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My Backpack:

A Children's Book About Separation

by

Susan B. Bloch

Mentor: Sal Vascellaro

Submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements of the degree of
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My Backpack: A Children's Book About Separation
By Susan B. Bloch

Abstract

My Backpack is a fictional book based on actual events to be read to children between the ages of three and four years prior to their entry to preschool and as a support during the separation process during the first weeks and months of school. The protagonist, Alice, is preparing for school by adding meaningful items in her new school backpack. Alice and her mother walk hand-in-hand to her school, where her teacher greets her at the door. Alice's mother says goodbye and sits on the bench outside of Alice's classroom. Alice's teacher, Ms. Linda, suggests that Alice chooses one item from her backpack to remain with her in her pocket. Alice involves herself in various activities at school and reunites with her mother at the end of the day. Alice takes with her the painting she has created in class that day. The story ends with Alice hanging her classroom painting above her bed and with an open backpack nearby ready for her second day at school.

This thesis opens with a copy of *My Backpack* and is followed by an explanation of the genesis of the book, a developmental section incorporating theorists' views on separation for children ages 3 and 4, children's reactions and responses to *My Backpack*, and a review of other valuable books on separation. The appendix offers a manual on supporting separation issues for early childhood educators as well as parents. Three salient themes are explored in depth: (1) *During a young child's separation from a parent and transition to school, a secure attachment to a parent is critical;* (2) *It is critical that a young child's sense of control is incorporated into the separation process from home to school;* and (3) *Transitional objects can assist in a young child's separation from home to school.*

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Acknowledgments

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I would like to thank the children I teach for trusting that my classroom is a place where they can take risks knowing I am a secure base for them and to their parents for allowing me to partner with them in raising autonomous individuals.

To Stan Chu, who is in my pocket everyday when I step into my classroom.

Finally, I would like to thank my daughter for allowing me to share her story and for being the reason I was able to understand the true meaning of secure attachment. Neither of us knew what was going to evolve twelve years ago, but we partnered then as we do now.

To my husband and my daughter, who were unwavering in their support of my pursuit of my Masters Degree in Early Childhood Education.

My Backpack: A Children's Book About Separation

By Susan Bloch





I have a new backpack because tomorrow is the first day of school. My Mom put extra clothes in it because the note from my teacher said that I need them.



In my backpack, I am putting
A shell I found on the beach this summer...



A baseball cap from when I
went to a baseball game with
my grandfather...



The flashlight my Dad and I use when we are reading in the dark at bedtime...



My Mom's glove...



A dog tag that my dog can't use anymore because it doesn't have the right address on it...



My Grandmother's clip-on earring...



A penny I found on the sidewalk right near where I live...



A marble my friend left at my house and I kept it...



A post card from my other Grandma who lives in Florida...



A medal I won in sports class...



A photograph of me with a real fairy from the Nutcracker Ballet...



And Betty, my stuffed bear.



Time to go to school! We are late because my mom couldn't find her other glove.



We are counting five blocks to school.
One, two, three, four, five...I see my school!



My Mom and I walk up the stairs to my classroom.
My teacher is waiting at the door.



We do our special goodbye and kiss necks but I can't feel her skin so my Mom gives me her scarf. Now my kiss can touch her neck.



My Mom sits with the other moms and dads on a bench outside my classroom.



My teacher, Ms. Linda, asks me to hang up my backpack in my cubby.



She shows me my cubby and helps me put my backpack on the hook.



Ms. Linda says, "Do you want to choose one thing from your backpack to put in your pocket?" I find the marble.



I do painting and Play-Doh. Then we sing a goodbye song. It helps me learn all my friend's names. The marble stays in my pocket but I know it is there.



All the grown-ups come into the classroom. My mom and I do our special kiss but she can't feel my neck because the scarf is in the way. My teacher, Ms. Linda, says "See you tomorrow, Alice."



I am leaving my change of clothes in my cubby. Now my backpack has room for the painting I made at school today.



Tomorrow I am going to do coloring. I wonder if Ms. Linda has purple crayons. Purple is my favorite color.



I am ready for school tomorrow and my backpack is too.

The Writing Process

The genesis for this book began in September of 2001 when my daughter experienced the onset of separation anxiety on her third day of preschool. In the twelve years that have passed since my daughter started preschool, I have thought about the process of separation almost every day. I have contemplated what this process means to the child within me, and means to me as a parent and as a teacher of preschool children. The attainment of individuation is a natural progression in our lives and, “Whilst especially evident during early childhood, attachment behavior is held to characterize human beings from the cradle to the grave” (Bowlby, 1979, p. 129, as cited in Cassidy & Shaver, 2008, p. 269).

I remember holding my daughter’s hand as we walked the four sundrenched blocks to her preschool, her three-year-old body overshadowed by a red backpack that hung from her shoulders to well below her waist. The backpack was filled with everything she needed to leave home. Her first day in the “5A” classroom was a breeze; I sat on a bench in her classroom with the other moms, happily chatting, confident in my daughter’s separation success. Day two was the same. Day three was not. Gut wrenching screams, my daughter’s refusal to stay in the classroom and absolute confusion on my part, led to early dismissal for both of us. This was the beginning of my education in the field of separation anxiety. Throughout my four-month confinement in the “Mommy’s Chair” my feelings progressed from disappointment to shame to hopeful. I remember one of the other mothers suggesting to the Director of the preschool that my child be removed from the classroom on a permanent basis because she was “a disturbance.” It was at that moment that I knew an investigation as to the cause or causes of my daughter’s acute anxiety had to commence

immediately, and in depth. I remain grateful to the Director of my daughter's preschool for occupying my time in the "Mommy's Chair" with child development books in order to support me through the investigation of my daughter's distress.

When my daughter was two years old a cyst was discovered in the gum of her front tooth during a routine dental exam. Before her hospital surgery to have this cyst removed, I explained to my daughter that she would go to sleep for a very short time, the doctor would remove her tooth, a separation process in and of itself, and when she woke up I would be next to her. Pivotaly, the anesthesiologist for the surgery underestimated the duration of the anesthesia and my daughter woke post surgery before I was by her side. It was then that my family's journey into the depths of separation began.

In 2001 my daughter entered preschool without her front tooth and recent memories of the surgery. She was not on firm ground, even at the beginning. Although she was able to make it through most days while I remained in the "Mommy's Chair" which, during the course of four months, was moved, incrementally, further away from the classroom, Thursdays were particularly difficult for her. On Thursdays, when my daughter knew it was time for music, panic ensued. What was it about Thursdays that made my daughter's separation anxiety round the corner to a disorder? Adjacent to the preschool music room is a soup kitchen, which is entered through a swinging door. On one particular Thursday, she refused to go to music and so I carried her down from her classroom, three flights of stairs, terror being shared between her body and mine. When we passed by the soup kitchen's swinging door, in a split second I saw what my daughter had seen during the three previous months: chefs in white hats and white uniforms. And I knew! I walked into the soup kitchen with my panicked bundle of a child and told her that this was a

kitchen, not a hospital. This intimate discovery restored my confidence in my ability to mother and set my daughter on the path to psychological recovery. This experience led to my realization that during a young child's separation from a primary caregiver and transition to school, a secure attachment to a parent is critical, which is one of the themes embedded in this thesis.

I am sharing this story because without it, this thesis would not be complete. I believe that the crucial work of preschool teachers is to support their students in mastering the separation process at a developmentally appropriate level. This can be accomplished through the ownership of who they are and their comfort in being an individual, separate and apart from the primary caregiver whom they love. This is not an easy job for any child, but it is certainly one that can be successfully supported by early childhood educators. My experience with my daughter and my experience as a preschool teacher, led to a second theme of this thesis: It is critical that a young child's sense of control be incorporated into the separation process from home to school.

In one of my graduate school courses, students were given the assignment to write a research project exploring an area of developmental variations. This was the opportunity I had been waiting for. I wanted to create a manual that would be of practical and accessible use to all early childhood educators. I knew the value of this manual but it lay dormant, as it was accessible only to adults, until a graduate course in children's literature provided the opportunity to write a children's book. *My Backpack* was written as the centerpiece of this thesis and the manual would supplement it. The reason I included a manual in this thesis is that, although *My Backpack* has the potential for happily ever after, separation issues do not necessarily happen on the first day of school. I wanted to create a

children's book that all teachers would have ease and accessibility using in early childhood classrooms. The manual, however, also addresses separation when it becomes a disorder.

The most effective way I have of sharing with parents and teachers the life of a child in the classroom is through photographs. My camera is with me always. I knew that my book would have to have photographs as its illustrative technique. I envisioned all the photographs, not digitally but rather as I originally learned to print photographs; as images appearing through a dark room with the photographs gradually developing in the tray of liquid chemicals. In each one of these photographs in my mind, I saw black and white with the exception of a red backpack. I wanted the backpack to be predominant in every image, as a mother is predominant in every child's mind as they go off to school.

It was impractical to print each of these photographs in a dark room because of the manipulation that was necessary in order to make the photographs exactly as I envisioned them. When working with a four-year-old child, it was necessary for me to photograph the images quickly and efficiently in order to maintain her focus. After two hours on our first day together, I was able to look at the photographs and realized that digital photography would be the only way to accomplish my vision. This method also allowed me to digitally move the backpack in highly visible places in every photograph. When taking the photographs, my concern for Alice's care, safety, and most of all having fun was paramount and therefore the option of digital photography and manipulating the images with a computer was my best option.

I also felt it extremely important for me to photograph in an environment that I knew, with teachers as participants who have worked with me throughout the years on helping children through the first days and months of their preschool years. I intentionally

chose a child to be featured in *My Backpack* who I did not know because I did not want *My Backpack* to be about a personal relationship I had with a specific child.

All of the items featured in the book belong to my daughter and had been collected by her throughout her lifetime and kept in a treasure box. Although a work of fiction, *My Backpack*, is based on actual events. I had the advantage of knowing when and why my daughter saved each of the personal possessions included in the book. These items symbolize for my daughter times spent with close family members, experiences of the loss of people she has loved, socializing with her peers, communicating with relatives who live far away, rewards for accomplishments she thought were beyond her reach, and finally a beloved nighttime companion. My daughter's treasured possessions imparted to me the important role that transitional objects play in the life of a young child. Another theme highlighted in this thesis is: Transitional objects can assist a young child's separation from home to school. Although the items in *My Backpack* actually belonged to my daughter, I chose not to include her or myself in the photographs so as not to sacrifice her anonymity. Without the prompts that these items offered to me, this book could not have been written. Not only are the items her possessions, the book is her story and it could not have been written without it being a biography of a time in her life that she is allowing me to share with preschool children.

The major themes of this thesis are not the only themes of separation, but are the themes that I knew intimately and therefore felt I could write a children's book about knowledgably. The major themes are: *During a young child's separation from a primary caregiver and transition to school, a secure attachment to a parent is critical; It is critical that a young child's sense of control is incorporated into the separation process from*

home to school; and Transitional objects can assist in a young child's separation from home to school.

I wrote *My Backpack* from the viewpoint of both a parent and a teacher. *My Backpack* is intended to be a delightful story for children as well as a resource for both parents and teachers prior and during the early days of preschool. Children come to school with memories, which Alice packs in her backpack, and school in its most enriching form should be experienced as an extension of these experiences. The most effective teachers understand that for both children and parents their goals should include bonding with teachers and friends, that the child's name will be known, following a schedule, and trusting the school environment. The underlying foundation for these goals is for the classroom to be a place where a child's rich life experiences outside and in the classroom can mesh to allow a child to make meaning for themselves.

My daughter's story did not end as optimistically as Alice's story does but I wanted to write a book about a child's first day at school that could be used by preschool teachers universally. My goal in writing this book was to share one child's experience on her first day of preschool that included her parent, her teacher, her symbolic transitional objects, her involvement in a classroom that engenders trust, and finally Alice's painting which symbolizes the home-school connection. My hope was that other three- and four-year-old children who are starting school could relate to feelings Alice experiences. Alice's day serves as a model for being able to leave home, experience school as a safe place, and to return home with hope for a successful next day.

In addition to a copy of *My Backpack* and the description of my writing process, this thesis includes an explanation of attachment and separation based on the work of child

development theorists, children's responses to a reading of *My Backpack* at three preschools in New York City, an examination of children's literature that focuses on separation, as well as an accompanying manual for parents and early childhood educators. The writing of this thesis and *My Backpack* coincides with my graduation from Bank Street and my daughter's graduation from high school. It is deeply satisfying for me to have had this opportunity to reflect, understand, synthesize my experience and research, and recreate it into a book for children, which I can share with parents, teachers, and preschool aged children.

The Developmental Connection

Separation is a major agenda in early childhood education. Entrance into school is often the first major separation that a child experiences. *My Backpack* embeds major themes to help children, parents, and teachers navigate this right of passage. The themes that are rooted in *My Backpack* are: *During a young child's separation from a primary caregiver and transition to school, a secure attachment to a parent is critical; It is critical that a young child's sense of control is incorporated into the separation process from home to school; Transitional objects can assist in a young child's separation from home to school.*

“During a young child's separation from a primary caregiver and transition to school, a secure attachment to a parent is critical.”

My Backpack has as its abiding premise that the protagonist, Alice, is an embodiment of Jean Piaget's theory of “object permanence.” Piaget's “object permanence” theory refers to the understanding that “when an object disappears from our sight, for example, we do not assume that it has thereby gone out of existence” (Flavell, 2002, p. 72). This concept is a major milestone in a child's development and is typically acquired at the age of 18-24 months. In its essence, it refers to the child's ability to realize that an object still exists when it is out of sight. In *My Backpack*, we can see examples of the employment of object permanence throughout. Alice's backpack contains objects that represent memories of experiences with family members that, for Alice, become the family members themselves, and accompany her to school. These objects remain in her backpack and, although she cannot see them, her family remains with her throughout her day. Alice's teacher understands the significance of the items packed and asks her if she would like to choose

one item to put in her pocket. She chooses the marble and although it remains hidden, Alice proclaims, “The marble stays in my pocket but I know it’s there” (Bloch, 2016)¹.

Piaget’s object permanence theory is the foundation for John Bowlby’s (1988) expansion into the development of attachment theory. While Piaget is known as the “object permanence theorist,” Bowlby is known as the “father of attachment theory.” Bowlby’s central theme was that the psychological bonds formed between children and their primary caregiver continue throughout life. He posited that the need for survival drives this attachment in that children understand that their primary caregiver is their best defense against forces in the world which may harm them. Bowlby expanded Piaget’s object permanence theory to include that when a child can form a mental representation of the attachment figure and sees that person as available and responsive, then secure attachment has been achieved. We therefore understand that secure attachment fosters exploration if the child is secure in her knowledge that her attachment figure will be available if needed:

...The provision by both parents of a secure base from which a child or an adolescent can make sorties into the outside world and to which he can return knowing for sure that he will be welcomed when he gets there, nourished physically and emotionally, comforted if distressed, reassured if frightened. (Bowlby, 1988, p. 11)

Without secure attachment, Alice, knowing that her mother would not be with her in the classroom, would not have been able to plan for the first day of school. Her mother provides both physical and emotional availability by walking Alice to and from school and being readily accessible to her during the time that Alice is in the classroom. Alice notes

¹ Children’s books are unpaginated. I therefore cite the title, author, and year. Quotes from *My Backpack* appear throughout the thesis, but will only be cited upon the initial occurrence.

that, “My mom sits with the other moms and dads on a bench outside my classroom”. We can also see that Alice and her mother both know that their reunion is reliable as they have a special kiss, which brings comfort to both of them “All the grown-ups come into the classroom. My mom and I do our special kiss but she can’t feel my neck because the scarf is in the way. My teacher, Ms. Linda, says, ‘See you tomorrow, Alice.’” Alice is already beginning to form an attachment to her teacher because she is able to transfer feelings of attachment to another reliable and responsive adult.

Theorist Mary Ainsworth (1978) augmented the work of John Bowlby (1988) through her “strange situation classification,” in which she investigated how attachments vary among children. The categories she observed were separation anxiety, the infant’s willingness to explore, stranger anxiety, and reunion behavior of the child and primary caregiver after a short absence. Ainsworth’s findings confirm Bowlby’s attachment theory and further clarify it by showing that separation can be categorized into specific behaviors. Ainsworth offered the term “secure base” wherein the attachment figure represents a base of security from which the child can continually return to from her exploration of the environment. Ainsworth attributes secure attachment to the pivotal factor of parental sensitivity to a child’s cues, both emotional and physical. She posits that parental sensitivity is “consistently responsive caregiving” (Siegler, Eisenberg, DeLoache, & Saffran, 2014, p. 435). To be consistently responsive, the caregiver needs to be in synchronicity with the child’s needs. Donald W. Winnicott (1964) states, “It is more the texture and the smell which take on vital significance, and the smell is especially important...” (p. 168). It is the sensory experience that calls up the person or helps maintain the connection, and makes the primary caregiver available. Alice’s mother is

intuitively responsive to Alice's needs as seen when she removes her scarf so that mother and daughter have physical contact, fulfilling Alice's needs before they separate. "We do our special goodbye and kiss necks but I can't feel her skin so my Mom gives me her scarf. Now my kiss can touch her neck."

"It is critical that a young child's sense of control is incorporated into the separation process from home to school."

Margaret Mahler's (1975) significant contribution to the understanding of attachment is her theory of "separation-individuation" wherein the child of 15 months and older begins to recognize her own identity as separate from that of her mother. Mahler believes that if this development is disrupted a child may be unable to continue with a reliable sense of her own identity. "It is not a sense of who I am but that I am; as such, this the earliest step in the process of the unfolding of individuality" (Mahler, 1975, p. 8). In *My Backpack*, Alice sees herself as separate and autonomous from her mother. Alice shows evidence of her own identity by gathering mementos that are hers and hers alone. She acknowledges her teacher's request to bring extra clothes on the first day of school, but in order to make herself known as an individual, she determines, for herself, what additional items are necessary for the first day of school. The selection of items that are put in her backpack are meaningful to her separate and apart from what is meaningful to her teacher or to her mother.

Erik Erikson (1963) categorizes psychosocial areas of development into four stages, one of which is Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt (18 months-2-3 years). This stage describes the cognitive area of a child's development wherein the child's ability to access greater vocabulary and abstract thinking leads to self-regulation and a sense of control and

power. As part of this maturation, autonomy increases and the child is better equipped to make independent choices and decisions. As Siegler et al., (2015) state:

The challenge for the child between ages 1 year and 3 ½ years (Freud's anal stage) is to achieve a strong sense of autonomy while adjusting to increasing social demands...Erikson pointed out that during this period, the dramatic increases that occur in every realm of the children's real-world competence—including motor skills, cognitive abilities, and language—foster children's desires to make choices and decisions for themselves...If parents provide a supportive atmosphere that allows children to achieve self-control without the loss of self-esteem, children gain a sense of autonomy. (p. 346)

It stands to reason that children begin school at a stage in their cognitive and verbal development when they have awareness of a larger world and are beginning to develop ways of integrating themselves into that world without their primary caregiver. Brazelton and Sparrow (2001) write:

He is just beginning to become aware that there is a much larger world beyond the one within his grasp. At the same time, he is more able to find his own solutions to life's puzzles, or at least he can dream up possibilities...When a child finds his own solution, he will be able to face other stresses with an assurance that he can look for and find such solutions...The cognitive area—of language, and with it, the ability to formulate and verbalize his increasingly complex ideas—gives a four-year-old power. (p. 114)

Alice has a plethora of emotions before the first day of school. However, she is able to extract the ability to problem solve through the items she chooses which she knows will be

of comfort to her throughout her day at school. Alice's ability to predict her needs and protect herself leads to a sense of power over a situation in which she knows she can expect uncharted terrain. Her backpack is symbolic of many of the ways a child can be helped through secure attachment, one of which is control over her needs. The first fourteen pages of *My Backpack* are devoted to Alice's process of choosing items from around her room to put in her backpack. This collection brings back memories of people and experiences that are meaningful to her. Choosing these items gives Alice independence, control, and power prior to her first entrance into the classroom. The last object Alice puts in her backpack is her stuffed bear which lays atop her bed, telling the reader that this bear is her companion at night; a time when children are in the darkness and must rely on their ability to regulate their fear of the unknown. This last addition into her backpack demonstrates Alice's realization that, for her, nighttime is analogous to the first day of school, in that there is much beyond her control but that she has the capability of preparing herself beforehand.

“Transitional objects can assist in a young child's separation from home to school.”

British psychiatrist D. W. Winnicott (1964) recognized and identified the importance of a child bringing objects from home into the outside world, specifically a favored one, which Winnicott refers to as a “transitional object.” Brazelton and Sparrow (2001) write:

Many children need a transitional object, especially during separation. A child who has fastened upon a blanket or a thumb is better prepared to fall back on her own resources... This is a touchpoint in a child's development—learning to become even more independent... At such a time, a child needs a comforting reminder from home and from the family relationships. (p. 77)

Winnicott (1964) posits that transitional objects are placeholders for the primary caregiver beginning during infancy and continuing even through adolescence, as he writes:

It is not the object itself, of course, that is transitional; it represents the infant's transition from a state of being merged with the mother to a state of being in relation to the mother as something outside and separate. (p. 42)

At the very earliest age, a transitional object does not replace the primary caregiver but allows the infant to have a tactile sense of the caregiver. By age three, these transitional objects give the child security when her primary caregiver is not in sight. These transitional objects allow the child to take her home life, and therefore her identity, into new experiences, which may be stressful. The transitional objects remind the child of the security, control, and attachment she has as she ventures into the outside world. Alice's comment at the beginning of *My Backpack* that her teacher has selected extra clothes as a prerequisite for the first day of school does not qualify for Alice as a transitional object. Her response is to fulfill her need with items from her home and her life outside of her home that will allow her to make the transition from home to school with the ammunition that she needs to do this successfully.

A parent cannot choose the transitional object. It must be chosen by the child.

Winnicott (1964) believes that in order for transitional objects to have meaning for individual children they must be chosen by the child themselves rather than passed down from one child to another or selected by the parent. Although Alice's room is a treasure trove of collected objects, many of the items she chose for her backpack came out of her treasure box, which held those that contained her most poignant memories. Alice selected each of the objects that she chose to pack. Winnicott (1964) writes, "It is impossible to do

justice to the enormous variety of early possessions and techniques employed by infants at times of stress...” (p. 169). Alice retreats to her backpack and her teacher, Ms. Linda, immediately recognizes that the contents of which must be with Alice throughout her day in order to make her attachment to school possible. “Recognizing this deepened need for dependency and giving it credit is an important way to support a child through changes and stress” (Brazelton & Sparrow, 2001, p. 78). Ms. Linda realizes that the entire backpack would be cumbersome for Alice and prevent her from involvement in the daily activities, so she compromises by allowing Alice to choose one item that can be stowed away on her person. Ms. Linda’s astute observation of Alice’s need for transitional objects, combined with her promise of tomorrow, ““See you tomorrow Alice,”” at dismissal, provide a secure base that Alice knows will be at school when she returns the next day. Ms. Linda’s expertise in supporting both Alice’s need for transitional objects and reinforcing her home-school connection, is supported by Howes and Richie (2002):

Because child-teacher relationships are an important first step in helping children explore and learn within the classroom environment, there is great value in teachers knowing *how* to help these children construct positive, trusting child-teacher relationships. Once a child can trust the teacher, they can use her or him to organize and structure their learning, as the teacher attends to their comments, is asked for help, and shares their discoveries. (p. 5)

Alice’s well-selected transitional objects, reliably available in her backpack and accessible to her through the support of her teacher, allows her to confidently plan for her second day at school.

The last photograph in *My Backpack* shows Alice hanging a piece of her classroom,

in the form of a painting, above her bed. This symbolic gesture effectively shows Alice's home-school connection, which she established independently. The painting has become another one of Alice's treasures, as well as a transitional object from school.

Children's Responses to the Story

My Backpack was read by the head teacher in three different preschool classrooms in Manhattan. One school is an independent preschool on the Upper West Side where the book was read to a classroom of 4-year-olds and read in small groups. The second school is an independent preschool located on the Upper East Side and the book was read in four classrooms to children ranging from younger 3-year-olds to older 4-year-olds. The third school was a Head Start program located in the East Village where the book was read to two classrooms of 3-year-old students. The readings were done in the early afternoon at all three schools. I chose to have the head teachers read *My Backpack* for several reasons. The head teachers had already established a rapport with the students and the children could therefore concentrate on the book, rather than on the reader. Additionally, the head teacher would be able to pace the reading of the book according to her students' needs.

Each teacher had a different read-aloud style; some teachers paused at each page while others read the book in its entirety and then asked for responses. Some teachers held the book at a distance from the children who sat cross-legged in a semicircle, while another teacher asked the children to gather closer to her as she sat in a child's size chair. In another classroom of 3-year-olds a teacher sat cross-legged on the floor with the children and propped the book on her lap facing the children. Many of the children responded to the illustrations by asking, "Is that real?" and repeatedly stroked the photographs in an attempt to have a tactile experience.

Although I originally conceived the book as a possible companion to the Teacher's Manual (see Appendix A), after seeing the reactions in all seven classrooms it was apparent that the book stands on its own as a delightful story for young children. The

majority of the children sat engaged from the very beginning, transfixed by the photographs of the cubbies on the cover. As the book progressed, every photograph evoked a meaningful connection from the listeners. In each of the three schools the cover of *My Backpack* captivated and evoked verbal responses from many of the children. This observation may support the notion that cubbies are a symbolic secure base for children of all ages, especially those starting preschool. Many of the children observed that there were so many cubbies and only one backpack. They also noticed differences between their cubby and the cubbies on the cover of the book. One child was confused at the lack of family photos in the cubbies and commented, “There are no pictures in the cubbies, only nametags.” In another classroom a 3-year-old child proudly said, “I hang my backpack on the hook too.” As each one of Alice’s objects were chosen, so too did different children in each of the classrooms contribute a response showing the connection they had to Alice’s choices. The children all sat eager to see what Alice would pack next. Comments such as, “I have that”, “I went to Florida” or “I went to the Nutcracker” were heard repeatedly.

The read-alouds illuminated what was distinct in the responses from the 3-year-olds as compared to how the 4-year-olds responded, as well as what was shared by both age groups. After reviewing my notes from the readings of *My Backpack* I was able to relate the children’s responses to the themes that I have chosen for this thesis: *During a young child’s separation from a primary caregiver and transition to school, a secure attachment to a parent is critical; It is critical that a young child’s sense of control is incorporated into the separation process from home to school; and Transitional objects can assist in a young child’s separation from home to school.*

References to the fact that a secure attachment to a parent is critical was evidenced through the numerous comments in response to the photographs involving Alice and her mom. One 3-year-old child commented on not needing special goodbyes anymore. She raised her hand excitedly and said, “Mommy only came into the class in the 2s.” The 4-year-olds on the other hand were much more verbal on the topic of arrival time at school. In one classroom the children’s teacher reminded the children that they might remember missing their mom when they first started school. One child bowed her head and shyly offered, “I remember I was crying because I missed my mom.” Another child contributed that he, like Alice, enjoys a special goodbye with his mom, “My mom gives me a kiss on the lips,” which encouraged another child to contribute, “We rub noses.” An animated discussion followed during which more children offered examples of their special goodbyes. One child referred to the goodbye ritual in the children’s book *The Kissing Hand*, said he did the same thing. Other children responded by saying: “My mommy and I kiss three times,” “I give my dad a hug when I get to the door.” Most poignantly when the teacher at the Head Start program was reading the book for the second time, as requested by her students, she asked her students why they thought Alice packed so much in her backpack. One child confidently responded, “To remember her mom.” The difference in the reactions between the younger and older children is due to the fact that 3-year-old children are still in the midst of the initial home to school separation process with their parent, they do not have the extensive language to verbalize the connections between their first day of school and that of Alice’s, and it may be too upsetting for them to talk about their goodbyes to their parent. One of the teachers from the class of 3-year-olds informed me that it was not that long ago, actually only months, that many of these children did in

fact need a special goodbye and that many of them still do. In the Developmental Connection section of this thesis, I have discussed that older children are more comfortable discussing the goodbye rituals for several reasons: they have more extensive language, for the most part they are not going through the separation process for the first time, and they also have had more time to develop the routines that they see Alice engaging in with her mom. Additionally, four-year-olds may observe their peers having similar interactions with their moms at arrival time and are therefore more comfortable talking about it in a group setting.

The photograph of a dog tag in *My Backpack* provoked a conversation in a class of 4-year-olds relating to the children's concerns about separation that I did not expect, and made a lasting impression on me. One child pointed to the dog tag and asked, "What's that?" Her peer responded, "It's a thing that a dog wears. My dog has one. When my dog got away on the street she was wearing one, so nice people were able to bring her back to our house. If she didn't have that on then she wouldn't have come back." This child-initiated connection was very satisfying for me to hear, in that it could be used to help assuage children's fears about being reunited with their primary caregiver. In another reading group, a child made the connection, "That's just like our backpack initial tags so we don't get lost either. But we're not dogs!" This comment sent the group of children into hysterical fits of laughter.

My initial intention of having Alice put one of her mom's gloves in her backpack was to photograph the image of handholding and skin-to-skin contact on route to school, of mother and child experiencing this maiden voyage simultaneously and establishing a new routine together. As I continued to write the book, I hoped that young children would find

enjoyment in the suspense of the hidden glove and humor in the fact that the mom is shown outside and inside wearing only one glove. The readers brought my hopes to fruition. In all three schools the missing glove evoked attention and discussion, confusion and laughter. The younger children wondered why the mom was wearing only one glove, whereas the younger fours asked, “Why didn’t she tell her mom that she had her glove?” The older fours thought it was hilarious that she was late for school because the mom could not find her glove, although they, in cahoots with Alice, knew where the glove was. The glove also raised comments relating to a child’s sense of control. For the 4-year-old children the glove evoked some tension in that they thought that Alice “didn’t tell her mom” and she was “sneaky.” Although some of these children’s comments were inaudible I could see groups of children whispering and laughing conspiratorially. This led to a discussion of whether or not Alice should have told her mom, perhaps indicating the ambivalence that 4-year-olds face about their sense of control.

Three and 4-year-old children are eager for a sense of control, most especially when their routines are disrupted, and a life changing routine such as the separation from home to school will certainly evoke issues of control. In relation to the second theme of this thesis, allowing children a sense of control in the separation process, one of the 3-year-olds at the school on the Upper East Side raised her hand and proudly said, “I pack my bag” while another offered, “I hang my backpack on the hook all by myself.” These comments were in reference to the photograph of Alice arriving at school and hanging her bag on the hook, with the help of her teacher. One child expressed, “I decide what I bring in my backpack and it’s really all the stuff I need.” Another child said, “We don’t need any help packing our backpack, only babies need help.” Most of the 4-year-olds that the book

was read to responded to Alice's packing up her backpack from a logical viewpoint. In a four-year-old's quest to gain independence children often take control over small aspects of their life that will ultimately support their ability to move smoothly from home to school. Taking responsibility to pack a backpack is an example of this control. The photograph where Alice hangs her artwork on the wall evoked animated discussion for the 4-year-olds at the independent school on the Upper East Side. One of the initial comments was, "I hang my painting in my room. I decided where I want it." Another child offered that her mommy hangs her paintings on the refrigerator and "That's ok with me." The children then discussed that they liked having painting in the classroom and they could paint everyday if they wanted to. One child told her peers that she expressly brings an empty backpack to school everyday so that she can bring her artwork home. Several other children said that they would ask their mom for an empty backpack too.

Understanding the concept of a city block gave these children, and many children, control over their route to school and therefore a less abstract understanding of the home - school connection. There were many responses from children in all of the read-alouds to the photograph where Alice is counting the number of blocks from her home to her school. The 3-year-old children slowly and loudly counted along with Alice and one child volunteered that it was also five blocks for her to get home. A 4-year-old questioned, "How did she count the blocks? How do you know how long a block is?" One child said that Alice probably counted each time she reached a corner. The day after the story was read in the independent school on the Upper East Side, a child came into the classroom and proudly exclaimed, "I walked seven blocks to school today. I counted each block on my own just like Alice!"

Additionally, the children's responses reflected the important role that transitional objects play in the lives of young children in preschool, supporting the third theme of this thesis: *Transitional objects can assist in a young child's separation from home to school.* During the readings of *My Backpack* the children discussed the special objects they bring with them to school. Throughout the readings of *My Backpack*, some children were literally miming Alice and using hand motions as if packing a backpack. Many children in all three schools made a contribution to the discussion of what they bring to school, whether or not the question was asked of them. The children mentioned items from stuffed animals, to food, to various objects that are not transitional objects but are necessary for a child throughout their day, such as items for after school activities. At the Upper East Side school, twin sisters sat listening to the story, clutching their identical stuffed monkeys. They seemed as captivated by *My Backpack* as I was captivated by them. They did not contribute verbally to the discussion; they remained very close to one another and caressed their transitional objects throughout the meeting. The girls had a broad grin on their faces while looking at the picture of Alice packing Betty, her stuffed bear. Although there were no words exchanged, it appeared evident that they made a connection to the book at that moment. A child in the Head Start program commented that she brings books in her backpack to read at school with her mom while they are waiting for the classroom door to open. Through the children's responses to *My Backpack* it was clear to me that their experiences confirm the theory that transitional objects support a child's separation from home to school, as well as allow them control as to what piece of home they will be bringing to school and what piece of school they will be bringing back home.

Not only did the children have meaningful responses to *My Backpack*, but the teachers did as well. After the reading of *My Backpack*, one of the teachers at the Head Start program reminded her students what each of them brings to school each day. One child, who the teacher had not mentioned, contributed that she brings a unicorn every day in her backpack. After the children dispersed, the head teacher shared with me that she did not know that this student brought a transitional object with her everyday and this information was enormously helpful to her. It was my intention to write a book for teachers, children and parents in order to support one another in the early weeks and months of preschool. I felt enormous satisfaction that *My Backpack* allowed this teacher to have another entry point into conversation her student.

At the end of every reading of *My Backpack* the children clapped, indicating their appreciation for the story. This, in addition to being introduced as the author and illustrator of *My Backpack*, were fulfilling moments for me. All teachers who value the understanding of separation in young children look for routes of communication with their students and the parents. Listening to children and watching their reactions to a book I wrote and illustrated gave me further insight as a teacher into their worlds. In the photograph where Alice is wearing her mother's glove before putting it in her backpack, one 3-year-old boy innocently asked, "Why she not just put her mommy in there?" to which another student giggled and said in a matter-of-fact tone, "Because she won't fit!" This resulted in fits of laughter from the children in this particular group. It also resulted in deep satisfaction from me because this child poignantly verbalized Alice's objective. I set out to write a book that would be entertaining for children to read and that would support parents, teachers, and children during the experience of separation at the beginning

of a child's school year. It was my hope that Alice would help children confront a very new and different situation where old routines are replaced by new ones. From the thoughtful, sensitive, enthusiastic responses from the children *My Backpack* was read to, I feel confident that *My Backpack* resonates with the experience of many children, and when used as a part of a thoughtful process of separation, may help assuage the anxiety that separation naturally brings for a young child entering preschool.

Looking at Children's Literature

This literature review reflects the three major themes that surfaced in *My Backpack*: *During a young child's separation from a primary caregiver and transition to school, a secure attachment to a parent is critical; It is critical that a young child's sense of control is incorporated into the separation process from home to school; and Transitional objects can assist in a young child's separation from home to school.* Each of the books selected offers children ages three to four, the ages *My Backpack* is written for, an opportunity to identify with the chosen themes. They are, in general, within the cognitive and emotional reach of this age range.

This literature corresponds to the three themes that unify *My Backpack* as well as the writing of this thesis. The three salient themes are woven throughout *My Backpack* and can be found individually or as unifying themes throughout the books I review in this section. Each of the books has value in and of itself and become more powerful when experienced as a library collection on the topic of the first day of school. All of the books discussed herein can be read and shared with parents, teachers, and children. *My Backpack* offers a glimpse of preparing for the first day of school through the eyes of one child in particular but her modeling can be considered as a suggestion for all children starting school. Many of the books I have reviewed include a foreword as a way of introducing the themes that will be explored in their books. I have instead included a manual, which explores the themes in *My Backpack* in a way that makes it easily accessible and practical for educators and parents of preschool children.

Books relating to the theme: “*During a young child’s separation from a primary caregiver and transition to school, a secure attachment to a parent is critical.*”

Goodnight Moon (1947) by Margaret Wise Brown (Ages 0-4)

Goodnight Moon addresses a myriad of aspects about separation, most poignantly the feeling of being surrounded by known objects when the unknown approaches. Margaret Wise Brown’s lullaby embarks on a tour of a young bunny’s room and its surroundings of familiar everyday items including a warm fire, pictures of his family and adventures, and even a familiar nursery rhyme. Brown expertly contrasts these comfortable surroundings with the solitary figure of the bunny’s mother close, but so far away. Clement Hurd’s illustrations alternate between a vividly colored room to black and white illustrations which signify the oncoming night. The repetition of Brown’s words lull the bunny to sleep but not before he takes a peak from his bed of the picture of his family hanging above him. As Margaret Wise Brown concludes her story with, “Goodnight noises everywhere,” the bunny is seemingly asleep and cats have perched on the rocking chair where the quiet old lady, who may be his mom, has been sitting until this last page. All the important mementos in this bunny’s life are in his room and he would be able to pack his backpack from the contents of his room in the same way Alice, in *My Backpack*, was able to do before she set out on her first day of school. When she enters her classroom she leaves her mother outside in the same way as the bunny enters sleep, the rocking chair is there but his mother is out of sight. Both books are written from the child’s perspective giving voice to the simultaneous need for independence and the reliance on an adult figure that marks the beginning of separation.

Mama, Will You Hold My Hand? (2009) by Anna Pignataro (Ages 0-3)

Anna Pignataro's simple writing and watercolor illustrations combine to tell the story of a young bear and his mother traveling through the seasons and different terrains hand in hand. The story opens with Sammy, the young bear, asking his mother, "Mama, are you there?" and her response of, "I'm right here." Sammy needs further reassurance of his mom's proximity by asking if she will hold his hand and she responds, "I'll hold your hand and you'll hold mine, and we'll go everywhere together." Throughout the remaining pages of the story, the illustrations depict them together, always hand-in-hand, as Sammy is finally reassured by his mother that she will never let him go. Pignataro's illustrations take us through so many travels that it is left to the reader as to whether the mother bear and her child have actually ventured to these places or whether it is the child's imagination. This gives a young child reassurance that no matter what they may be imagining, their hand will always be held by their significant adult. The hand symbolizes a secure base from which a child will eventually move outward without the aid of his mommy's hand. The universal anxiety experienced by every young child about being separated from their primary caregiver is assuaged in this small sized accessible book. The universality of handholding can also be seen in *My Backpack* as one of the items chosen by Alice is her mother's glove, representing handholding as well as the photographs which depict Alice and her mother holding hands walking to school and walking home.

Owl Babies (1992) by Martin Waddell (Ages 0-3)

Owl Babies takes us into the nighttime world of three sibling owls who awake to find that their mother is gone. They have no clue as to where she went or when she will return. As the young owls sit together on a branch of a tree, Sarah, Percy, and Bill

experience the universal feeling of anxiety when a loved one is missing. The baby owls, despite having wondered and feared about their mother's return, having had no prior experience with separation, are left with the lasting impression that separation is essential and inevitable, as Owl mother says, "You knew I'd be back." The experience of their mother coming back is what they will take with them throughout their lives. The board book version is perfect for young hands and will allow young readers to flip the pages again and again as they too are reassured of their own mommy's return. The illustrations of owls are done in clear white, which contrasts beautifully with the shades of black colors used as the background for this story, which takes place during nighttime hours. They also stand out against enveloping darkness. The three siblings fit comfortably on a branch of a tree and the mother is illustrated across two pages, wings wide open, in a protective gesture. The last page reunites the mother and her children on the forest floor as the story concludes with Bill saying, "I love my mommy!" *Owl Babies* conveys that not only do mommies always come back, but that mommies often have necessary reasons to leave the nest, in this case to go hunting for food. This story will assure all young readers that their anxiety about separation is shared by all living creatures. The communication between the siblings expresses the fears that are common among young children regarding separation. Although the owls' expressions communicate their feelings, it is through the words of Martin Waddell that truly let the reader know how the owls are feeling. *My Backpack* and *Owl Babies* both conclude with a child's understanding that separation is essential and inevitable and part of life. Conversely, in *My Backpack*, the protagonist's anxiety is portrayed not through words, but through the action of her selecting and packing the items

in her backpack. Both books end with a reunion of mother and child and with both children having experienced separation.

You Go Away (1976) by Dorothy Corey (Ages 2-3)

You Go Away uses the sparse, repetitive words, “You go away, you come back,” to reinforce the circular nature of separation and reunion. The book’s illustrations begin with a child of toddler age and evolve to a child entering an inclusive classroom. The story includes many kinds of separation such as a mother returning from work, a father going to work, bedtime rituals, a child unable to find his/her mother in a supermarket, older siblings going to school, a child’s first entry into a classroom, and family members traveling abroad. The story ends with a multigenerational family being reunited. All of these scenarios serve to reassure young children that separation always ends in reunions. The illustrations span two pages allowing the reader to feel enveloped by them while the text continually remains sparse. The repetition of, “You go away, you come back,” to each situation depicted in the story, reinforces the author’s message of reuniting with a loved one after a separation. This basic primer is accessible to children experiencing separation for the first time and offers examples through a myriad of circumstances. *You Go Away* can be used by parents for children who have yet begun school but are experiencing short periods of separation when adults go grocery shopping, out for an evening, to work, or play Peek-a-Boo. *You Go Away* would be a suitable precursor to *My Backpack* as it includes a parent throughout. *My Backpack* can serve as a continuation to *You Go Away* because the storyline in *My Backpack* is generated by the child rather than by circumstances happening around her. Additionally, *You Go Away* ends with the child going

off to school and saying, “Goodbye,” to their parent and *My Backpack* begins with a child preparing for the first day of school.

Books relating to the theme: “*It is critical that a young child’s sense of control is incorporated into the separation process from home to school.*”

My First Day at Nursery School (2004) by Becky Edwards (Ages 3-5)

My First Day at Nursery School begins with an illustration depicting a young child holding her teacher’s hand as her mommy waves goodbye outside the classroom door accompanied by bold text, “I want my mommy.” She tells us that in spite of all the activities she can participate in at school she still wants her mommy. She acknowledges the activities that are possibilities for her but she still wants her mommy. As she perhaps realizes that the activities may be of interest to her, she ventures throughout the different areas of the classroom and her expression of, “I want my mommy,” is shortened to, “I want my...” then to, “I want...” then eventually to, “I...” until the sentence is not mentioned at all. Throughout her day she enjoys snack, music, and friendships. When her mom eagerly arrives to take her home, she realizes much to her surprise that she doesn’t want to go home and would prefer to do all of the activities at school that she initially rejected. The book ends with her gleefully jumping up and down on her bed as Edwards writes, “Tomorrow is an important day for me. Tomorrow is my second day at nursery school. And I can’t wait!” This ending contrasts with the beginning of the book when her trepidation is evident on her face as she sits motionless in her chair staring at her breakfast. Trepidation in young children about the unknown is deftly handled by Edwards as she slowly allows this young child the natural reaction of caution and observation to evolve into participation and enjoyment. Although the text journeys from worry to assuredness,

the illustrations are vibrant throughout giving even the youngest reader hope that this story will have a positive outcome. Both *My First Day at Nursery School* and *My Backpack* take the reader from home to school and back again and both books end optimistically with the child looking forward to the next day at school.

The Kissing Hand (1993) by Audrey Penn (Ages 4-6)

The Kissing Hand tells the story of a reluctant raccoon, Chester, on the cusp of his first night at school. His mother imparts a secret that takes the form of a kiss on his hand, which his mother promises will ensure that:

Whenever you feel lonely and need a little loving from home, just press your hand to your cheek and think, ‘Mommy loves you. Mommy loves you.’ And that very kiss will jump to your face and fill you with toasty warm thoughts.

Chester returns this symbolic favor as he places a kiss in her palm and is enabling him to enter school. This simple tale told through the eyes of the animal kingdom will surely be mimicked by young children and their parents for years to come. The vibrant colors of the illustrations depicting daytime activities contrast beautifully with the warm glow of the evening time as Chester sets off to school. In choosing a raccoon, Audrey Penn simultaneously confronts a child’s anxieties about leaving their grownup during the day and at night. Both Chester and his mother are able to adjust to this meaningful first time separation through the power of the secret kiss. The power of this book lies in its ability to address the feelings of anxiety that both a parent and child might have rather than from one viewpoint or the other. The forward in *The Kissing Hand* is written by Jean Kennedy Smith, who broadens the scope of the book, by writing that separation is more inclusive than only going to school. “*The Kissing Hand* is a story for any child who confronts a

difficult situation, and for the child within each of us who sometimes needs reassurance.”

The Kissing Hand is the story of reciprocity between mother and child, which also has a place of importance in *My Backpack*. *The Kissing Hand* has Chester looking to his mother for help, whereas in *My Backpack*, the motivator of the story comes from the independence of the child to prepare herself for separation on her first days of school.

Wemberly Worried (2000) by Kevin Henkes (Ages 4-6)

Kevin Henkes wastes no time and begins his book with, “Wemberly worried about everything.” From that page on, he lists every possible situation that Wemberly could worry about, from the impossible to the possible. Some of these worries are transitory but her worry about her doll, Petal, is a constant. During her moments of extreme worry, she rubs Petal’s ears, “Wemberly worried that if she didn’t stop worrying, Petal would have no ears left at all.” Wemberly’s worries reach their apex in her worry about the first day of school. Henkes illustrates this worry with bold type “what if” questions spread across two pages accompanied by question marks in the background.

When Wemberly arrives at school, Henkes captures her entrance into the classroom masterfully by showing Wemberly clutching Petal in one arm while her other hand grasps her mother’s skirt as she looks in the direction of her teacher standing in close proximity with an outstretched arm. Her teacher, Mrs. Peachum, suggests to Wemberly that, “There is someone I think you should meet,” as she introduces Wemberly to a child standing apart from the other children in the classroom whose arms are enveloping a doll. As the two girls introduce their dolls to each other and a friendship ensues, Wemberly embarks on a busy day at school. Henkes ends his story with Mrs. Peachum saying goodbye to Wemberly with, “Come back tomorrow,” and Wemberly responding, “I will. Don’t worry.” This story

addresses the plethora of worries that occur in young children. By using mice rather than people in this story, Henkes allows children to express their emotions, in this case their worries, freely while knowing their emotions are shared by others. Additionally, the use of animals gives the child reader a safe distance from the situation, allowing him/her to freely express their emotions and share them with others. It also gives importance to teachers being prepared for separation issues with more than just the suggestion of “don’t worry,” but an actual plan of action. In *My Backpack* Alice’s astute teacher asks her if she would like to take something out of her backpack and bring that object with her into the classroom in much the same way that Mrs. Peachum quickly assesses Wemberly’s worry and has a ready plan to help assuage it. *Wemberly Worried* and *My Backpack* were written with the express purpose of acknowledging children’s anxiety and both offer a remedy for those children setting off on their first day of school by letting them decide which objects will be of comfort to them.

Books relating to the theme that: “*Transitional objects can assist in a young child’s separation from home to school.*”

Ira Sleeps Over (1972) by Bernard Waber (Ages 4-6)

Bernard Waber’s *Ira Sleeps Over* conveys the importance of transitional objects even for children who are not setting out on their very first adventure without their parents. However, Ira is going on his first sleepover and is in a quandary about taking his teddy bear along. Ira is uncertain as to whether his friend sleeps with a special object as well. Although his parents encourage Ira to take his teddy bear on the sleepover, Waber keeps the story moving along until the very last page when Ira discovers that his friend, Reggie, is fast asleep in his own bed with a teddy bear. Waber’s underlying message is that not all

children have transitional objects but that those who do should be supported in having their object remain in their life until the child decides that it is no longer a necessity. His detailed illustrations and the amount of text make this book unsuitable for very young children but Waber is aiming for the older child who might be outgrowing his/her transitional object. *My Backpack* is clearly written for the child who is still fully dependent on a transitional object whereas Waber's book is more appropriate for children who are considering the importance of their object in their life.

Knuffle Bunny: A Cautionary Tale (2004) by Mo Willems (Ages 2-5)

Knuffle Bunny's words and illustrations jump off every page and grab the young reader from beginning to end. The mixed media of black and white photographs of actual locations combined with the vibrantly colored characters keeps both the reader and the audience entertained. Mo Willems' characters Trixie and her daddy take a trip to the laundromat where everything goes according to plan until Trixie, through garbled speech and body language, tries to convey to her dad her realization that her knuffle bunny has been left at the laundromat. Although Trixie does not have the words to convey her panic, the illustrations do the job wonderfully. When her dad and Trixie arrive back home, her mother's greets them with the question, "Where's Knuffle Bunny?" and the family speedily returns to the laundromat where they successfully find Knuffle Bunny in a washing machine. Trixie utters her very first words, which are, "KNUFFLE BUNNY!!!" This story is easily accessible to all young children who know but may not be able to express through words, their need for loving adults who make every effort to understand them and for a piece of home that they take with them on many adventures. Mo Willems

subtitles this book with the words, *A Cautionary Tale*, as advice for grownups as to the importance of transitional objects to young children.

The Ticky-Tacky Doll (2002) by Cynthia Rylant (Ages 3-5)

Cynthia Rylant masterfully writes the story of a little girl and her “ticky-tacky doll” made for her by her Grandmama from scraps of cloth. *The Ticky-Tacky Doll* has a caveat on its cover page, “Starting school changes everything...” and Cynthia Rylant deftly shows us that a transitional object can help a child maintain control of his or her world during times of transition because the object remains constant. Early on in the story, Rylant tells us that on the eve of the little girl’s first day of school she realizes that there would be no possibility of bringing her ticky-tacky doll to school:

Well, the little girl might as well have been asked to leave her nose behind, or her two ears, or her eyes. The ticky-tacky doll was as much a part of her as eyes or ears or a nose, and the little girl did not know how else to be.

The young girl is unable to involve herself in any activities at school and longs to return to home where she can be reunited with her ticky-tacky doll. Her Grandmama intuitively understands the importance of the ticky-tacky doll and makes one small enough to fit in her granddaughter’s backpack. The empathy from Grandmama to her granddaughter is expressed poignantly and succinctly by Rylant, “Grandmama had lived a long time and knew about loneliness and missing someone.” This single sentence allows the readers to understand the importance of a loving adult in a child’s life, the necessity of transitional objects as sources of comfort, and how memories of childhood can remain with us through old age. The fact that the ticky-tacky doll was made of scraps is also a metaphor for all of the pieces of this child’s life coming together in one object that represents security and

love from one generation to another. Harvey Stevenson's softly-colored illustrations convey the emotions in this story including the feeling of love shared throughout generations. *The Ticky-Tacky Doll* should be in every young child's library both at home and at school.

The "...beautiful little scraps and bits and pieces of dreams," remains hidden in her backpack, just as Alice's secrets of memories and dreams remain in hers and comfort her.

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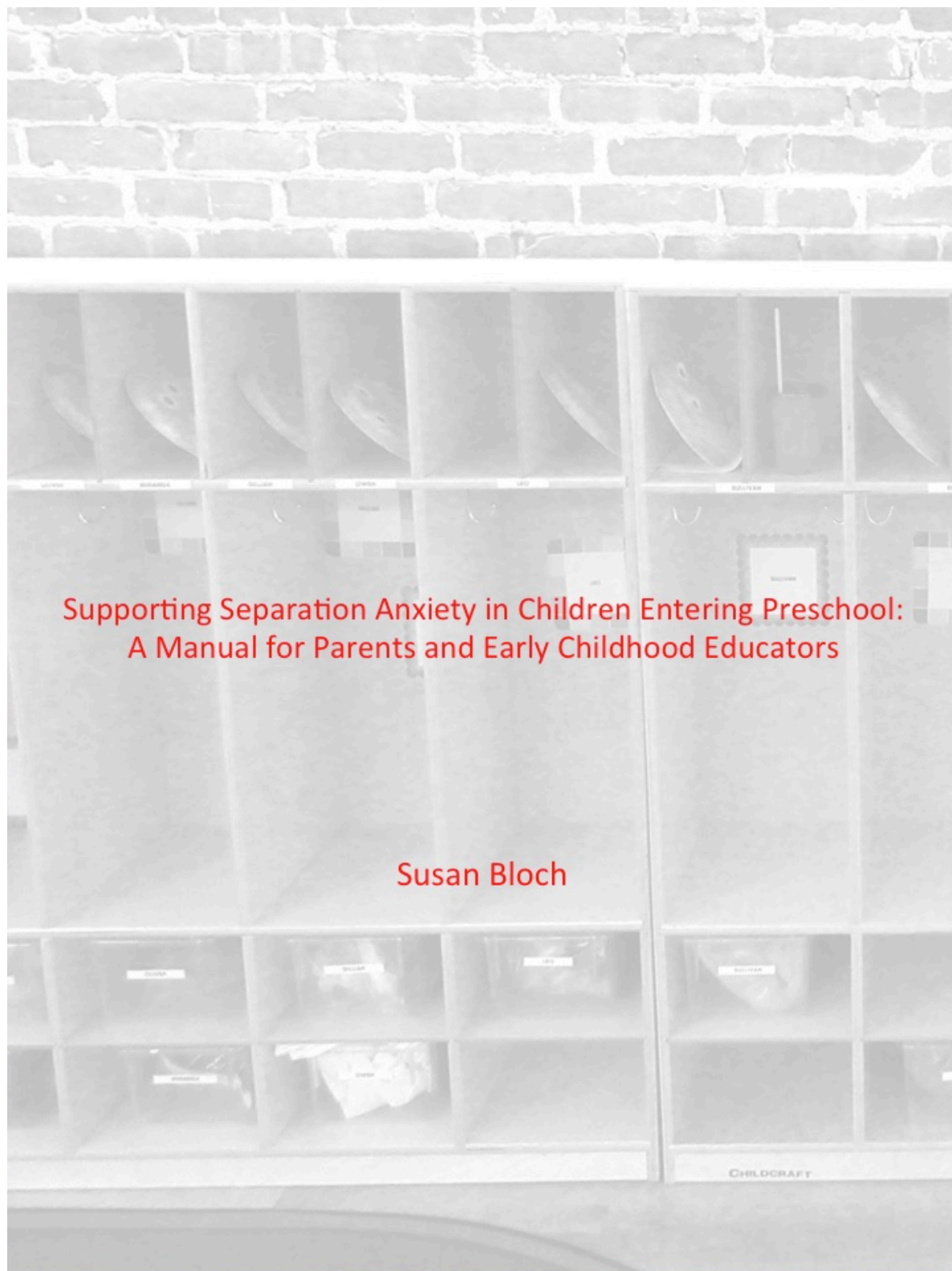
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Appendix A

Manual for Parents and Early Childhood Educators on Separation



INTRODUCTION

This handbook was conceived during the first four months of my daughter's pre-school education during which I sat in the "Mommy's Chair" listening to my child's distressful cries and the supportive words from her calm and experienced teacher. This is my first opportunity since that time to put my thought, experience and, now, research about separation anxiety in the preschool child into a manual for early childhood educators.

This manual is intended as a supportive guide for all educators in a preschool setting, but it is not intended as a whole for all children; every teacher must consider every child as unique in that every situation will be unique. I am offering the information contained herein in calendar form to assist the reader in preparation before and during a child's first school experience. I hope I have provided enough information for you, the teacher, to help your young students, and their primary caregivers, through the first days, weeks and months of their preschool education.

JULY

Separation Anxiety vs. Separation Anxiety Disorder

Definition	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
Week 1 Typical Separation Anxiety					
Week 2 Separation Anxiety Disorder (SAD)					
Week 3 Assessment Of Anxiety Symptoms					
Week 4 Observation Method					

"It is a mistake to label as 'very attached' a young child who clings fearfully to the mother; such attachment behavior may reflect insecure attachment or secure use of the mother as a safe haven, depending on the context." (Cassidy, 2008, p. 13)

--Ainsworth

CHILDCRAFT

JULY

Separation Anxiety vs. Separation Anxiety Disorder

(This information is tedious but necessary)

Week 1

The process of separation begins at birth, not at school. Typical and healthy separation anxiety as a life stage first develops at about 7 months of age as a baby understands that his/her caregivers do not disappear when out of sight. This discovery results in the baby developing a meaningful attachment to the care-giving adults in his/her life. Meaningful attachment is indicative of secure attachment; a child knows that a parent will be available and responsive both physically and emotionally. Secure attachment is indicative of responsive parenting. Typical separation anxiety commonly peaks at 10-18 months of age and subsides by 3 years. Typical separation anxiety characteristics are increased need for security objects, increased dependency on their caregivers and teachers, regression in development i.e. thumb sucking, bathroom accidents, and trouble sleeping.



S. Bloch, 2014

Week 2

The current DSM-IV definition for Separation anxiety is classified as a psychological disorder when typical fears become excessive worries ("Separation Anxiety Disorder," 2010). Common symptoms of SAD are persistent worries that something bad will happen to the child's attachment figure if the child leaves, and can result in refusal to go to school (school phobia), fear of being alone, and repeated complaints of repeated symptoms i.e. headaches and stomachaches (Bowlby, 1973). The major contributing factors to separation anxiety disorder are insecure attachment to the primary caregiver, the presence of anxiety in a parent, and/or a traumatic event. In order for separation anxiety to be classified as a disorder, the symptoms must last for at least 4 weeks (Angold & Egger, 2006).



S. Bloch, 2014

Week 3

There are very few psychological assessments available for the treatment of anxiety in preschool age children. The contributing reason for this is that the understanding of anxiety in this age group is not able to be articulated by the children themselves at this point in their development. Given that early intervention would certainly be of benefit the lack of assessment methods is troubling. The only assessment that is currently available is the Preschool Anxiety Scale (PAS) but this scale is limited in that "the PAS utilizes parent report" thereby limiting objectivity (Edwards, Rapee, Kennedy, & Spence, 2010).

Week 4

Take a look at your school's child observation templates in order to be ready to use them if necessary.

AUGUST

Theories of Separation



S. Bloch, 2016

Theories	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
Week 1	Jean Piaget (1896-1980)				
Week 2	Margaret Mahler (1897-1985)				
Week 3	John Bowlby (1907-1990)				
Week 4	Mary Ainsworth (1913-1999)				



S. Bloch, 2016

"Whilst especially evident during early childhood, attachment behavior is held to characterize human beings from the cradle to the grave." (Bowlby, 1979, p. 129 as cited in Cassidy & Shaver, 2008, p. 269)

--Bowlby

CHILDCRAFT

AUGUST

Theories of Attachment

(Without attachment there is no separation therefore, although this is not the best choice for beach reading, these theories will definitely be useful for teachers)

Week 1

Jean Piaget's "object permanence" theory refers to the understanding that "when an object disappears from our sight, for example, we do not assume that it has thereby gone out of existence" (Flavell, 2002, p. 72). This concept is a major milestone in a child's development and is typically acquired at the age of 18-24 months. In its essence, it refers to the child's ability to realize that an object exists even if it is out of sight. This is one of the reasons why the game of peek-a-boo is played so frequently with parent and child.

Week 2

Margaret Mahler's significant contribution to the understanding of attachment is her theory of "separation-individuation" wherein the child of 15 months and older begins to recognize his/her own identity as separate from that of his/her mother. Mahler believes that if this development is disrupted a child may not be able to continue with a reliable sense of his/her own identity. "It is not a sense of who I am but that I am; as such, this the earliest step in the process of the unfolding of individuality" (Mahler, 1975, p. 8).

Week 3

John Bowlby is known as the father of attachment theory. His central theme was that the psychological bonds formed between children and their primary caregiver continue throughout life. He posited that fear of survival drives this attachment in that children understand that their primary caregiver is their best defense against things in the world which may harm them. Bowlby expanded Piaget's object permanence theory to include that when a child can form a mental representation of the attachment figure **and** sees that person as available and responsive, then secure attachment has been achieved. We therefore understand that secure attachment fosters exploration if the child is secure in his/her knowledge that his/her attachment figure will be available if needed. "...The provision by both parents of a secure base from which a child or an adolescent can make sorties into the outside world and to which he can return knowing for sure that he will be welcomed when he gets there, nourished physically and emotionally, comforted if distressed, reassured if frightened" (Bowlby, 1988, p. 11).

Week 4

Mary Ainsworth augmented the work of John Bowlby through her "strange situation classification" in which she investigated how attachments vary between children. The categories she observed were separation anxiety, the infant's willingness to explore, stranger anxiety, and reunion behavior of the child and primary caregiver after a short absence. Ainsworth's findings proved Bowlby's attachment theory and further clarified them by proving that separation can be qualified into categories. Ainsworth offered the term "secure base" wherein the attachment figure represents a base of security from which the child can continually return to from his/her exploration of the environment.

SEPTEMBER

Welcome to School

Welcome	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
Week 1	Letter to Parents				
Week 2	Prepare Classroom For Children				
Week 3	Adjustment Schedule				
Week 4	Adjustment Schedule				



S. Bloch, 2014

"Thus, from the time of the child's first entry into school a sincere and cordial relationship between the teacher and the mother will serve to arouse a sense of confidence in the mother and reassurance in the child." (Winnicott, 1964, p. 194).

--Winnicott

CHILDCRAFT

SEPTEMBER

Welcome to School

(Here is what you have been waiting for)

Week 1

The welcome letter is your opportunity to introduce yourself to both the parent and the child. You may want to include a photograph of the child's teachers, some book suggestions and some preliminary separation tips. You may also take this opportunity to express to parents that separation anxiety is typical and expected. Also included in this letter will be your school's questionnaire about the child's history of separation (see Appendix). The home visit is the first opportunity for you and the parent to become a unified team in which both sides support one another and a chance to discuss the separation process before school begins. The home visit is a window into the child's world and including the type of attachment the child exhibits to the primary caregiver.

Week 2

Think about everything that Piaget, Mahler, Bowlby, and Ainsworth have taught you and use this information to help you ready your classroom in ways that are most conducive for both parent and child to separate one from the other. Presupposing an adjustment phase-in schedule, your classroom should include a chair for the caregiver for each child. The teachers should select only a few manipulatives to be offered on the tables and rug so as not to overwhelm the children, but enough to encourage exploration of the classroom. Select hello and goodbye songs, and prepare a visual predominately displayed schedule for the day. As the weeks progress you can add more activities. Label children's cubbies with their names and include a photograph of their family.

Week 3

The adjustment schedule can vary from school to school but the philosophy of accommodating a comfortable transition from home to school, for both parent and child, remains constant. During the first two weeks it will be necessary to determine how long the parent should stay in the classroom, and when it is time to decrease the time.

Week 4

This schedule allows children to experience the first days of school in small groups so that the teacher can give individual attention to each child. It may be necessary to give children extra attention when they are upset about separating and in most cases it does not take the teacher away from the other students, but in fact helps them realize that you would do the same for them if they were upset. This individualized attention provides a sense of emotional security for all children.

SEPTEMBER				
Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
	3	4	5	6
Labor Day School Closed				
9	10	11	12	13
		Week 1 Schedule Group A 9:30-10:30 Group B 10:30-11:30	Week 1 Schedule Group A 9:30-10:30 Group B 10:30-11:30	Week 1 Schedule Group A 9:30-10:30 Group B 10:30-11:30
16	17	18	19	20
Week 2 Schedule Full Group 9:30-11:30	Week 2 Schedule Full Group 9:30-11:30	Week 2 Schedule Full Group 9:30-11:30	Week 2 Schedule Full Group 9:30-11:30	Week 2 Schedule Full Group 9:30-11:30
23	24	25	26	27
Regular Schedule Begins 9:00-12:30				

OCTOBER

Parent/Child Tips

Application	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
Week 1	Teacher Supporting Parent	_____●			
Week 2	Parent Supporting Child	_____●			
Week 3	Howes & Ritchie	_____●			
Week 4	Winnicot	_____●			

*"There is little growth without some pain or anxiety."
(Balaban, 1985, p. 22).*

--Balaban

OCTOBER

Parent/Child Tips

(Drink plenty of water and get plenty of rest)

Week 1

Teachers can Support Parents by:

- Discussing the separation process before school begins.
- Allowing parents to stay in the classroom until their child has separated.
- Provide assistance for working parents.
- Communicate with parents about their child's separation.
- Call parents during the day to report on how their child is doing.
- Become a unified team in which both sides support the other.
- Tell parents that separation takes time, effort and cooperation.
- Help parents say goodbye when the child is ready, but the parent is not.



S. Bloch, 2014

Week 3

"Children are calmed and use their secure relationship with the caregiver to organize, modulate, and regulate their emotions."
(Howes & Richie, 2002, p. 39).

Week 2

Parents can Support Children by:

- Telling them in advance about school but not too far in advance.
- Tell them what they will be doing in school.
- Use words like "your teachers, your classroom, your cubbie" to convey ownership.
- Be positive about the new experience
- If your child clings to you try not get upset. It is a natural reaction. Let him/her stay near you but do not comment. Your child just needs to be near you.
- Do not engage with your child. Bring a book to keep you involved.
- Try not to compare your child with any other child.
- Never, never, never sneak out.
- The relationship the teachers are forming with your child is based on trust.
- Create good-bye rituals-how many hugs will they give? How many kisses?
- Keep things simple.
- Remain calm and confident; anxiety can be contagious.

Week 4

"Some mothers operate on two levels. At one layer they only want one thing, they want their child to grow up, to get out of the enclosure, to go to school, to meet the world. At another layer...they cannot conceive of letting their child go." (Winnicott, 2002, p. 174).



S. Bloch, 2014

NOVEMBER

Overcoming Separation Anxiety

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
Week 1	Teachers Supporting Children	_____●			
Week 2	Practical Tips	_____●			
Week 3	Children Supporting Children	_____●			
Week 4	Howes & Ritchie	_____●			

*"To remain within easy access of a familiar individual known to be ready and willing to come to our aid in an emergency is clearly a good insurance policy – what-ever our age."
(Bowlby, 1988, p. 27).*

--Bowlby

CHILDCRAFT

NOVEMBER

Week 1

Teachers can Support Children by:

- Allow children to bring security objects.
- Supplying a "Primary Caregiver Chair" which can be moved incrementally during the course of several weeks, further and further away from the classroom.
- Never make a child feel like they are being taken from their parents by force.
- Listen
- Be involved in their learning.
- Be consistent
- Set rules, rituals and routines, and stick to it.
- Provide positive attention.
- Check in with the quiet children because they may be hurting inside.
- Take written observations of progression or regression of children separation.
- Children's reactions can be anything from being shy upon arrival to racing around the classroom investigating everything.
- When children are scared they may act out, become aggressive and argumentative. This is a way of dealing with their fears.



S. Bloch, 2014

Week 3

Children can Support Children by:

- Suggest to parents that they make playdates for their children and let the children decide at which home they would be most comfortable.
- Have children work on projects together in the classroom.

Overcoming Separation Anxiety (Remain calm and flexible)

Week 2

Practical Tips:

- Know each of your students as individuals.
- Make sure that a teacher is available at the classroom door to facilitate separation from parent to teacher, and another teacher is available in the classroom.
- Involve children in classroom activities immediately.
- If they are hesitant have a favorite toy or area open and inviting.
- Allowing a child to dictate a letter to the teacher expressing their feelings even with one or two words can be helpful.
- Allowing a child to draw whatever comes to mind can give teachers clues about how the child is feeling.
- Give opportunities for expression through dramatic play.
- Give a child a basket with wooden chips with pictures that correspond to the days' schedule. As each activity is finished remove the corresponding chip from the basket to help the child understand the passage of time.
- Take photographs of children involved, participating, and having fun in the classroom. Make albums with the children who are experiencing separation anxiety.

Week 4

"Because child-teacher relationships are an important first step in helping children explore and learn within the classroom environment, there is great value in teachers knowing *how* to help these children construct positive, trusting child-teacher relationships. Once a child can trust the teacher, they can use her or him to organize and structure their learning, as the teacher attends to their comments, is asked for help, and shares their discoveries." (Howes & Richie, 2002, p. 5)

DECEMBER

Separation Anxiety Disorder

Red Flags	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
Week 1	Symptoms	_____●			
Week 2	Causes	_____●			
Week 3	How to Help	_____●			
Week 4	Treatment	_____●			

"Furthermore, there is widespread agreement that what a child fears is not what will happen at school, but leaving home." (Bowlby, 1973, p. 262).

--Bowlby

CHILDCRAFT

DECEMBER

Separation Anxiety Disorder
(Dig down deep, investigate, and support)

Week 1

Symptoms:

- Fear that harm will happen to a loved one.
- Constant worry, specifically about permanent separation or being kidnapped.
- Nightmares
- Refusal to go to school.
- Insomnia
- Continual complaints of physical sickness.

Week 3

How to Help:

- Learn about Separation Anxiety Disorder.
- Listen to the child and respect their feelings.
- Do not ignore the issue.
- Keep calm.
- Encourage the child's interaction in social and physical activities.
- Make sure that the parents have been informed as soon as you see the first signs of separation anxiety that does not look typical.

Week 2

Causes:

- Change in the environment, i.e. new house and/or new school.
- Stressful situations i.e. loss of loved one, divorce, and/or traumatic body injury.
- Anxiety or depression in the parent.



S. Bloch, 2014

Week 4

Treatment:

Professional treatment for Separation Anxiety Disorder may include:

- Talk therapy
- Play therapy
- Family counseling
- Individual counseling
- Medication

RECOMMENDED READING LIST FOR PARENTS/ TEACHERS TO READ TO CHILDREN

Are You My Mother?, by P.D. Eastman
Don't Forget to Come Back!, by Robie H. Harris
Goodnight Moon, by M.W. Brown
Maybe She Forgot, by Ellen Kandoian
Mommy Don't Go, by Elizabeth Crary
More, More, More, Said the Baby, by V.B. Williams
The Goodbye Book, by Judith Viorst
The Kissing Hand, by Audrey Penn
The Runaway Bunny, by M.W. Brown
Toy Boat, by Randall DeSeve
Where is Baby's Mommy?, by K. Katz
Will You Come Back for Me, by Ann Tompert
You Go Away, by Dorothy Corey

PARENT SURVEY

What group activities is your child enrolled in during the year (e.g. ballet, sports, art or music lessons)?

Is this a drop off class? _____

Stressful occurrences (operation, major health problem, death in the family, moving, sibling arrival, etc.) _____

When? _____ Child's reaction? _____

Fears (thunder, dark, animals, masks, stories etc.): _____

Comforting objects and behaviors (bottle, blanket, thumb, pacifier, etc.):

How often and where are they usually used? _____

How old was your child when you first left him/her with a sitter or someone other than you? _____

How did he/she react at the time? _____

How does he/she react now? _____

Any special experiences last summer? _____

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TEACHER'S NOTES

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
Week 1 Notes					
Week 2 Notes					
Week 3 Notes					
Week 4 Notes					

TEACHER'S NOTES

	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri
Week 1 Notes					
Week 2 Notes					
Week 3 Notes					
Week 4 Notes					



Courtesy of author

"We shall not cease from exploration. And the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know it for the first time."

-- T.S. Elliot,
Little Gidding

CHILDCRAFT

Appendix B

Photo Release Forms

March 21, 2016

Dear Parents,

As part of my Integrative Master's Project for Bank Street College I am writing a teacher's manual and children's book relating to the separation process. Throughout these books I will be using photographs of children and their parents. An example would be a photograph of a parent and child at arrival time.

Please fill out the below release form, giving your permission for me to use a photograph of you and/or your child for my project.

Many thanks,

Susan Bloch

Photo Release Form

I _____, give permission to Susan Bloch to use a photograph of my child, _____ and/or myself, for her Bank Street College Integrative Master's Project.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

March 21, 2016

Dear Parents,

As part of my Integrative Master's Project for Bank Street College I am writing a teacher's manual and children's book relating to the separation process. Throughout these books I will be using photographs of children and their parents. An example would be a photograph of a parent and child at arrival time.

Please fill out the below release form, giving your permission for me to use photograph of you and/or your child for my project.

Many thanks,
Susan Bloch

Photo Release Form

I Matt Messinger, give permission to Susan Bloch to use a photograph of my child, Roger Messinger and/or myself, for her Bank Street College Integrative Master's Project.

Signature: Date: 3/22/16

March 21, 2016

Dear Parents,

As part of my Integrative Master's Project for Bank Street College I am writing a teacher's manual and children's book relating to the separation process. Throughout these books I will be using photographs of children and their parents. An example would be a photograph of a parent and child at arrival time.

Please fill out the below release form, giving your permission for me to use photograph of you and/or your child for my project.

Many thanks,
Susan Bloch

Photo Release Form

I San Vaffee, give permission to Susan Bloch to use a photograph of my child, peyton Vaffee and/or myself, for her Bank Street College Integrative Master's Project.

Signature: _____

Date: 3 | 22 | 16

March 21, 2016

Dear Parents,

As part of my Integrative Master's Project for Bank Street College I am writing a teacher's manual and children's book relating to the separation process. Throughout these books I will be using photographs of children and their parents. An example would be a photograph of a parent and child at arrival time.

Please fill out the below release form, giving your permission for me to use photograph of you and/or your child for my project.

Many thanks,
Susan Bloch

Photo Release Form

I Pat Ann Basso, give permission to Susan Bloch to use a photograph of my child, Andrew Basso and/or myself, for her Bank Street College Integrative Master's Project.

Signature:

Pat Ann BassoDate: 3/22/16

March 21, 2016

Dear Parents,

As part of my Integrative Master's Project for Bank Street College I am writing a teacher's manual and children's book relating to the separation process. Throughout these books I will be using photographs of children and their parents. An example would be a photograph of a parent and child at arrival time.

Please fill out the below release form, giving your permission for me to use photograph of you and/or your child for my project.

Many thanks,
Susan Bloch

Photo Release Form

I Nikia Alexander, give permission to Susan Bloch to use a photograph of my child, Siri Alexander and/or myself, for her Bank Street College Integrative Master's Project.

Signature:

Nikia Alexander

Date:

3/24/2016

March 21, 2016

Dear Parents,

As part of my Integrative Master's Project for Bank Street College I am writing a teacher's manual and children's book relating to the separation process. Throughout these books I will be using photographs of children and their parents. An example would be a photograph of a parent and child at arrival time.

Please fill out the below release form, giving your permission for me to use photograph of you and/or your child for my project.

Many thanks,
Susan Bloch

Photo Release Form

I Nicole Foster, give permission to Susan Bloch to use a photograph of my child, Keira Grubert and/or myself, for her Bank Street College Integrative Master's Project.

Signature: Maria Test

Date: 3/24/16

March 21, 2016

Dear Parents,

As part of my Integrative Master's Project for Bank Street College I am writing a teacher's manual and children's book relating to the separation process. Throughout these books I will be using photographs of children and their parents. An example would be a photograph of a parent and child at arrival time.

Please fill out the below release form, giving your permission for me to use a photograph of you and/or your child for my project.

Many thanks,
Susan Bloch

Photo Release Form

I Jandi Taylor, give permission to Susan Bloch to use a photograph of my child, Margaret Taylor and/or myself, for her Bank Street College Integrative Master's Project.

Signature: Jandi Taylor

Date: 3/29/16

March 21, 2016

Dear Parents,

As part of my Integrative Master's Project for Bank Street College I am writing a teacher's manual and children's book relating to the separation process. Throughout these books I will be using photographs of children and their parents. An example would be a photograph of a parent and child at arrival time.

Please fill out the below release form, giving your permission for me to use a photograph of you and/or your child for my project.

Many thanks,
Susan Bloch

Photo Release Form

I Alison Coen Searcy, give permission to Susan Bloch to use a photograph of my child, Conner Searcy and/or myself, for her Bank Street College Integrative Master's Project.

Signature: Alison

Date: 3/28/16