



Transition practices into kindergarten and the barriers teachers encounter

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Introduction

The transition to kindergarten is important in setting the stage for children's formal schooling career (Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, & Cox, 2000). Transition practices vary greatly from school to school and classroom to classroom. Aside from their effectiveness, some teachers will view these practices as easier or harder to implement. From a teacher's perspective, there may be barriers to using certain practices. The purpose of the present study was to explore transition practices in kindergarten classrooms and the perceived barriers to employing those practices.

Participants

The updated version of the Center for Early Development and Learning's Transition Practices Survey (1996). The survey contains 38 questions asking Kindergarten teachers about their perceptions of Kindergarten readiness, transition practices, teacher training and the characteristics of children in their classrooms.

Instrument

In the spring of 2015, over 500 Kindergarten teachers across the US responded to an email and filled out our 38-question survey. In total, 484 kindergarten teachers provided information on the transition practices used in their classroom. The sample was 97% female with a modal age of 45-54 years old ($n = 160$). They averaged 18 years teaching overall and 11.5 years teaching kindergarten.

Reported use of transition practices and barriers to using those practices

Question	n	Use of Transition Practice			Barriers to Using this Practice		
		Did not use	Used for certain children	Used for the whole class	n	Yes	No
A visit to the children's home before school starts	474	94%	4%	2%	403	69%	31%
A visit to the children's home after school starts	474	93%	6%	1%	397	66%	34%
Regular meetings among school, early childhood, and preschool staff in community	475	61%	17%	21%	396	55%	45%
Preschool teacher(s) brought next year's children to my classroom	478	57%	25%	18%	402	43%	57%
Informational website on child performance or classroom activities	477	53%	5%	41%	397	48%	52%
A newsletter/email to the children's parents before school starts	481	29%	4%	68%	417	30%	70%
Written records of children's past experience or status were made available to me and I read them	467	21%	50%	29%	441	45%	55%
An open house for parents and children after school starts	481	17%	1%	81%	411	26%	74%
An open house for parents and children before school starts	482	16%	3%	82%	420	31%	69%
A newsletter/email to the children's parents after school starts	482	7%	3%	89%	421	19%	81%

Reported use of transition practices and barriers to using those practices

Barrier to Using Transition Practices	%
Parents underestimate the importance of kindergarten	66%
Class lists are generated too late	57%
Parents do not bring their child in for registration or open house	55%
Parents' lack of access to technology	49%
Children are not present in school (frequent tardiness or absenteeism)	45%
A transition practices plan is not available in school/district	42%
There is a language barrier with the parent	39%
Requires work in summer that is not supported by salary	35%
Child's housing situation is unstable	34%
I could not reach most parents of children who need these practices	34%
Resources are not available (e.g., funds, website)	32%
Parents cannot read letters, etc. sent home	30%
It is dangerous to visit students' homes	30%
The school or district does not support	28%
It takes too much time to conduct these practices	19%
Contacts with parents are discouraged prior to the start of school	11%
Concern about creating negative expectations	9%
Others? Please describe.	9%
I choose not to do it	8%

Discussion

Teachers tended to use practices that they viewed were most efficient with their time

The most frequently reported transition practices had two common elements: They were focused on providing information and were directed at the whole class (e.g., newsletters and open houses). Teachers likely used universal transition practices like sending out a newsletter as a more efficient use of their time than more individualized approaches.

Teachers view parents and school structures as barriers to using transition practices

Children who might benefit the most from the use of transition practices (e.g., English language learners) may be least likely to find transition practices accessible (e.g., informational newsletters). Not compensating teachers to do transition activities communicates that transition activities are not a priority for the school/district. Other barriers such as having a transition plan, establishing a set of transition guidelines (or communicating about existing guidelines), and providing class lists may be easier to overcome than teacher compensation for conducting transition practices outside of school.