

Bridging the Divide Between Preschool and Elementary School: How Preschool-Elementary  
Collaborations Can Promote Young Children's Transition to Kindergarten

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## **Bridging the Divide Between Preschool and Elementary School: How Preschool-Elementary Collaborations Can Promote Young Children's Transition to Kindergarten**

Research indicates that children's transition to kindergarten has many long-term effects on academic, social, and other developmental outcomes (Corter & Pelletier, 2010; Entwisle & Alexander, 1999; Pelletier & Corter, 2005; Smythe-Leistico, et al., 2012). This is particularly true for learners who are considered economically or socially at-risk (Smythe-Leistico et al., 2012). Although the importance of a smooth kindergarten transition is well documented, many children's experiences remain disjointed. A nationwide survey of over 3,600 teachers indicated that up to 48% of children have difficulty making the transition to kindergarten (Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta & Cox, 2000). The transition to kindergarten may be a child's first major transition and often creates uncertainty and anxiety for children and their families (Wolery, 1999).

Preschool and elementary educators tend to hold different views of young children, their philosophies of education, and their roles in assisting children's life successes. Preparation for the two types of teachers differ, as the pre-service coursework of preschool educators tends to focus on child development, while that of kindergarten teachers tends to emphasize content, curricula, assessment and learning expectations (Corter, Janmohamed & Pelletier, 2012). Educators working in preschools typically collaborate and partner with colleagues, while kindergarten educators often have their own classrooms. Such differences in professional histories may contribute to problems encountered when preschool and kindergarten educators are expected to work together (Pelletier & Corter, 2012; Rose, 2011). The purpose of this study was to investigate educators' perspectives on the similarities and differences between preschool and

kindergarten environments and to describe how collaborations between these two groups of teachers can promote young children's transition to kindergarten.

The research indicates positive relationships between early childhood initiatives that promote collaboration among educational leaders, practitioners and parents and children's social-emotional, cognitive and language development (Corter & Pelletier, 2010; Ritchie & Gutmann, 2014; Simons & Curtis, 2007). In particular, quality interventions appear to be related to the cognitive and social-emotional skills of at-risk children (Ritchie & Gutmann, 2014).

Kindergarten transition programs tend to lead to higher on-time enrollment, increased parent involvement, and improved community and school relationships (Smythe-Leistico, et al., 2012). Children who participated in pre-kindergarten transition activities in which families, preschool and kindergarten educators collaborated, were judged by kindergarten teachers as having fewer behavior problems and more social skills than children who did not participate in such activities (LoCasale-Crouch, Mashburn, Downer, & Pianta, 2008). A positive kindergarten experience is important because children's initial academic paths in elementary school tend to be stable throughout the remainder of their education (Alexander, Entwisle, & Dauber, 1993).

Although there is substantial evidence that a coherent transition from preschool to kindergarten has multiple social, emotional and academic benefits for children, research also indicates that a gap often exists for children and families moving from preschool to kindergarten (Corter & Pelletier, 2010). This gap is evident in the difference in classroom climate of the two settings (Ritchie & Gutmann, 2014). It has been reported that kindergarten classrooms, compared to those in preschools, tend to have less social and emotional support, fewer child-directed activities, increased whole-group instruction, less time for meals and reduced time outdoors.

Research indicates that typical kindergarten transition practices such as flyers and group open-houses are insufficient to adequately prepare children and parents, especially for learners who are considered economically or socially at-risk (LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008). Educators, particularly those who serve culturally and linguistically diverse children, may lack adequate resources to assist children's transition. The overall quality of early childhood classrooms serving non-white and poor or working-poor families has been found to be sub-par (Stuhlman and Pianta, 2009). Compared to classrooms serving white and more affluent communities, these classrooms have fewer enriching adult-child interactions and lack an overall positive climate.

Preschool educators often perceive that compared to kindergarten, they give children more time to practice social skills (Hatcher, Nuner & Paulsel; 2012). These teachers believe that they assist children to learn problem-solving strategies with peers and to develop verbal problem solving abilities, i.e., using words to solve problems. Whereas, the kindergarten environment has other priorities and more structure so social-emotional factors cannot be a priority as in preschools.

Misperceptions could also contribute to disjointed preschool to kindergarten transitions. Firlik (2003) reported that preschool directors perceived kindergarten to be like "boot camp," focused on phonics, sight-word drills, and prescribed curricula. Preschool educators reported feelings of anxiety regarding children's readiness for kindergarten and expectations for children's mastery of reading and other demands of kindergarten (Hatcher et al., 2012). Until recently, there have not been many opportunities for preschool and early elementary educators to interact with one another and unfamiliarity could be contributing to misperceptions.

In response to the growing research base on the need for coherent transitions, programs that work to bridge preschools and elementary schools have recently been established. These

programs are similar in that they all work to unite early childhood practitioners, leaders and the community members around a common goal of improving children's transition to formal school. Positive outcomes are associated with a shared goal of improved outcomes for transitioning kindergarteners and opportunities for collaboration such as joint professional development (Corter & Pelletier, 2010; Ritchie & Gutmann, 2014; Smolkin, 1999).

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

This study applied Bridging Multiple Worlds Theory (Cooper, 2011) to understand how children traverse the multiple worlds of home, preschool, and elementary school to make smooth transitions to kindergarten. Bridging Multiple Worlds Theory suggests that when these multiple worlds are more consistent, transitions will tend to be smoother. In the case of kindergarten transition, this study tried to understand two institutions, the preschool world and that of elementary schools.

We also applied Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory to explain how two groups of educators, preschool teachers and their elementary counterparts develop different views of young children and the role of education. We sought to understand how interactions across these two groups may develop common understandings or intersubjectivity that may lead to better kindergarten transition. Vygotsky maintained that all psychological phenomena, including our thoughts, ideas, beliefs and ways of thinking, develop through interacting with those around us. Novices interact with more proficient members of their communities using language and other symbolic means. What others around them say and do eventually become appropriated by the novices. For example, as novice preschool teachers interact with their more experienced counterparts, they begin to take on the views of education and young children that are expressed by more experienced members of the school community. Similarly, elementary educators'

preparation in their profession includes interactions with more veteran teachers. Overtime, the new teachers also begin to act and talk in ways that are similar to their colleagues and mentors.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions for this study were: (a) In what ways do preschool and kindergarten educators perceive their two worlds to be similar and different? (b) From the perspectives of these educators, how can collaborations between these two groups of educators promote kindergarten readiness? and (c) What facilitates these collaborations?

### **Method**

**Participants.** Participants included 12 early childhood educators in Hawai'i: four preschool teachers, two elementary teachers who worked with Grades K-3, two preschool administrators, and five teacher educators. The educators were recruited from a project that brought preschool and early childhood elementary educators together to learn effective instructional strategies and also develop place-based science curricula. All but one of the participants was female. The teachers' ethnicities were Japanese American (n=3) and European American (n=4). One of the administrators was Hawaiian and the other was European American. The teacher educators were all European American. Of the teacher educators, three had spent their careers in early childhood, both in preschools and elementary schools. One was secondary trained, but had previously worked with many elementary and secondary teachers.

All of the educators worked in settings serving culturally and linguistically diverse families. The elementary teachers and one of the administrators worked in schools where the majority of children was Native Hawaiian. The school in which the preschool educators worked was very diverse, such that there was no ethnic majority. The participants had a range of experiences, having worked in education between 4 and 35 years.

**Procedures.** Participation was voluntary and each educator provided informed consent. Participants were interviewed about their views on how they thought preschool and elementary education was similar and different, the goals and expectations they had for the setting in which they worked, and what facilitated and impeded collaborations among educators from these two groups, as it related to kindergarten transition. The interviews took 45-60 minutes to complete and were audio recorded and transcribed. Two of the educators, a teacher educator and a preschool administrator, were interviewed on the telephone.

**Data analysis.** We used Corbin and Strauss's (2008) grounded theory method of analysis to determine themes in the data, applying open and axial coding. We used open coding to determine themes that came from the data. We read through the transcripts and used open coding. Starting with the research questions, we developed initial codes, for example, we established codes for the differences between elementary and preschool settings and similarities between them. We further refined the coding, by becoming more specific (e.g., philosophy, state mandates) and also found themes that were not anticipated in advance (e.g., differences in lesson planning). After open coding was complete, we used axial coding, which involves organizing the codes to determine how they are related to one another (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

## **Results**

### **Similarities**

All of the educators recognized that there were more differences between preschool and elementary education, than there were similarities. Compared to the teachers, the administrators and teacher educators mentioned more similarities. Vera<sup>1</sup>, one of the teacher educators said that preschool has become more like elementary school, with increasing emphasis on learning

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<sup>1</sup> All of the names are pseudonyms.

outcomes and “more intentional teaching.” She and Kehau, a preschool administrator, also noted that many of the assessments used at the two institutions were often the same. Three teachers educators mentioned that preschool and elementary educators were united in wanting the children in their classes to succeed. As Sharon, a teacher educator who works often with both elementary and preschool teachers suggested, both “[preschool] and kindergarten teachers really want the kids to do well. They really have full intention of helping their kids learn. It’s just how they go about it is a wee bit different.” Beyond these commonalities, the participants saw the worlds of the two school systems as very different.

### **Differences**

**Developmental vs. academic goals.** Participants suggested that preschools tended to focus more on children’s overall development and developmentally appropriate practices; whereas, elementary schools were more focused on academic skills. Renee, a preschool teacher, noted that “preschool educators look at the whole child and try to develop all aspects of their development.” She explained that preschool teachers think about seven different domains of child development including physical development, creativity, and cognitive development, under which academic goals would be placed. Donna, a kindergarten teacher said that preschools focused more on socio-emotional development, whereas, “we focus more on academics.”

Other participants also characterized elementary schools as more academic. Sharon mentioned that there is increasingly more content that elementary school teachers are expected to cover.

There is so much pressure in the [State Department of Education] system to teach . . . the common core, that the curriculum has been pushed down. So things that used to be



second grade are now first grade and things that were first grade are being pushed down into kindergarten.

The two preschool administrators noted that elementary educators would like preschools to prepare children for kindergarten by teaching specific skills. Lisa said that at her school they did cover these skills, but were not as emphasized,

I think a lot of time in elementary school, the standards, the expectations of the parents, the administration, even the teachers themselves [are] much more . . . single mindedly on academic, measurable skills and success. I think preschool does those things, but we definitely don't document it, and we definitely don't have the same level of . . . pressure and expectation.

**Curriculum differences.** Participants explained that because elementary education focuses more on academic standards, and preschool is focused on developmental goals, the two groups of educators tend to approach their curricula differently. Vera, a teacher educator who worked with both groups explained that preschool education “is more child initiated work with teachers . . . observing the child, following the child’s lead and providing opportunities for the child to explore;” thus, emphasizing children’s interests and choices. Sandy, an elementary teacher, agreed. Drawing on her experiences in public elementary schools, she explained that elementary educators had many external expectations and curricula that they needed to follow. On the other hand, “it seems like preschools are more able to follow their own curriculum, or teachers can be more responsive to their kids, more creative. I feel like preschools tend to be more open in terms of meeting the child’s needs.” Pam, a preschool teacher agreed, “we can create our own curriculum somewhat. So we really follow the child and their interest, and in

elementary public school . . . you don't have that much latitude to actually tap into the child's interests.”

Vera suggested that the different emphases placed in preschools and elementary schools also translated to the amount of time that educators spent with children outside the classroom, and the purposes they intended for these moments. In preschools, there is a

recognition that the entire environment that the child is exposed to is a learning environment. That it's not just a classroom that is a learning environment. So there's outdoor learning. So the curriculum is taking place outdoors. It's not thought of as just recess or play. It is play, but it's not thought of as just a break from the curriculum . . . . I think in elementary education . . . outdoor exposure is seen more as kind of a break from the real curriculum.

Vera felt that young children also needed opportunities to physically release their energy, and this could come from playing outside. She attributed many behavioral problems in elementary school to not enough time outdoors and being forced to sit still for long periods of time.

**Structure of the day.** Having more outdoor play in preschool also reflected the different ways that educators structured their time. Five participants mentioned that curricular differences reflected the different ways that elementary and preschool teachers structured the day for children. Lisa, a preschool administrator, pointed out that elementary schools appeared much more structured and compartmentalized than preschools. She noted that when her teachers were going to teach a science lesson, they would not necessarily always do it at the same time of the day; whereas, elementary educators had a specific time.

Activities were also structured differently. Sandy, an elementary teacher, noted that there was more whole group instruction in elementary classrooms than in preschools, where they spent

more time in small groups. Vera, a teacher educator, observed that because there was less choice in elementary school, children were often working on the same assignment at the same time,

**Language emphases.** Perhaps because there was more small group activity in preschool, two preschool and one elementary teacher mentioned that there was more conversation in those classes. The preschool teachers said that they promoted children talking and interacting with peers and adults. Hannah said she tries to promote children's questioning. When a child asks a question, she might say, "Oh, so-and-so that's a good question. Did you guys hear this person's question? and [I] then repeat the question so that it was model for others' inquiry and talk."

Donna, an elementary school teacher, thought that although they used to emphasize oral expression kindergarten, currently, there was there was more emphasis on reading and writing.

**Documented lesson plans.** Three preschool educators talked about the different ways that preschool and elementary educators went about their lesson planning. The issue arose in the broader project in which this study was contextualized and in which many of the participants were involved. The teacher educators on the project asked the elementary and preschool teachers to turn in lesson plans to document the curricula they were developing. The template for the lesson plans was based on what the teacher educators had previously used with elementary educators.

The preschool educators found the template to be long, more detailed, and structured than what they typically used. They said that they would more typically brainstorm the general topic and activity, but not exactly when everything would happen. While preschool teacher Patty said that the lesson plan helped her to think about her expectations for the children, she often abandoned her plan, suggesting that "when young children are interested in something you want to go. . . where their interests are." Lisa, a preschool administrator, said that the lesson planning

became work that was not meaningful for her teachers. After the preschool teachers expressed that they were not happy with the plan's structure, they helped to create something that better fit what was more meaningful and helpful.

**Time pressure in elementary school.** Participants felt that the external pressures and mandates put on elementary school teachers created stress for them to help children acquire certain skills and knowledge by a deadline. Kehau, preschool administrator described this difference between what they did at her preschool and her experiences with elementary school,

I think the lessons we provide help them master those skills and we're willing to take the time for them to master it. I think that by the time they get into [elementary school], it's just like shoved down their throat, you know, either you get it or you don't and if you don't get it you get kicked out of the class. Instead of really focusing and taking the time to really help the students.

Sharon, a teacher educator, also pointed out that most preschools have nap time, whereas, in elementary school they have cut out those rest breaks because there is not enough time to cover everything.

**Partnerships with families.** Four participants mentioned that different from elementary education, preschool educators promoted the development of partnerships with families. Renee, a preschool teacher, explained that she and her colleagues had a lot of contact with families, so that in school, educators could more easily make connections to children's home lives. Her school invited families to drop in at any time, and contrasted this with elementary school, where families were rarely invited into the classroom.

Vera, a teacher educator said that cultivating relationships with families was an expectation of preschool education. Although, elementary teachers might want this, they often had little preparation in how to do it. She said that preschool educators

realize that they really are partners with parents in the caregiving role . . . and make very deliberate attempts to engage parents in the learning environment, as well as doing outreach to parents. I think there's more expectation there that early childhood educators work with parents. Whereas, in the [elementary] school environment, I think there is a real strong desire for family engagement but there isn't as much training.

**Professional development and status differential.** Finally, participants mentioned the different preparation and professional development that was available for the two types of educators. Renee, a preschool teacher, described how the professional development for teachers was segregated. The major convention for the local early childhood organization focused largely on preschool education and workshops for public school teachers in Grades K-3, typically did not include preschool educators.

We live in two separate worlds. So our professional conferences are separated. There's early childhood, which is supposed to be from eight and below, but that typically is defined as preschool and below . . . there is very minimal cross over.

Lisa, a preschool administrator and Sharon, a teacher educator, mentioned the lower status of preschool education, compared to elementary schooling. Lisa thought that her field was challenged by the perception of their roles, "People think of preschool as childcare, babysitting . . . before the real education. And it's not even just the elementary or other people who think that, I think some preschool teachers kind of think that too." Sharon and Renee suggested that this lower status of preschool teachers sometimes got in the way of the preschool and elementary

educators collaborating, as elementary teachers were often put in a position of more authority over preschool educators. They both noted that if the status could be equalized, the two groups could learn much from each other.

### **Collaboration between Preschool and Elementary Educators**

All of the participants recognized the importance of preschool and elementary educators collaborating to assist children in their transition to kindergarten. Six participants mentioned that it would be helpful if educators from each of the two types of schools could exchange information about their institutions to assist in children's transition. The two preschool administrators said that they tried reaching out to the elementary schools in their areas to start conversations about children's transitions. Lisa said that she suggested that the preschool and kindergarten teachers meet to plan for the transition. She found that a few schools were willing, but most were not enthusiastic. The general message they perceived was that elementary educators did not value those interactions. The other preschool administrator, Kehau, said that she tried reaching out to elementary schools to which the children at her preschool would be transitioning, however, she also perceived a lack of interest on the part of the elementary schools. Both Lisa and Vera felt that this ambivalence on the part of elementary schools might stem from the fact that children from any one preschool in Hawai'i transitioned into many elementary schools, such that it was not clear to elementary educators which relationships with particular preschools would really make a difference.

**Learning about the two institutions.** Teacher educators Vera and Sharon were both involved in programs that brought preschool and kindergarten teachers together. In the programs in which they worked, preschool and kindergarten teachers visited each other's classrooms and met to discuss what they observed. The two felt that the classroom visits helped the two groups

of teachers understand the worlds in which the others worked. Both felt it was important for educators to have time to discuss and ask each other questions. Allison, another teacher educator agreed that the teachers needed a way to gain the perspective of the other group's work environment. In addition to classroom visits, Allison thought teachers might benefit from watching video recordings of each other's classrooms.

Marsha, a preschool teacher, whose master's program included both preschool and elementary teachers in Grades K-3, noted that she appreciated what she learned from her elementary peers. Prior to being involved in this program, she did not realize what it was like to be an elementary school teacher. As she listened to the experiences of elementary teachers, she learned a lot and gained empathy for her elementary teacher peers. Marsha said that this was very positive and help to eliminate stereotypes that people had about the other group.

**Learning more about the children who would be transitioning.** Participants also suggested that preschool and elementary collaborations could also result in elementary teachers learning more about the children who would be transitioning. Sharon noted that some of the elementary teachers with whom she worked learned about which children could benefit from being placed in junior kindergarten as opposed to kindergarten, and that this information came from collaborations with preschool teachers who currently worked with those children. Sharon also noted that when the two types of teachers visited each other's classrooms, they learned about what children were able to do in those settings and that informed practice,

So that each knows what's happening in the others' environments and what the expectations are. It was really interesting because the kindergarten teachers were just blown away that three and four year-olds could work independently going from center to center on their own, because their own kindergarteners couldn't do it at that point in time.

Vera and Sharon said that through collaborations with preschool teachers, elementary educators learned about the kinds of assessments that were conducted in preschools. In both of their programs, the preschool teachers share assessment data with the kindergarten teachers, and vice versa. According to Vera, the preschool teachers

see how well their students did or didn't do and in what areas they were doing better than not. So . . . once they see the data, they see how successful they were in implementing some of the curriculum activities that were geared towards making the children have an easier transition to kindergarten.

### **Facilitating Collaboration Between Preschool and Elementary Educators**

**Visitations and co-teaching.** Participants suggested different ways that the two types of educators could collaborate to facilitate the transition to kindergarten. One strategy described above was for teachers to visit each other's classrooms and discuss what they saw. Three participants mentioned another strategy for preschool and elementary teachers to co-teach the same group of children, often in the summer before children moved into kindergarten. Sharon said that co-teaching could work very well because the two teachers begin to see strategies that the other uses. As described previously, difficulties sometimes arose when there was a status differential, with the preschool teacher taking a more subservient role. Renee noted that preschool educators were not used to working with elementary school teachers, and elementary teachers were more accustomed to working alone. Sharon felt that if the roles could be more equally shared, the two groups of educators could learn much from each other through co-teaching.

**Articulation of goals.** Renee felt that there needed to be better articulation between preschool and elementary school goals, such that educators on both sides need to be clear about



how these came together as children transitioned to kindergarten. This is similar to Sharon's description of how she once worked with preschool and kindergarten teachers. Sharon asked nine kindergarten teachers to create their "wish list" of what they would like incoming children to be able to do. At the same time, she asked preschool teachers in the area to write down what they meant by children being ready for kindergarten. Sharon created two combined lists, one created by kindergarten teachers and the other created by preschool teachers and shared them with both groups. The lists covered expectations for math, writing, language arts, social skills, emotional stability, approaches to learning, and behavioral expectations for school. Then the two groups of teachers got together to discuss what appeared on the two lists.

**Taking courses together.** The broader project, in which this study emerged, involved preschool and elementary teachers engaged in professional development together. Four of participants mentioned this as a strategy for encouraging collaboration with the two groups. Tammi, a teacher educator who developed a program that included teachers in preschool and Grades K-3, noted that having preschool and elementary teachers taking courses together promoted teachers learning about each other's contexts. Sandy, who worked in such a program, saw this happening. She explained that her own preparation as an elementary educator did not involve exposure to preschool education. She saw many advantages to bringing those two worlds together and observed that when the two groups met, "they're sharing their ideas, their curriculum, their pedagogy." As discussed earlier, Marsha, had experienced this as a master's student, and gained a better understanding of what her elementary counterparts experienced.

**Administrative support.** Five participants emphasized the importance of school administrators being supportive of the collaborations between preschool and elementary teachers to facilitate kindergarten transition. Sharon noted that administrators have to value the

collaborations enough to put it in their budgets, “I think it’s hard to underestimate the importance of administrator support because it’s expensive. If you’re going to do visitations for example, somebody has to be watching the kids. So, you got to have a substitute. That’s an expense.” Vera agreed that “administrators have to buy in and they have to be the ones [who think that] this is important. You can’t just do it with teachers.” In her program, preschool and elementary administrators met monthly to build trust and plan for the collaborations.

### **Discussion**

Understanding the differences between preschool and kindergarten educators’ perspectives may help bridge two worlds that have been isolated from each other. The results from this study suggest that preschool and elementary educators perceive many ways that their worlds were different from each other and that these ideas are consistent with previous research. The educators in this study remarked on differences between philosophies and approaches to education, in that preschool tends to emphasize broader areas of development, and kindergarten focuses on academic skills. Pelletier and colleagues (Pelletier et al., 2012) reported that the coursework preparing the two types of educators differed in these ways, with preschool educators receiving more coursework on child development and kindergarten teachers learning about content, curricula, and assessment. These orientations may explain other differences mentioned by participants, such as different goals, curricula, and ways to structure activities.

The academic emphasis of kindergarten discussed by the participants is consistent with the literature that describes how kindergarten is now more connected to upper grades, and no longer seen as the bridge to elementary school (Goldstein, 2009). Federal policies such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB) have put pressures on kindergarten educators to abandon play-based curricula in favor of activities that can prepare children for high stakes testing. Although NCLB

does not include assessment of children in kindergarten through Grade 2, there is increasing pressure for teachers to prepare children for testing in Grade 3. Hatch (2002) described how the standards movement has resulted in an “accountability shovedown” putting undue pressure on children and teachers that restrict children’s experiences in preschool and threaten the integrity of educators and the field.

Also consistent with the literature, the results of the current study suggest that collaborations between preschool and elementary educators have the potential to benefit children’s transition to kindergarten, creating smoother transitions and improved outcomes for learners. Finding common ground between preschool and kindergarten is particularly important as accountability measures are being implemented throughout early childhood and expectations for school readiness and outcomes are increasing (Goldstein, 2009; Hatch, 2002). The participants in the current study felt that the advantages of creating opportunities for preschool and elementary educators to work together included increasing the knowledge each group had about the expectations and strategies that were found in both settings. Research suggests that when early childhood environments integrate aspects traditionally found in both preschool and kindergarten, such as addressing children’s social-emotional and developmental needs, as well as their academic and cognitive needs, a higher percentage of students meet academic standards, have improved mathematic skills, behavior gains, and children perceive their academic abilities to be higher (Perry, Donohue, & Weinstein; 2007; Siraj-Blatchford & Sylva, 2004).

The kinds of activities that the participants suggested as possible collaborations between the two groups were similar to those found in the literature on preschool-elementary collaborations. Participants mentioned visitations to each other’s classrooms (Smolkin, 1999) and discussions across the two groups, which may involve participating in professional

development opportunities together (Peltier & Corter, 2005). These activities may be effective in creating what Vygotsky (1998) called intersubjectivity, or shared meaning. In a sense, the different worlds in which preschool and elementary teachers exist are different professional cultures. Through discussion and other forms of interaction, teachers from each group may come to understand the other group's perspectives. One of the preschool teachers in our study who had enrolled in a master's program that included both preschool and elementary teachers in Grades K-3 commented that she gained a perspective of elementary school by interacting with her elementary teacher peers. A teacher educator also remarked that when these interactions worked, both groups learned about each other and built common understandings of the young children they served. Consistent with Bridging Multiple Worlds Theory (Cooper, 2011), such processes bridged the two worlds of preschool and elementary school to create more successful transitions for children.

These collaborations are not without challenges. Consistent with prior research, the participants in this study noted that there were barriers to preschool-elementary collaborations, including status differentials between preschool and elementary teachers, time and other resource constraints, and an unwillingness to collaborate. Such challenges are similar to Rose's (2011) findings that barriers to collaboration arose when inter-professional teams worked together to provide child services. The barriers, according to Rose, fell into four general themes: identity, power, territory and expertise. The challenges were overcome when participants defined and pursued joint goals. Corter and Pelletier (2010) cited similar difficulties faced by child service providers and kindergarten teachers during the initial stages of the Toronto First Duty Project. The authors described problems related "professional turf," as well as issues related to finding

space and time for collaboration. They concluded that the barriers were overcome with strong leadership and by prioritizing time for stakeholders to collaborate.

### **Limitations**

One of the limitations of this study was the small sample of teachers, and particularly the limited number of elementary teachers. This study developed out of a broader project to bring preschool and elementary educators together for professional development, so those who participated may have already been in favor of such collaborations. Data for the study consisted of interviews, and these data could have been susceptible to social desirability, such that the educators may have reported practices that they thought reflected positively on them, rather than what they actually did. Finally, we did not include families in our study, and as research has shown that family engagement can facilitate kindergarten transition (Simons & Curtis, 2007; Smythe-Leistico, et al., 2012), this was another limitation.

### **Future Research**

Future research could increase the numbers of educators who are interviewed and also include observations of educators at each type of site. Video reflexive interviewing (e.g., Tobin, Hsueh, & Kurasawa, 2009; Tobin, Wu, & Davidson, 1989) might also add insight into the two contexts. Tobin and his colleagues (Tobin et al., 2009; 1989) showed video recordings of typical days in classrooms in Japan, China, and the U.S. to educators in each of these countries. The comments that were elicited about the recordings revealed differences in philosophical beliefs about child rearing and education. In a similar way, showing video recordings of typical elementary and preschool classrooms to educators from these two types of settings might uncover beliefs about children and education more readily than would be revealed in a standard interview. Finally, future research could include family perspectives on how preschool and

elementary settings differ and investigate coordinated interactions between families and educators from the two types of schools, related to children's transitions.

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