Transition Practices into Kindergarten and the Barriers Teachers Encounter

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Abstract A child's transition to Kindergarten is a critical time to establish a positive school trajectory. This chapter presents results from a survey of 484 Kindergarten teachers across the United States who reported on their transition practices and the barriers to using those practices. Results indicated teachers' primary strategies for transition involved communicating to the parents of the entire class by way of newsletters, by emails, or by hosting open houses. Teachers viewed parents and school structures as key barriers to implementing transition practices.

From the beginning of their school careers, children are expected to know more than ever before, making the transition to Kindergarten more difficult than it has been in the past. In fact, what was once taught in first grade is now regularly taught in Kindergarten (Bassok, Latham, & Rorem, 2016). State standards, such as the Common Core, have academic benchmarks that start in Kindergarten (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010). However, even though what was once taught in first grade is now taught in Kindergarten, what was once taught in Kindergarten is not necessarily taught to children in preschool.

Although preschool has also become more academic, not all preschools offer high-quality programs, nor do all children attend preschool. This has put schools and Kindergarten teachers in a challenging position. Because children are entering Kindergarten with varied readiness levels, teachers have to differentiate instruction much more while still working to assist all children to meet (higher) grade-level standards. This means that some children need to learn more than 1 year's worth of material. Thus, as more is expected of Kindergarten children, a greater emphasis is placed on providing the supports children need for a successful transition to Kindergarten.

The transition to Kindergarten is thought to be particularly important compared to transitions into other grade levels (Cook & Coley, 2017). Evidence suggests that children's academic school trajectories are set quite early – by second grade (Alexander & Entwisle, 1988), making it even more critical to promote school success at the start of their school careers. Children's early school successes can set the stage for further growth (Duncan et al., 2007) and are positively linked to myriad academic and behavioral outcomes, while children who struggle in Kindergarten may not have all the skills that they need as they progress in school (Cook & Coley, 2017; Li-Grining, Votruba-Drzal, Maldonado-Carreño, & Hass, 2010; LoCasale-Crouch, Mashburn, Downer, & Pianta, 2008; Razza, Martin, & Brooks-Gunn, 2015). Furthermore, children who struggle may develop diminished motivation to work in school (Anderman & Anderman, 2013) setting the stage for low school performance in the near term and other problems in school (e.g., dropout) in the longer term.

The transition practices that schools and teachers use may help set the stage for positive child outcomes. Transition practices are the practices teachers and schools typically undertake to reach out to children and families prior to, during, or just after the transition to Kindergarten. There is evidence that part of Kindergarten success is associated with the ease of transition (Cook & Coley, 2017; Schulting, Malone, & Dodge, 2005). Fundamentally, these practices are meant to ease children's entry into formal schooling, quickly develop skills children may not have, and help children prepare for the new demands that will be placed on them.

We wondered about the extent to which teachers and schools are engaging in various Kindergarten transition practices to help children establish a positive trajectory from the start of school. Teachers and schools may also face barriers in implementing transition practices, be they technological or due to a lack of opportunity (La Paro, Kraft-Sayre, & Pianta, 2003). We sought to develop a better understanding of these issues by asking Kindergarten teachers about the practices they use, for whom they use the practices, and their perceived barriers to implementation. This chapter reports the results of a survey conducted by the Coalition for Psychology in Schools and Education of the American Psychological Association about the transition practices used by nearly 500 US Kindergarten teachers.

School Readiness

Transition practices can be seen as promoting school readiness. School readiness refers to a broad set of skills – academic, social, and emotional – that allow children to thrive in school. In general, these prerequisite skills are used as building blocks for other, more sophisticated, skills that are emphasized in school. Measures of readiness have consistently been predictive of academic and social outcomes at the end of Kindergarten (Stormont, Herman, Reinke, King, & Owens, 2015). Thus, transition practices that can promote these academic, social, and emotional skills may help set children on a better trajectory than they would otherwise experience.

Academic skills at Kindergarten entry typically refer to those skills that are needed for early reading and mathematics, although other academic domains are also included. For example, pre-reading skills may refer to knowing the names and sounds of letters of the alphabet and knowing how text is arranged in a book. If children master these elements, then teachers can focus on teaching children to read. Similarly, pre-mathematics skills focus on children knowing the numerals and what they represent, as well as cardinality (i.e., the last number counted is how many objects there are), and being able to determine what numbers come before, between, and after other numbers. If children learn these elements, teachers can focus on teaching other mathematical operations, such as addition and subtraction.

Many Kindergarten programs also focus on children's social–emotional learning (SEL). According to the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), SEL has five core components including: self-awareness, self-management, responsible decision-making, relationship skills, and social awareness (http://www.casel.org/what-is-sel/). In general, these skills allow children to understand their own and others' emotional states and to engage in pro-social interactions (Denham et al., 2003, 2014). When these skills are used throughout the day in a classroom, it can make a substantial difference in how children engage in learning tasks, especially when other children are involved (Denham, 2006). In this way, social–emotional skills are also helpful in promoting academic skills (Curby, Brown, Bassett, & Denham, 2015; Denham, Brown, & Domitrovich, 2010). Given this association, and the fact that Kindergarten

teachers may be less comfortable teaching academic content (Jarrett, 1999), it is not surprising that social–emotional skills have been prioritized over academic skills by teachers at Kindergarten entry (Curby et al., 2017; Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, & Cox, 2000), although teachers do increasingly want children to arrive at Kindergarten with academic skills, such as already having begun to read, compared to earlier cohorts of teachers (Bassok et al., 2016).

Differences in Children's Readiness for Kindergarten

Children arrive at school remarkably different from one another in terms of their skills and abilities. These differences may, in part, be due to variations in the nature and forms of their preschool experiences. Children may have experienced parental care, home-based childcare, daycare, or more formal center-based pre-Kindergarten experiences. Each one of these early childcare settings has advantages and disadvantages, particularly when the quality of these programs is considered (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development Early Child Care Research Network & Duncan, 2003). Parental care, home-based childcare, and daycare may not have regular schedules, and children may not have opportunities to engage in activities with same-aged peers. Pre-Kindergarten is usually reserved for children who are entering Kindergarten the next year and tends to have an academic component. Some Pre-Kindergarten programs are housed in elementary schools. However, many, but not all, new Kindergarteners may be attending school for the first time. Thus, transition practices may be more important for some children than others. Teachers need to be able to identify children's needs quickly based on their educational background and supplement instruction for those who have no prior experience.

There are other characteristics that are beyond the bounds of schools and schooling and reflect the children's home environment or biology. These characteristics, such as socioeconomic status, may have a profound impact on children's readiness for school. Several of these characteristics (temperament, socioeconomic status, and special needs status) that affect transitions are discussed in more detail elsewhere in this book, and the reader is referred to those other chapters for an in-depth discussion. Nonetheless, several home and child characteristics are briefly described below.

Enriched Home Environment An enriched environment can have a profound influence on brain development (Kempermann, Kuhn, & Gage, 1997). Some children may have an enriched, cognitively stimulating home environment, while others may have an environment that provides little exposure to novel, cognitively demanding experiences, with fewer opportunities to learn. An enriched home environment (Bradley et al., 1989) provides opportunities to learn skills that will be helpful in school.

Attachment Parent–child attachment describes the extent to which children seek comfort and support from a parent. Generally, children who form a secure attachment are more willing to explore their environment. Along with the enriched environment, Bernier, Beauchamp, Carlson, and Lalonde (2015) found that children who were securely attached to their mothers in toddlerhood had better executive functioning skills (working memory, attention, cognitive flexibility) as well as better teacher reports of task performance at school entry.

Parental Control of Child Behavior Some children may come from environments that place many demands and limits on their behavior (Baumrind 1966). Other children may come from homes with few demands and limits. Based on these varying experiences in the home, children will enter the classroom with different expectations about how to engage with other children and adults. Children who come from permissive environments may struggle in a classroom in which they are permitted few choices and in which their behavior is monitored and, potentially, reprimanded. For example, a child who is not required to share at home may have conflicts with children and teachers if sharing is expected in the classroom. Fundamentally, these home-based differences in upbringing provide children with differing levels of social–emotional skills (Eisenberg, Cumberland, & Spinrad, 1998), which shape how they engage in classroom tasks.

Temperament Another factor associated with differences in how children transition is their biologically based temperament. Temperament provides a behavioral baseline for the way in which children interact with others and their environment over time (Henderson & Wachs, 2007). There are a variety of temperamental factors recognizable to parents in infancy (Thomas & Chess, 1977). Although malleable, temperament plays a role in the early childhood classroom and the ways in which children might face a transition. For example, a less-adaptable, behaviorally inhibited child may have more difficulty starting at a new school, with unfamiliar classmates and teachers, whereas an exuberant, approach-oriented child might relish the novelty.

Sociodemographic Characteristics Research suggests that children from low socioeconomic backgrounds – particularly those who have not attended high-quality preschool – are often not as ready for Kindergarten as their more affluent peers (Jarrett & Coba-Rodriguez, 2015; Lee & Burkam, 2002). Language is one area where sociodemographic differences are evident in school readiness. There can be large differences in the amount of language exposure children of differing socioeconomic levels have prior to age 3. On average, evidence suggests that children in families on welfare hear 30 million fewer words than children from professional families over the first 4 years of life (Hart & Risley, 2003). Furthermore, because families with similar sociodemographic characteristics tend to cluster in neighborhoods, many local schools may have concentrations of disadvantaged children (Cook & Coley, 2017).

Children with Special Needs Many children enter Kindergarten with diagnosed disabilities – which can include developmental, cognitive, language-related, psychological, physical, or emotional difficulties. Another group of children are on a trajectory that will ultimately result in a diagnosis, but have not yet been identified. These children have particular, and sometimes acute, needs that may hinder their school readiness – although high-quality preschool can mitigate some of these problems (Yoshikawa et al., 2013). As such, the transition to school may be particularly challenging for children with special needs, and, therefore, these children may disproportionately benefit from transition practices.

Variability in Transition Practices

Schools and teachers engage in transition practices to help children prepare for and adjust to Kindergarten with a variety of goals. Transition practices may help meet informational, instructional, or relational goals. Informational approaches are primarily designed to have one-way information flow from the school or classroom to the parents. These approaches are frequently less expensive than other transition practices but tend to be low-intensity. Instructional approaches are designed to directly promote Kindergarten readiness skills, such as providing access to a website or app that teaches these skills, which would require relatively few resources, or a summer preparatory program, which might require many resources. Relational transition approaches focus on promoting positive relationships across the transition (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). Any transition practice can operate through multiple means, but some approaches are weighted toward meeting one goal. For example, a newsletter will be more informational, whereas a home visit will be more relational.

Transition practices vary greatly from school to school and classroom to classroom. Some of these practices may involve more effort and expense but may also be more engaging. For example, a Kindergarten teacher may visit a child's home, allowing for the teacher to learn about the needs of the incoming child before school starts. Other practices are potentially easier to implement, such as sending out an informational newsletter to the families of incoming children. There are a variety of other practices that schools and teachers can employ, such as accessing school records, meeting with preschool teachers of the incoming children, and holding open houses.

Schools generally do not use just one transition practice. Instead, they can develop an entire system of transition practices that a given child would experience (Berlin, Dunning, & Dodge, 2011; Cook & Coley, 2017; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008; Schulting et al., 2005). For example, a child could visit the Kindergarten classroom as a preschooler, and the family could receive information during the summer. Or a child might attend an instructional summer program, and the teacher might visit the child's home before the start of school. Combined, these experiences may make for a potent combination in promoting school readiness.

Schulting et al. (2005) found that children who received transition services prior to Kindergarten entry also had higher achievement scores at the end of Kindergarten. LoCasale-Crouch et al. (2008) found that preschool children who received more transition services, generally, and whose preschool teachers talked with their Kindergarten teachers, specifically, were rated by their Kindergarten teachers as being more socially competent and having few problem behaviors. Bierman, Welsh, Heinrichs, Nix, and Mathis (2015) found that children in Head Start who received home visits targeted toward parent training and math skills acquisition saw improvements in academic achievement in Kindergarten compared to similar peers who only received mail-home math games. Cook and Coley (2016) found that specific transition practices, such as parent orientations, were linked to increased achievement in reading and math.

Universal, Targeted, and Indicated Transition Practices

Transition practices can be thought of as primary prevention strategies with different supports available to some children and other strategies available to all children. At the lowest intensity level, transition practices can be universal. This means that all children entering Kindergarten would receive the same transition practice. For example, although somewhat impersonal, newsletters and open houses provide efficient opportunities for the whole class to get information about the classroom and school.

At a higher intensity level, targeted transition practices can be used for children who are considered to be at risk of not being ready for Kindergarten. For example, children who attend Head Start (and therefore are from low-income families) may be provided extra supports at the transition to Kindergarten. The targeted transition practices may include such activities as having the eligible children visit the Kindergarten classroom (Early, Pianta, Taylor, & Cox, 2001), allowing them to establish relationships with the Kindergarten teacher, and promoting more continuity in the children's classroom experiences over the transition period (Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000).

Lastly, high-intensity transition practices can be used for children who are not simply at risk for difficulties but have indicated in some way that they are likely to have a challenging transition and, therefore, have the highest level of need. For example, children who have demonstrated behavior problems may benefit from a transition program specifically supporting the teacher–child relationship (Eisenhower, Baker, & Taylor, 2016), or a child identified as needing special education services may benefit from school personnel talking with the child's parents (Daley, Munk, & Carlson, 2011). Other high-intensity practices might include a visit to the child's home before the start of school or conversations between the preschool and Kindergarten teachers about the child.

Barriers to Using Transition Practices

Despite the positive effects of transition practices, there is variation in their implementation. Some of this variation may be attributable to the barriers teachers and schools may encounter during implementation. Decision-making processes about what transition practices to use are often based more on school or teacher resource constraints (money and time) than what might be most effective or best for (individual) children. Class lists generated too late may preclude sending a newsletter before the start of school. Or, teachers may not be paid to do transition work prior to the start of school. In addition, some practices may require training for implementation or best be used in conjunction with training, which is rarely available (Early, Pianta, & Cox, 1999). For example, teachers are likely to need to work with school personnel in order to have a meeting with preschool staff and be able to use information from that meeting effectively.

Notably, families and children from low socioeconomic backgrounds are less likely to receive transition services. This is despite the aforementioned factors, which make these children most likely to need such services (Cook & Coley, 2017; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008). Further, schools in impoverished communities tend to engage in fewer targeted transition practices.

Additionally, the effects of successful transition practices on academic achievement are often mediated by parent involvement (Schulting et al., 2005). Studies have found that when given the opportunity to engage in transition practices, parents are willing and excited to participate, but there are many barriers that may prevent parent involvement such as work schedules and transportation (La Paro et al., 2003). If teachers understand the barriers parents face, they may have lower expectations for parents to be involved. Alternatively, if teachers do not understand the barriers parents face, they may believe that parental noninvolvement is due to not caring about education/Kindergarten. Regardless, teachers may simply not believe it is worth the effort to engage with the parents about the child's transition, given what they perceive parents will (or will not) do with the information (La Paro et al., 2003).

The Present Study

Recent trends in education may have influenced the need for and shape of transition practices. More academic content is expected in the early years, more teacher accountability exists for academic performance, and the public is faced with reports of increases in the rates of Kindergarten suspensions and expulsions. Given the changing backdrop of education, we wanted to explore the current use of transition practices into Kindergarten.

The present study presents results from a national survey of Kindergarten teachers in the United States. The instrument itself was adapted from a previous survey

of Kindergarten teachers conducted by the National Center for Early Development and Learning (1996). Readers are referred to Pianta, Cox, Taylor, and Early (1999), Early et al. (1999), as well as Early et al. (2001) for results of this earlier survey.

The new instrument was modified to update the language and, in some cases, to expand the scope of key items. Generally, the survey asked about characteristics of children, the teacher, classroom, and school as well as teachers' perceptions of school readiness skills and transition practices. The survey was conducted by the American Psychological Association's Coalition for Psychology in Schools and Education (http://www.apa.org/ed/schools/coalition/), a group of psychologists who meet regularly to address issues at the intersection of psychology and education.

In May of 2015, three waves of emails were sent to 10,000 randomly selected Kindergarten teachers. The email distribution list was purchased from Market Data Retrieval, an agency that maintains a list of emails of Kindergarten teachers in the United States. The unsolicited email asked teachers to participate in the survey for a chance to win one of 40 Amazon gift cards worth $25 each. The teachers clicked a link in the survey that took them to the survey hosted on Qualtrics. About 2000 teachers opened the email, and about 530 provided information in the survey. For our purposes, 484 Kindergarten teachers provided information on the transition practices they use for their classroom. Limited demographic information was collected in the survey, but of the teachers in our sample, 97% were female; the modal age group was 45–54 years old (n = 160); and teachers averaged 18 years teaching overall and 11.5 years teaching Kindergarten.

Survey Results

Our first question asked which practices teachers used as their students transitioned into Kindergarten. All teachers reported using at least one transition practice. As shown in Table 1, the most commonly reported transition practices used for the whole class were sending a newsletter/email to the children's parents after school starts and hosting an open house either before or after the beginning of the school year. Notably, the list of transition practices was not exhaustive, and several teachers mentioned other transition practices that were not pre-listed, such as Parent Teacher Association-sponsored playground meet-ups, which may be important in helping children engage with other children and families interact with one another.

Although less common than universal transition practices, the most commonly reported targeted transition practices was reviewing written records of children's past experience or status. The next most commonly used targeted transition practice was having preschool teachers bring the next year's children to visit the classroom. Few teachers conducted home visits for incoming children.

A follow-up item on the questionnaire was asked to determine if there were barriers (yes/no) to using each of the transition practices endorsed. Ninety-five percent of teachers who reported on their transition practices reported that there was at least

Table 1 Reported use of various transition practices as well as the degree to which teachers perceived barriers to using those practices

| Question | Use of transition practice | | | | Barriers to using this practice | | |
	n	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%

one barrier to using those transition practices. The majority of teachers indicated that there were barriers to visiting a child's home either before or after school started or having regular meetings with preschool staff. Teachers reported the fewest barriers to sending a newsletter or holding an open house after school started.

Finally, we asked teachers what the barriers were to using transition practices generally. As shown in Table 2, results indicated that the majority of teachers viewed parents' beliefs and behaviors as barriers to transitioning children to Kindergarten. (Four of the top five items related to families.) The top-ranked items included "parents underestimate the importance of Kindergarten," "parents do not bring their child in for registration or open house," and "parents' lack of access to technology." This suggests that teachers strongly implicate parents in their decisions not to utilize certain transition practices. These results are unfortunate given that research has found that parental involvement is a cornerstone to success of the transition into Kindergarten (Puccioni, 2015).

Teachers also frequently selected items that indicated structural features of how schools were run could hinder the use of transition practices. For example, the second most endorsed item was "Class lists are generated too late." Few teachers saw

Table 2 Percent of teachers reporting a given barrier to using transition practices

Barrier to using transition practices	% Endorsed
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 children's 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%

themselves as a barrier by indicating "I choose not to do it" suggesting that they would engage in transition practices if barriers were removed. Some teachers chose "Other" when selecting barriers to implementing transition practices. Although some of their responses recapitulated their checkbox selection (e.g., class lists generated too late), there were several novel responses, including frequent transitions due to being on a military base, the late registration of children for Kindergarten, unresponsive parents, the multiple languages spoken by parents and the associated lack of translation support, being discouraged to do these practices by other teachers, undocumented parents not wanting contact with school officials, too many children, and changing teaching assignments.

Teachers were also asked if they had received training in transition practices. Approximately 24% of teachers reported receiving such training. We wondered if training in transition practices was related to using particular practices. Using chi-square analyses, we looked for differences between using a certain practice (yes/no) and training (yes/no). Results indicated that receiving training was significantly related to having children visit the Kindergarten classroom. Training was also related to having regular meetings among school, early childhood, and preschool staff in the community.

Summary and Conclusions

This chapter presented results from a national survey of Kindergarten teachers' transition practices. Three important findings emerged from the results. First, teachers tended to use universal transition practices, which allowed for efficient use of their time but may limit the supports and connections derived from individually targeted practices. Second, teachers view parents' beliefs and behaviors as well as school structures as barriers to using transition practices. Third, training may be necessary for teachers to use particular transition practices.

Prominence of Whole-Class Transition Practices

The most frequently reported transition practices had two common elements: They were focused primarily on providing information and were directed at the whole class (e.g., newsletters and open houses). Teachers and schools likely used these universal transition practices as a more efficient use of their time than more individualized approaches. This is consistent with prior work showing that transition practices that were time intensive (Early et al., 2001) or involved in-person contact were least likely to be used (Pianta et al., 1999). Although the practices that were likely to be used for the whole class may not be particularly potent in terms of promoting children's skills, they are likely to be helpful in setting the stage for families to engage in Kindergarten, particularly if they take place before school starts. However, it is notable that teachers reported favoring practices that would best be utilized by highly engaged parents, while also viewing parents' beliefs and behaviors as barriers to overcome.

Less time-efficient methods, such as reviewing individual files of children, were reserved for targeted or indicated groups of children. This may be appropriate given that certain children may have higher needs for transition activities than others. These transition practices likely only focus on children from just a handful of backgrounds, such as those who receive special education services, those that do not attend a pre-Kindergarten program attached to the school, or those that are English language learners. However, these characteristics are just a few of the factors that can make it challenging for a child to transition into Kindergarten. Other factors, such as being very shy, can potentially make the transition to school daunting. A very shy child might benefit greatly by going to the school individually for a visit over the summer. Schools should consider ways to meet the transition needs of children based on a variety of family and child characteristics.

Teachers View Parents and School Structures as Barriers to Using Transition Practices

Interestingly, teachers viewed external factors, such as the parents or the schools, as the main barriers to using transition practices. These potential misperceptions may mask the fact that language barriers prevent parents from being able to read a newsletter or show up for a parent–teacher conference. Two-thirds of children who are English language learners (and presumably have parents who are also not proficient at English) live in poverty (Capps et al., 2005). Therefore, children who might benefit the most from the use of transition practices may be least likely to find commonly used transition practices accessible (e.g., information newsletters and open houses).

To the extent that the barriers are real, and not simply a misperception, there are some potential ways to mitigate the challenges associated with these home-based barriers. For example, being mindful of when transition events are and whether the child or siblings can come may make the difference for a single parent who is deciding whether or not to attend. When sending information home, it is important to consider whether the medium (e.g., letter vs. email) can be accessed by families that don't have access to technology. What languages are being used in communications as well as having access to translators may influence whether a family will be engaged in the transition. Parents may be more involved, not only when some of these barriers are addressed but also when they see the school trying to address the barriers in some way.

School policies and practices can also be barriers to the use of transition practices. Not compensating teachers to do transition activities (prior to the start of school) communicates that transition activities are either beyond the scope of a teacher's job or not a priority. Other barriers may be easier to overcome for the school or district. For example, many schools and districts do not have a transition plan (that teachers are aware of). Establishing a set of guidelines (or communicating about existing guidelines to teachers) would help to prioritize transition activities. Other school- or district-based barriers may be technical – such as having class lists generated too late, which has been a long-standing problem (Early et al., 2001). If there were an established transition plan and teachers not only had the class list but knew what to do with the list (which may require training) and were compensated to do so, then overcoming the challenges to generate a class list prior to the start of school may enable even more or better transition activities.

Training May Be Necessary for Teachers to Use Particular Transition Practices

Lastly, there are general practices that most teachers engage in regardless of what training they have received (e.g., holding open houses, sending out newsletters after school starts). However, teachers with some training in school transitions tended to

utilize transition practices that engaged children directly or were more time inten-
sive, such as having preschool children visit the Kindergarten teacher and holding
regular meetings in the community with school, early childhood, and preschool staff
about what to expect from the Kindergarten curriculum and experience. These tar-
geted practices have been shown to be more effective with the populations who
might benefit the most from transition activities, suggesting that trainings and
investment in the Kindergarten transition may be worthwhile (LoCasale-Crouch
et al., 2008). Interestingly, this is consistent with the work of Early et al. (1999) –
using the prior version of the instrument our study used – who found that teachers
lacked specific training in effective transition practices.

Conclusion

Despite the importance of starting school well, many effective transition practices
are simply not being used at many schools. If schools were to enhance resources
available to support more use of these effective transition practices, children might
be more ready to learn at Kindergarten entry. Combined with effective classroom
teaching and management, the effective use of transition practices may help chil-
dren establish a better academic trajectory that, in some cases, may avoid remedia-
tion and lead to academic achievement. This result would benefit children, teachers,
and schools alike.

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