

Transition Practices from Preschool to Kindergarten

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In this study, pre-kindergarten teachers' use of kindergarten transition practices were described, as well as the extent to which these practices were associated with kindergarten teachers' judgments of children's social, self-regulatory, and academic skills upon their entry into kindergarten the following fall.

The transition from preschool to kindergarten can be a challenging time for children who may not be prepared for the adjustment to a new setting with more structure, unfamiliar teachers and peers, and increased expectations for following directions, demonstrating academic skills, and working independently.

Research evidence suggests that children may be at greater risk for school failure and social adjustment problems when they experience an ineffective transition between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten. Early childhood educators need to understand the mechanisms that smooth transitions and facilitate successful child adjustment to the start of formal schooling.

Once children enter kindergarten, their teacher's judgments of their abilities are particularly important because these judgments are used to refer children for special services, place children in ability groupings, and inform others about children's competencies, which in turn establish expectations for children's performance. Teachers' perceptions of children's abilities at the beginning of the school year can be strong predictors of future social and academic functioning.

The Study

A correlational study was conducted by researchers at the Center for Advanced Study and Teaching and Learning using data from the National Center for Early

Development and Learning's (NCEDL) Multi-State Study of Pre-Kindergarten. They analyzed this data to describe pre-kindergarten teachers' use of kindergarten transition practices and to examine the extent to which these practices were associated with kindergarten teachers' judgments of children's social, self-regulatory, and academic skills upon their entry into kindergarten.

The study included 722 children from 214 pre-kindergarten classrooms in spring 2002 and followed them into kindergarten in the fall. Nearly one-half of the sample (49%) were male, and slightly more than one-half of the sample (54%) came from families that were poor. *Poor* was defined as annual family income less than or equal to 150% of the federal poverty guidelines for their family's size.

A list of common or known supportive transition activities was included as part of the NCEDL pre-kindergarten teacher survey. The Academic Rating Scale was used to measure kindergarten teachers' perceptions of children's language and literacy skills, and the Teacher-Child Rating Scale was used to measure their perceptions of seven elements of children's social and emotional competencies. In their analysis researchers controlled for child, family, and preschool program quality characteristics to increase confidence that outcomes were correlated to transition practices and not the result of some other factor.

Table 1
Transition Activities Identified*

(Percent of Total Sample of 214)

PK children visit KG class	74%
PK teacher visits KG class	78%
KG teacher visits PK class	42%
Spring orientation for PK children	62%
Spring orientation for PK parents	65%
School-wide activity for PK children	55%
Individual meetings with parents	68%
Written records shared with KG	79%
Contact with KG teacher about curriculum or specific children	67%

*Note that teachers could implement multiple activities.

PK = Pre-kindergarten; KG = Kindergarten

Outcomes

Of the nine transition practices listed in the survey, pre-kindergarten teachers reported implementing, on average, six transition practices (see Table 1). The number of activities ranged from 0 to 9.

The study found that, when children attended pre-kindergarten classrooms in which more transition activities were implemented, kindergarten teachers judged children to have more positive social competencies and fewer problem behaviors. Contact between the pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teacher about specific children or curricula was the one activity most associated with kindergarten teachers' perceptions of positive social competence and fewer negative behavior problems.

The positive influence of pre-kindergarten transition practices on kindergarten teachers' ratings of social competencies was stronger among children from poor families compared to children from non-poor families. For children from poor families, kindergarten teachers' perceptions of children's social competence was significantly lower when pre-kindergarten teachers used a low number of transition activities compared to a medium and high number of transition activities. The types of transition activities that had significantly stronger benefits for children who experience social and economic risks were those that children directly experienced.

A greater number of transition practices had a stronger influence on kindergarten teachers' positive judgments of children's social competence for African-American children compared to

Caucasian children, and on teachers' less negative judgments of behavior problems for children with other race/ethnicity.

Implications

This study provides some of the first evidence that pre-kindergarten teachers' use of transition practices are associated with their students' adjustments during early kindergarten, particularly for children who experience social and economic risks and enter school lagging behind their peers. Other research has indicated that quicker adjustment to kindergarten allows children to take better advantage of learning opportunities, so that by the end of the year they are doing better academically than their peers who took more time to adjust.

By increasing intentionality in activities that we know contribute to children's adjustment, transition practices may serve as a prevention strategy for future school problems. Investment in transition practices that build coherence across early childhood settings show promise as a means of supporting children's adjustment during early schooling.

For a complete description of this research, see LoCasale-Crouch, J., Mashburn, A. J., Downer, J.T., & Pianta, R.C. (2008). Pre-kindergarten teachers' use of transition practices and children's adjustment to kindergarten. *Early Childhood Quarterly*, 23, 124-139.

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