversations at home in which they encouraged their daughter to talk about new relationships and experiences. Each day, Martha maintains the routine of asking her child what she played, who she played with, and what she ate. Martha relies on information provided by the teachers (via email or face-to-face conversations) to enhance these conversations with Mary. Other parents mention similar conversations with their child in which they talk through changes in terms of new toys, friends, and teachers. During the transition experience, it seems parents perceive their role as providing information to help the child process changes and framing the transition to give their child a sense of purpose, excitement, and accomplishment. These discussions may have normalized the experience let the child know that from their parents’ perspective, the transition was a good experience.

### **What factors contribute toward parents’ perception of the classroom change?**

#### ***The transition is welcomed due to perceived benefits for the child***

All participants share the perspective that transitioning to the two-year-old room will lead to increased learning opportunities for their child. The transition is a welcome change for the parents: a classroom that offers different and varied play materials and learning experiences. The transition is positively anticipated because the new environment offers opportunities the child is

seeking but not able to attain in the younger classroom environment. For example, Linda said, “I think it’s great, I think he’ll get to do more older toddler things and that will be enjoyable to him to kind of help challenge his learning a little bit more.” This discernment of upcoming benefits is a significant factor affecting the parental perception of the classroom-to-classroom transition. Parental understanding of developmental readiness to transition seems to be influenced by personal insight, knowledge of child development, and messages received from the classroom teachers. Understanding that their child is ready to move on from the current classroom, parents focus on ways the new environment will be beneficial in terms of development and learning.

The transition is viewed as similar to a promotion or advancement. This is illustrated by Mark’s comment: “I think just being in a more advanced group she will learn more things.” Parents observe distinct differences in the types of play in which their child is engaged as compared to the younger children in the one-year-old room. Participants also recognize that a new classroom will be interesting and appealing to the child, particularly in terms of the social environment. Alice says, “In the new room she will be curious about what they are doing. She will follow the older kids in what they are doing.” All parents feel that the child will benefit from the older children in the two-year-old classroom who will be modeling new skills and playing slightly ahead of their child’s level, which will promote their child’s learning. Martha says the older peer models “...will also help her on the potty training and all that. With other kids and just because they are doing things different she will want to do the same thing. So that will help her learn faster.”

### ***Children show developmental readiness to transition***

The transition is taking place at a time when the children seemed to be outgrowing their current environment. All children in the study are displaying behaviors that show both teachers

and parents that they were developmentally ready to be in the two-year-old classroom. Martha remarks:

“They [the infant teachers] were telling me, ‘she was drawing a circle and doing this and that. It’s just showing us she is ready to move on.’ So with that and with all the things she is doing at home, she is showing she is growing and so I had no concern.”

Three parents mention that their child is “getting bored” in the one-year-old room because they are the oldest in the group and more advanced in their social and cognitive play. Paige states, “You can tell he was getting bored. So a benefit is that it’s something different, something new, kind of matches his development level now.” The transition is understood as a necessary process due to the child’s growth and need for teaching and learning to match his or her developmental level. Alice illustrated this point by saying, “I think she will learn more because they have several story times...different routines...they will play games that the other room will not play.”

Challenges presented by the transition experiences can be framed as opportunities. Linda held the viewpoint that the transition was an opportunity for her son to learn *how* to transition. She expressed that transitions are an inevitable part of life, and learning early on how to transition would prepare him for the future. She remarked, “This is a natural growing transition for the child and I think it’s very healthy for them to have these experiences because it can help them later on in life as they transition. Cause there’s transitions constantly in life.”

## **How do parental perceptions develop or change over time?**

### ***Development of quality relationships***

Relationships play a reoccurring role in the transition experience for both parent and child. Building connections seems to be central to the entire process. If the child has a strong bond with a caregiver from the one-year-old classroom, parents question how the child will cope

without her in the new environment. However, they are optimistic that he or she will form quality relationships with new teachers. The quality of current teacher relationships, previous experience of both parent and child with classroom transitions, and the temperament style of the child all seem to influence the way parents anticipate the upcoming classroom change. Initial perceptions change over time as parents become comfortable with the new teachers and observe their children forming relationships with the new teachers and children. After the transition, the child's security in these relationships with caregivers and peers has an influence on whether or not the parent considers the child to have adjusted. This process of relationship building and the behaviors of the child in the new environment appear to be closely connected to the parental perception of the transition over time.

Gaining comfort with new teachers is seen as the initial step in adjusting to the classroom environment as a whole. Martha remarks, "Once she started feeling comfortable with the new teachers then everything went smooth, and then she's making friends and she's completely adjusted." A "smooth transition" (minimal distress behaviors, such as crying) is repeatedly attributed to the child's level of familiarity with the new teachers as well as peers prior to the transition. During the transition week, Alice says, "So far it's good. I think it is that she is kind of familiar with those teachers and the kids, because previously they were together with her [in the one-year-old room]. So she's doing good. Better than my expectation (laughs)." Trusting and feeling confident in the new teachers seems to also help the parent to adjust, as Page says, "I'm more comfortable now that I know he's in good hands, and now that I feel confident in the teachers. So you have to get comfortable with the teachers as well as him [the child]."

*Adjustment equated with sense of belonging*

As parents reflect on whether or not their child has adjusted to the new classroom environment, adjustment is often equated with whether or not the child has found a place in the social environment. During the transition processes, Mark compares the experience to a state of limbo, and speaks to the significance of Mary finding a place where she feels she belongs: “I guess it is just important she understand that the other group is taking her, that she is integrating with the other group, not like she is just in between there, not knowing where to go.” Reflecting back on the experience after the transition, the Martha says, “She’s making friends and she’s completely adjusted. Once the teacher told me she’s playing with (child’s name) and getting buddies, I said ‘okay that’s great! That’s it! That’s the end!’ She won’t feel left out, she won’t feel alone.” Martha remarks on the difference between the need for establishing peer relationships when settling into the two-year-old room, as compared to Mary’s transition to the one-year-old room a year prior. She mentions, “This is the age when she starts playing with someone else, not by herself. If it were, you know, the toddlers, I wouldn’t care if she doesn’t have a friend because I know that they play mostly by themselves. Now she needs friends and so she has to learn how to play with others.” Other parents share this same perspective and echo the need for their child to feel a sense of belonging in the social setting. Linda states, “He has his own spot in that environment and he is finding his own place as far as fitting in with his new peers.” For the child, parent, and teacher, this transition to a two-year-old room appears to be an experience of establishing and building relationships. The process of transition can be viewed as a system of social and emotional connections being strengthened over time.

### ***Child behaviors influence parental perception over time***

Some parental perceptions changed over the course of the transition experience, based on their children’s behaviors throughout the process. Alice anticipated that the classroom transition

would be difficult for her daughter, as her child was very close with one particular teacher, had a shy temperament, and had not coped well with transitions in the past. She expressed significant stress prior to the classroom change, but this was alleviated during the transition process as her daughter responded positively to the new environment, peers, and teachers. After the transition, the mother said she could feel her child's happiness and relaxed state, and reflected that the transitioned had not personally affected her like she anticipated. Linda was excited for the upcoming transition and felt it was an opportunity for growth for her son. She had expected her child to "do better" and not experience significant distress in the new environment. Although she maintained a positive attitude, "As time goes on, that will improve," she spoke of needing to reassure her husband and reflected on conversations they were having about how to best support their son.

## Chapter 5 - Discussion

The results of this study describe parents' perceptions of the transition process from an infant/toddler room to a two-year-old classroom. Each parent faces unique challenges as his or her child experiences the process of classroom transition. Parents feel excitement and pride for their children as they enter into an environment filled with new opportunities for growth and development. Certain factors contribute to this perception, including messages from classroom teachers regarding the children's readiness to move on to an older classroom, personal observations of the children seeking out cognitive and social challenges, and anticipation of benefits to the children's development in an environment with older peer models. These findings indicate that, although the parental perception is constructed in multiple ways, child care educators can be a primary source of influence. Understanding their children's level of development and the reasons why a classroom change would benefit their growth helped these parents positively navigate the transition.

Two-year-old children are establishing a sense of autonomy during this developmental period, and seek out ways to make choices, handle problems on their own, and "stand on their own two feet" (Erikson, 1959, p. 71). When talking to their children about the transition, parents emphasize that the child is accomplishing something important and relay a sense of excitement for the new peers, teachers, and play materials. These conversations may help children feel a sense of control in a situation that has the potential for them to feel somewhat powerless. This may enable the children to continue to develop a sense of autonomy during this time of transition.

Several studies have examined the experience and process of adjustment for a child transitioning between classrooms and show the parental experience has not been examined in the

research literature (Cryer et. al., 2005; Ahnert et al., 2004; Datler et. al., 2012; Recchia, 2012). For the parents in this study, relationships seem to be one of the salient components of the transition phenomenon. These participants express a need to personally trust and feel comfortable with the new teachers, as well as know that their children are establishing positive relationships with the teachers as well. It is important for the parents to understand that their children feel a sense of belonging in the social environment of their peers. Several parents indicate that a gradual transition over a period of days is beneficial both personally and for their children. Easing into the environment helps both parent and child feel more comfortable before starting in the new classroom full time. Also, parents rely on the teachers for information regarding their children's social adjustment and development within the classroom, as the parents may not easily observe this firsthand. The teachers at Early Education Center #1 send a daily email updating each parent in their classroom about their children's behaviors and mood. All of the parents from this center mention how much they value and appreciate this information during the day. It eases anxiety and helps them focus on their work as well as sparks and provides content for end-of-the-day conversations between the parent and child. These emails keep the parent informed on their child's progress regardless of whether or not time allows for face-to-face conversations with a teacher during the day in the classroom environment.

The changes in Linda and Alice's perceptions of the transition over time are based on unexpected behaviors exhibited by their children. Alice expected Abbey to express distress during the transition, but her own stress was alleviated when she observed her daughter responding positively to the new environment. In contrast, Linda expected Larry to navigate the transition fairly easily, but he showed daily distress by crying and requesting to return to the teachers in the one-year-old classroom. The reassurance Linda provided to her husband about



Larry's distress behaviors illustrates how each part of the family system affects the others. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model provides a way of viewing the interconnected pieces of the transition experience (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998). This is evidenced by the child's behaviors having an influence on the parental reaction and interpretation of the transition as well as the parents' reliance on communication from classroom teachers. The stress experienced by parents as a result of the child's distress behaviors may influence their daily lives at work and at home, possibly impacting the child as well.

The transition can be seen as a normative, expected stress experienced by the family (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993). Family systems theory can explain the reasons why family members behave the way they do in certain situations (Christian, 2006). Families each possess a unique state of balance that allows them to know what to expect, and a change can create inconsistency in the system (Christian, 2006). Family systems theory is relevant when considering classroom transitions. Paige spoke directly to the mutual influence of members of the family during the transition process:

“I think we were all ready for it cause we could tell he was getting bored...we liked the slow transition just to make sure he was ready. We kind of had to see if he had changed in any way or got a little scared about it, so the small steps were nice. So then we were just kind of feeding off of him and how he was taking it to kind of direct how we should react.”

As early childhood professionals observe the result of disequilibrium on the family system during classroom transitions, parents can be encouraged to find other ways to maintain consistency in their daily lives. For example, maintaining a consistent morning routine with the child, or attempting to limit other changes that could potentially occur at the same time. Mark

and Martha were acutely aware of this potential influence, and practiced maintaining as much consistency as possible during their daughter's transition. The parents express the importance of maintaining a consistent home routine so that there are minimal changes in multiple areas of Mary's life at once, and feel this contributes to adjustment in the new classroom. By conceptualizing the phenomenon through family systems theory, we can better predict and explain to families what they can expect, and provide strategies to lessen the impact of the transition on the family as a whole (Whitchurch & Constantine, 1993).

Linda holds the perspective that this experience was an opportunity for Larry to learn how to transition, which frames the challenges experienced by the child as opportunities for growth. The child's development may be stimulated as he or she moves into a state of disequilibrium and seeks to adapt to a new environment (Recchia and Dvorakova, 2012). In the absence of early transitions, such as times when children experience continuity of care, parents may express concern that their child might have increased difficulty separating from caregivers and adjusting during later transitions (Hedge & Cassidy, 2004). Early transitions can be understood as opportunities to build resilience for future transitions, which provides a varied perspective on the transition experience (O'Farrelly & Hennessy, 2014).

### **Study Limitations and Strengths**

One limitation of the study is the absence of participant observation. I chose to utilize parent interviews as the main source of data collection, but in future studies I would suggest adding an observation component. In particular, it may be insightful to observe the drop off and pick up routines of families in the one-year-old room as compared to the two-year-old room. Observations may reveal subtleties not expressed in interviews. A strength of this study is the design. By interviewing parents at three points in time I was able to analyze the development of

perceptions as well as more confidently identify potential factors of influence. Another strength is the sample. Among the five participants included in the study, consistent themes emerged and I began to reach saturation. This is also significant considering the variation in cultural backgrounds of the participants.

### **Implication for Future Research**

All the children in this study were transitioning from one-year-old rooms to two-year-old rooms. From the perspective of these participants, it is clear that the one-year-old transition is a different sort of experience for parents. One-year-old children are limited in their cognitive ability to process the change and are more prone to react in distress when separated from trusted caregivers. Cryer et al (2005) found that younger infants showed more distress upon moving to a new classroom than older toddlers. Parents reported the children displaying significant distress behaviors during the initial transition to child care, as well as the transition between an infant to a one-year-old room. These same children showed minimal distress during the two-year-old classroom transition. Examining the classroom transition experience of parents of younger children may be an area for further research. This could provide insight into the differences in the structure, child experience, and parental perception of a classroom transition to a one-year-old room as compared to a two-year-old room.

### **Implications for Educators**

Educators and administrators must be mindful that several factors may contribute to the significance of the transition experience, such as past experiences with classroom transitions, parent's temperament, temperament of the child, quality of relationships with classroom teachers, understanding of child development, levels of support received by the parents. Certain transition strategies were agreed by all families to be beneficial for the child's transition. These

included maintaining consistent communication with the teacher regarding the child's progress via email, phone, or face-to-face conversations; establishing familiarity between the child and the new teachers and peers; enabling the child to gain comfort through repeated visitation of the two-year-old room prior to starting in the classroom full-time. In reference to the last strategy, it may be helpful to flexibly adjust transition strategies based on the child's reaction to the transition as well as what parents consider to be the child's greatest needs. For example, at Early Education Center #1, the teachers extend the visitation days for the child based on signs of distress or discomfort in the new classroom environment. In addition, families used knowledge of child development and classroom teaching practices to accept and welcome the classroom-to-classroom transition, which indicates that providing this information to families may help others in a similar way. Educators should appreciate that although transitioning between classrooms is a common occurrence in child care centers, children and families experience the process in unique ways.

Teachers and administrators must understand the family as a system. Parents affect and are affected by their children's behavior. As teachers maintain an awareness of the individual needs, values, and culture of families, support strategies can be adjusted accordingly. Educators should intentionally engage parents in discussions regarding their children's needs, as well as concerns and experiences they anticipate. Teachers should invite this type of discussion prior to the transition, and continue to monitor their progress during and after the transition. The parents in this study shared certain overlapping concerns, but others that were exclusive to particular individuals. For example, three out of the five parents said their greatest concern regarding the upcoming transition was whether or not their child would adjust and fit into the new peer group. A concern expressed by only by Paige was the anticipation of how her child would be treated by

older peers due to the experience of her older son being “bullied” when he was two-years-old. The older sibling’s negative experienced influenced how this parent perceived the upcoming transition for her younger son. This illustrates the need for educators to hold individual conversations with parents in order to identify and address particular concerns that might not be commonly shared. Educators should be especially mindful when working with families of children who are experiencing significant difficulties during and after the transition, as the child’s distress may likely be influencing the family’s perception of the experience.

Teachers and administrators should consider the physical relationship between the infant and toddler rooms. These findings suggest that children were comfortable with the transition because they were able to see their new teachers and peers prior to the transition as well as see their former teacher and peers after the transition. For example, at the Early Education Center #1, the two classrooms are connected and the children are familiar with the neighboring children and teachers. This distinctive design may have influenced how the children transitioned to the two-year-old room. Four out of five parents identified this aspect as being helpful for their child in gaining comfort more easily in the new classroom. If this design is not possible due to the physical arrangement of a child care center, teachers might use strategies such as center-wide community events in order to establish familiarity with parents in classrooms other than their own.

## **Conclusion**

This study illustrates the complexity of the transition phenomenon for parents of two-year-olds. The findings enable us to expand our understanding of the transition by incorporating the parental process of adjustment as the focus of the entire experience. The commonality of these transitions in early childhood education centers should not deter educators and practitioners

from treating each familial experience as unique and significant. Not only is the child seeking to adapt and find a place in the new classroom environment, but the parents are as well. This in-depth study of the lived experience of these five families provided significant insight into the transition phenomenon. This insight can serve to enhance the practices of educators seeking to establish reciprocal relationships with families before, during, and after a transition to their classroom.

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## Appendix A - Parent Interview Guides

### Parent Interview #1: (before transition)

1) Tell me about your child.

Follow-Up: Now I would like to specifically talk about your child's temperament. Temperament describes how a child approaches and reacts to the world. It is her personal "style." Children can adapt over time, but let's paint a picture of your child's current style.

*1:How would you describe your child's reaction to new people?*

*2:How about her reaction to change or unexpected transitions?*

*3:How would you describe her frustration tolerance (such as persistence with challenges/handle frustration)*

*4:How would you describe her intensity of reaction?*

*5:The last aspect is her activity level.*

\*Before I move on to talking about your child's experience in child care, is there anything else you want to tell me about your child?

2) How would you describe your child's current experience in full day child care?

Follow-Up: *Drop off routine/pick-up routine*

*Does your child show preference for caregivers? If so, describe the relationship.*

*Peer interactions*

*Perceived benefits for the child*

3) Now let us think back to when your child first began full day child care. What can you tell me about this transition for your child?

Follow-Up: *Age at transition*

*Reason for transition*

*Adjustment period for child*

*Relationship development between child and primary caregiver*

4) Describe your own experience when your child transitioned to full day child care.

Follow-Up: Please share specific examples...*As a wife/husband*

*Mother/father*

*Employee*

5) How would you describe your relationship with the lead teacher in the infant classroom?

Follow-Up: *How was the relationship established initially? (conference, home visit, classroom visit)*

*In what ways do you think the relationship has been built over time?*

6) We have talked about you and your child's experience in child care. Now let us look ahead to the upcoming move to the new classroom. Describe your feelings about your child transitioning to the toddler classroom?

Follow-Up: *What would help you prepare for the transition?*

*What would be helpful in preparing your child for the transition?*

7) These last questions are to provide me with some information about yourself.

Follow-Up: *What is your age?*

*What is your occupation?*

*Describe your education leading up to your current position*

*How would you describe your temperament style (How is yours similar to your child's, or different?)*

*Tell me about your family (# of children, ages) and extended family*

*Describe your life satisfaction*

*Describe any stressors affecting your family presently*

8) Those are all the topics I wanted to ask you about today. Anything else you care to add?

## **Parent Interview #2: (during transition week)**

1) At the time of our current meeting, your child is in the process of visiting his/her new classroom. How do you think the transition is going for your child so far?

Follow-Up: *Feedback from infant teacher*

*Feedback from toddler teacher*

*Behavior changes in child*

*Conversations with child*

*Personal observations*

2) This next question is about your perspective. What do you think about how the transition process has been structured for your child thus far?

Follow-Up: *How has the infant teacher helped prepare the child?*

*How has the toddler teacher welcomed the child into the new classroom?*

*Personal conversations with child*

3) What types of interactions have you had with the toddler teacher?

Follow-Up: *Informal*

*Formal*

4) Describe what you have done to support your child during this transition.

Follow-Up: *What input did you give to the teachers regarding this process?*

*What strategies have you used to help your child during this transition week?*

5) When thinking about your child entering a new classroom, what are some benefits of a transition that come to mind?

Follow-Up: *What are you excited about?*

6) When thinking about your child entering a new classroom, what concerns come to mind, if any?

7) How would you describe your child's "readiness" for joining a new classroom? Please give specific examples that illustrate your thoughts.

8) My last question is directed at your personal experience. This is not only a transition process for your child, but also for you as parents. How is this transition process affecting you, if at all?

9) These are the questions I wanted to ask. What should I have asked you that I didn't think to ask?

**Parent Interview #3: (two weeks after transition)**

1) At this point, your child is in the toddler classroom full time and has finished the physical transition process. How would you describe your child's transition experience overall?

Follow-Up: *What types of challenges did your child face?*

*What were the greatest contributors to the successful transition?*

2) In what ways has your child adjusted (or not) to the new classroom?

Follow-Up: *Teachers*

*Peers*

*Environment*

*Daily schedule*

3) Describe your comfort level with your child's adjustment to the classroom?

4) This question helps me understand your perspective about how the structure of the process met your child's needs. Let's think back over the last few weeks, what are your opinions about the effectiveness of various aspects of the transition process?

Follow-Up: *Home visit*

*Toddler classroom book*

*Various types of classroom visits:*

*Classroom walk-through*

*Classroom visits with infant teacher*

*Classroom visits without infant teacher*

*Time spend with toddler teacher*

*Length of transition*

*Do you think the structure of the process met the needs of your child?*

*Is there anything you wish you could have changed?*

5) What were the most meaningful ways you helped your child through the transition process?

6) We have focused on your child's overall experience, but this next question will focus on your personal experience. When we first met, you mentioned certain feelings of [anticipation and anxiety]. Do you continue to feel this way? Why or why not?

7) Would you say the "transition" is complete? Why or why not?

Probe: *Are you still transitioning into the new classroom? If so, how?*

*Is your child still transitioning into the new classroom? If so, how?*

8) Let us say you are having a conversation with a parent whose child is preparing to transition his/her child to a toddler classroom. What advice would you give to that parent?

## **Appendix B - Teacher Questionnaires**

### **Infant Teacher Questionnaire**

- 1) What is the structure of the transition plan for moving this child to the new classroom?
- 2) How did you decide on this plan, and how were the child's parents involved in the process?
- 3) How does this particular transition plan meet the individual needs of the child?
- 4) What are you doing for this particular child and family to help support them through the transition experience?
- 5) Describe your relationship with these particular parents? Examples?
- 6) How would you describe the emotions these parents are feeling about their child transitioning to the toddler room? Please share specific observations.
- 7) What strategies have you found helpful when communicating with these parents about the transition process?
- 8) Describe the ways in which the parents are helping their child prepare for the transition.
- 9) Please provide some background information about yourself.  
Please mention your: *Background in teaching, Age, Specific job description, Education*
- 10) Please include additional information regarding the transition process for this family that you feel is important:

### **Two-Year-Old Teacher Questionnaire #1**

- 1) Describe the child's experience in the transition so far.  
Please touch on each of these points:
  - The child's separation from familiar teachers or parents*
  - The child's interactions with peers*
  - The child's interactions with teachers*
  - The child's engagement in the classroom environment*
- 2) What are you doing for this particular child to help support him or her through the transition experience?
- 3) What types of interactions have you had with the parents?
- 4) In what ways will you initiate a relationship with these parents?
- 5) In what ways are you helping to support them in this process?

- 6) Describe the parent's behaviors you observed as well as the child's behaviors at separation.
- 7) In what ways will you integrate this new family into the classroom environment?
- 8) This is not only a transition process for the child, but also for you a teacher. How is this transition process affecting you as a teacher?
- 9) Please provide some background information about yourself.

Please mention your: *Background in teaching, Age, Specific job description, Education*

- 10) Please include additional information regarding the transition process for this family that you feel is important:

### **Two-Year-Old Teacher Questionnaire #2**

- 1) In what ways has the child adjusted (or not) to the new classroom? Please describe specific observations of child behaviors.
- 2) How effective has this transition process (or strategies) been for the child, and particularly for the parents? Please give specific examples.
- 3) Do you think the structure of the process met the needs of the child? Why or why not?
- 4) Is there anything you wish you could have changed about the transition process? Why?
- 5) What questions or concerns have the parents brought to you, and how have you answered them?
- 6) Describe the parents' comfort level with their child's adjustment to the classroom? Please share specific observations.
- 7) Describe the ways in which the parents helped their child through the transition.
- 8) Would you say the "transition" is complete?

**If answer is yes:** What leads you think the child and parents have adjusted to the new classroom?

**If answer is no:** How are the parents and child continuing to adjust to the classroom?

- 9) Please include additional information regarding the transition process for this family that you feel is important:

## Appendix C - Informational Form for Participants

Parental Experience of the Transition between Classrooms in Child Care

Researchers: Bronwyn S. Fees, Ph.D., and Emilee Morris, B.S.

Kansas State University

### Parent Information

We are conducting this study because we would like to know more about how parents experience the transition between child care classrooms when their child is under three years old. We want to discover what the experience is like in order to inform transition practices used to prepare families for this classroom change.

To be eligible for the study, we prefer that you are experiencing this classroom transition for the first time. If you agree to participate, you and your partner together will be interviewed three times about your experiences related to your child's classroom transition. The interviews will each last approximately half an hour. Interviews will take place at the child care center or a location of your choosing, and they will be scheduled flexibly, depending on your availability.

Your participation in the study will total approximately one month.

Understanding how parents experience their child's transition between child care classrooms is important to improving the family-center relationship. If child care providers have a better understanding of how parents experience this change, programs aimed at supporting families through this transition could be improved. Your participation in this research project could help make that happen.

*If you are interested in participating in the study or would like to know further information, please contact Emilee Morris at [emorris@ksu.edu](mailto:emorris@ksu.edu) or Bronwyn Fees at [fees@ksu.edu](mailto:fees@ksu.edu).*

## **Appendix D – Participant Consent Forms**

### **Parental Perceptions of Transition Between Birth-3 Child Care Classrooms**

**Researcher: Emilee Morris**

**Participant: Parent(s)**

You are being asked to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow your participation in the study. You should receive a copy of this document to take with you.

#### **Explanation of Study**

This study is being done because I would like to know more about how parents experience the transition between child care classrooms when their child is under three years old. I want to discover what the experience is like in order to inform transition practices used to prepare families for this classroom change.

If you agree to participate, you and your partner together will be interviewed three times about your experiences related to your child's classroom transition. The interviews will be audio recorded. The interviews will each last approximately one hour.

You will be asked to complete a transition journal. There will be documents in this journal to be filled out each day for four weeks immediately after you or your partner drop your child off at child care. There will also be a section for you to add additional thoughts as you see fit throughout the transition process.

A researcher will observe once in your child's first classroom and once in the new classroom. Your participation in the study will total approximately one month.

#### **Risks and Discomforts**

You might feel discomfort with one or more topics brought up during an interview. You may refuse to answer any questions and are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

#### **Benefits**

Understanding how parents experience their child's transition between child care classrooms is important to improving the family-center relationship. If child care providers have a better understanding of how parents experience this change, programs aimed at supporting families through this transition could be improved.

#### **Confidentiality and Records**

Your study information will be kept confidential. Video and audio tapes will be locked in a cabinet in one researcher's office. When the video and audio tapes are transcribed, no



information that identifies you will be included in the transcript. Pseudonyms (made-up names) will be used to identify individual participants in the transcripts. The list that ties your real name to your pseudonym will be placed in a locked cabinet in one of the researcher's office. After the video and audio tapes are transcribed, the tapes will be destroyed.

Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

- Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;
- Representatives of Kansas State University (KSU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at KSU;

### **Contact Information**

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact Bronwyn Fees, Kansas State University, [fees@ksu.edu](mailto:fees@ksu.edu), (785) 770-7003, or Emilee Morris, Kansas State University, [emorris@ksu.edu](mailto:emorris@ksu.edu), (620) 960-2631.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant, please contact Dr. Rick Scheidt, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, Kansas State University, (785) 532-3224.

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By signing below, you are agreeing that:

- a researcher may interview your child's teachers regarding the transition experience
- you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered
- you have been informed of potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction
- you understand that Kansas State University has no funds set aside for any injuries you may receive as a result of participating in this study
- you are 18 years of age or older
- your participation in this research is completely voluntary
- you may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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

**Parental Perceptions of Transition Between Birth-3 Child Care Classrooms**  
**Researcher: Emilee Morris**  
**Participant: Infant teacher**

You are being asked to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow your participation in the study. You should receive a copy of this document to take with you.

**Explanation of Study**

This study is being done because I would like to know more about how parents experience the transition between child care classrooms when their child is under three years old. I want to discover what the experience is like in order to inform transition practices used to prepare families for this classroom change.

If you agree to participate, you will be interviewed one time. The interview will focus on the experience of the family in your classroom as they prepare to transition to a new classroom. The interviews will be audio recorded. The interviews will each last approximately one hour.

A researcher will observe in your classroom at least one time, for a period of approximately one hour. The researcher will contact you prior to the visit.

If you conduct a conference with the family, the researcher will ask to sit in on the meeting as an observer.

Your participation in the study will total approximately two weeks.

**Risks and Discomforts**

You might feel discomfort with one or more topics brought up during an interview. You may refuse to answer any questions and are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

You may feel discomfort with the researcher observing in your classroom. The researcher will visit informally prior to the start of the research project in order to increase familiarity and comfort. You may ask the researcher to leave at any time.

**Benefits**

Understanding how parents experience their child's transition between child care classrooms is important to improving the family-center relationship. If child care providers have a better understanding of how parents experience this change, programs aimed at supporting families through this transition could be improved.

**Confidentiality and Records**

Your study information will be kept confidential. Video and audio tapes will be locked in a cabinet in one researcher's office. When the video and audio tapes are transcribed, no information that identifies you will be included in the transcript. Pseudonyms (made-up names) will be used to identify individual participants in the transcripts. The list that ties your real name to your pseudonym will be placed in a locked cabinet in one of the researcher's office. After the video and audio tapes are transcribed, the tapes will be destroyed.

Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

- Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;
- Representatives of Kansas State University (KSU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at KSU;

**Contact Information**

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact Bronwyn Fees, Kansas State University, [fees@ksu.edu](mailto:fees@ksu.edu), (785) 770-7003, or Emilee Morris, Kansas State University, [emorris@ksu.edu](mailto:emorris@ksu.edu), (620) 960-2631.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant, please contact Dr. Rick Scheidt, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, Kansas State University, (785) 532-3224.

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By signing below, you are agreeing that:

- you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered
- you have been informed of potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction
- you understand that Kansas State University has no funds set aside for any injuries you may receive as a result of participating in this study
- you are 18 years of age or older
- your participation in this research is completely voluntary
- you may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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

**Parental Perceptions of Transition Between Birth-3 Child Care Classrooms**  
**Researcher: Emilee Morris**  
**Participant: Toddler Teacher**

You are being asked to participate in research. For you to be able to decide whether you want to participate in this project, you should understand what the project is about, as well as the possible risks and benefits in order to make an informed decision. This process is known as informed consent. This form describes the purpose, procedures, possible benefits, and risks. It also explains how your personal information will be used and protected. Once you have read this form and your questions about the study are answered, you will be asked to sign it. This will allow your participation in the study. You should receive a copy of this document to take with you.

**Explanation of Study**

This study is being done because I would like to know more about how parents experience the transition between child care classrooms when their child is under three years old. I want to discover what the experience is like in order to inform transition practices used to prepare families for this classroom change.

If you agree to participate, you will be interviewed two times. The interviews will focus on the experience of the family as they transition into your classroom. The interviews will be audio recorded. The interviews will each last approximately one hour.

A researcher will observe in your classroom at least one time, for a period of approximately one hour. The researcher will contact you prior to the visit.

If you conduct a conference, home visit, or a meeting of similar nature with the family, the researcher will ask to sit in on the meeting as an observer.

Your participation in the study will total approximately 3-4 weeks.

**Risks and Discomforts**

You might feel discomfort with one or more topics brought up during an interview. You may refuse to answer any questions and are free to withdraw from the study at any time.

You may feel discomfort with the researcher observing in your classroom. The researcher will visit informally prior to the start of the research project in order to increase familiarity and comfort. You may ask the researcher to leave at any time.

**Benefits**

Understanding how parents experience their child's transition between child care classrooms is important to improving the family-center relationship. If child care providers have a better understanding of how parents experience this change, programs aimed at supporting families through this transition could be improved.

**Confidentiality and Records**

Your study information will be kept confidential. Video and audio tapes will be locked in a cabinet in one researcher's office. When the video and audio tapes are transcribed, no information that identifies you will be included in the transcript. Pseudonyms (made-up names) will be used to identify individual participants in the transcripts. The list that ties your real name to your pseudonym will be placed in a locked cabinet in one of the researcher's office. After the video and audio tapes are transcribed, the tapes will be destroyed.

Additionally, while every effort will be made to keep your study-related information confidential, there may be circumstances where this information must be shared with:

- Federal agencies, for example the Office of Human Research Protections, whose responsibility is to protect human subjects in research;
- Representatives of Kansas State University (KSU), including the Institutional Review Board, a committee that oversees the research at KSU;

**Contact Information**

If you have any questions regarding this study, please contact Bronwyn Fees, Kansas State University, [fees@ksu.edu](mailto:fees@ksu.edu), (785) 770-7003, or Emilee Morris, Kansas State University, [emorris@ksu.edu](mailto:emorris@ksu.edu), (620) 960-2631.

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a participant, please contact Dr. Rick Scheidt, Chair, Committee on Research Involving Human Subjects, Kansas State University, (785) 532-3224.

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By signing below, you are agreeing that:

- you have read this consent form (or it has been read to you) and have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have them answered
- you have been informed of potential risks and they have been explained to your satisfaction
- you understand that Kansas State University has no funds set aside for any injuries you may receive as a result of participating in this study
- you are 18 years of age or older
- your participation in this research is completely voluntary
- you may leave the study at any time. If you decide to stop participating in the study, there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

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