

## Facilitating an Effective Transition from Preschool to Kindergarten: Strategies for Children with Challenging Behavior

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## Importance of Kindergarten

- Initial year of formal schooling for nearly all children in the U.S. (Zill & West, 2000)
- Sets children on a path that influences their subsequent learning and school achievement (West, Denton, & Germino-Hausken, 2000)

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## Importance of Smooth Transition

- Children who have a difficult transition and adjustment to school usually have trouble catching up with their peers (La Paro, Kraft-Sayre, & Pianta, 2003)

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## School Readiness

- Children enter school demonstrating a vast array of knowledge and skills (West, Denton, & Hausken, 2000)
- Assessments of children's status at school entry should include evaluations of "the whole child" (Resource Group on School Readiness, 1991)
- Both social emotional competencies and pre-academic skills important

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## School Readiness


- Common definition for school readiness locates a child's skills (or problems) within the child
- Pianta and La Paro (2003) define readiness as a property of a system that involves the child interacting with adults, peers, and other resources

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## A Child-Focused/Skills Only Model of Transition


(Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000)

Preschool

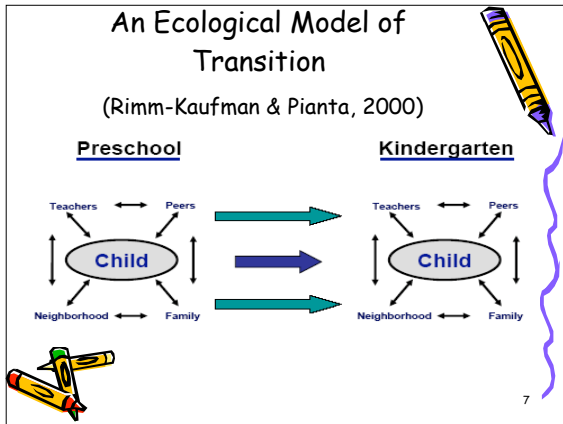


→

Kindergarten



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### Teachers' Judgments of Problems in Kindergarten Transition

(Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, & Cox, 2000)

- National sample of 3,595 teachers surveyed
- Teacher reported that:
  - about one-third of the students had some problems making the transition to school
  - about one-fifth of the students had difficult adjustments marked by serious concerns

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### Teachers' Judgments of Problems in Kindergarten Transition

(Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, & Cox, 2000)

- Problems that teachers most frequently reported for half of the class or more included:
  - difficulty following directions (reported by 46 percent of teachers)
  - lack of academic skills (36 percent)
  - disorganized home environment (35 percent)
  - difficulty working independently (34 percent)
  - lack of a formal preschool experience (31 percent)
  - difficulty working as part of a group (30 percent)
  - poor social skills (20 percent)
  - immaturity (20 percent)
  - communication problems (14 percent)

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### Teachers' Judgments of Problems in Kindergarten Transition

(Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, & Cox, 2000)

Conclusions:

- There is often a poor fit between the skills of kindergartners and expectations of their teachers
- Although kindergarten teachers clearly value academic skills, they also place strong emphasis on children's social/behavioral and task-oriented skills as indicators of their readiness for school (these skills determine the child's "teachability")

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### Emotional Adjustment and School Success

- Children who experience high levels of peer acceptance in preschool and have friends entering kindergarten with them make a better adjustment to school (Johnson, et al. 2000)
- Aggressive young children who are rejected by their classmates in their first year of school are at a greater risk for (Social Policy Report, 2002)
  - Lower academic achievement
  - Greater likelihood of being "held back"
  - Greater likelihood of dropping out of school
  - Greater risk of delinquency

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### Emotional Adjustment and School Success

(Social Policy Report, 2002)

- Children with emotional difficulties are likely to "lose out" academically
  - Disruptive children are tough to teach
  - Emotionally negative, angry children may lose opportunities to learn from their classmates
- Children who act in antisocial ways are less likely to be accepted by classmates and teachers
  - grow to like school less, feeling less love for learning, and avoid school more often, with lower school attendance

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## Key Social Emotional Skills Children Need as They Enter School

(Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning, 2003)

- Key skills
  - Confidence
  - Capacity to develop good relationships with peers
  - Concentration and persistence on challenging tasks
  - Ability to effectively communicate emotions
  - Ability to effectively listen to instruction and be attentive

When children don't have these skills, they often exhibit challenging behaviors <sup>13</sup>

## Activity

- Each group will be given a key social emotional skill
- Identify the behaviors that you observe when a child does not have the key skill

## Basic Assumptions

(Center on the Social and Emotional Foundations for Early Learning, 2003)

- Challenging behavior is most often related to some skills deficit (e.g., language, social)
- Behavior that persists over time is working for the child
- When we have positive relationships with children, supportive classroom environments, and focus on teaching social and communication skills, we reduce the likelihood of challenging behavior

## Current Transition Practices (NCEDL, 1996)

- Majority of kindergarten teachers reported using transition practices such as:
  - Sending a letter to parents after the beginning of school
  - Holding an open house after school starts
  - Sending a brochure home after school starts

Problems with these practices?

## Principles for Schools to Base Transition Practices

"School transition is not a 'one size fits all' program" (Kraft-Sayre & Pinta, 2000)

- Reaching out
- Reaching backward in time
- Reaching with appropriate intensity

## Guiding Principles in Fostering Successful Transition (Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 2003)

- Foster relationships as resources
- Promote continuity from preschool to kindergarten
- Focus on family strengths
- Tailor practices to individual needs
- Form collaborative relationships

## Core Partners in Kindergarten Transition

- Family and other caregivers
- Sending team
  - Professionals involved in the program which the child is leaving
- Receiving team
  - Professionals from the new program
- Community agency representatives



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## Transition Practices for All Children (Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000)

- Family-school connections
- Child-school connections
- Peer connections
- Community Connections



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## Activities to Promote Family-School Connections

(Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000)

- Contact with family during first few days of preschool or kindergarten
- Assessment of family needs
- Periodic contact with family
- Connecting family to community resources
- Family participation in home-learning activities
- Family participation in the classroom and at school events
- Regular family meetings at school
- Family meetings about transition issues
- Family & preschool teacher information-sharing with kindergarten teacher about individual child
- Newsletters/resource materials
- Parent orientation after preschool and kindergarten start



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## Activities to Promote Child-School Connections

(Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000)

- Preschool child connection with kindergarten teacher
- Preschool connection with elementary school for special school functions
- Preschool practice of kindergarten rituals
- Kindergarten activities incorporated from preschool
- Preschool teacher contact with former students
- Kindergarten support staff visit preschool children



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## Activities to Promote Peer Connections

(Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000)

- Peer connections within the class
- Peer connections outside of school
- Peer connections with non-classmate peer who will be in kindergarten
- Preschool peer connections with kindergarten peers
- Group-based peer connections



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## Activities to Promote Community Connections

(Kraft-Sayre & Pianta, 2000)


- Inter-school collaboration about programs and classroom practices
- Identifying and communicating curriculum/community expectations for children
- Inter-school connection about specific child
- Connections with community agencies



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### Strategies to Assist Child with Disabilities and/or Challenging Behaviors (Keating, 2002)


- Share information with the sending and receiving team
  - Provides a basis for similarity and continuity for the child
- Offer knowledge of the child's areas of strengths and needs to be used to plan for successful experiences
- Identify preferences in activities, people, toys, and materials to the receiving team



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### Strategies to Assist Child with Disabilities and/or Challenging Behaviors (Keating, 2002)


- Invite the child and family to visit the new classroom setting prior to the beginning of school
- Teach the child needed transitions skills to help prepare the child for dealing with the next classroom
- Provide experiences, toys, and rewards that are familiar to the child. Identify and maintain some level of routine the child can readily identify



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### Strategies to Assist Families of Children with Disabilities and/or Challenging Behaviors (Keating, 2002)


- Provide information about what the next placement entails, including site visits
- Discuss with the parents the transition process steps, outcomes, and responsibilities
- Form a parent support group of families experiencing the transition process
- Use resources for parent rights information and assistance in IEP development and decision making
- Write out with the parents the pros and cons of the placement options
- Determine communication strategies to be used for conveying student activities and information with the receiving team



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### Strategies for the Sending Team of a Child with Disabilities and/or Challenging Behaviors (Keating, 2002)


- Learn about available services and strengths of the next placement in order to communicate information to the family
- Make sure there is a transition plan formulated that outlines the transition steps
- Start early! Teach the child skills for future settings, gather information about the child from multiple sources
- Follow the child into the next school year in order to support the receiving team, check student progress and assist in problem solving
- Evaluate the transition process and make the appropriate changes based on the feedback



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### Promote Advocacy

- Children often need their parents to be advocates for them because they cannot easily communicate needs and difficulties
- Parents may effectively help teachers and other school staff develop strategies to address these needs
- Inform parents of their rights
- Parents should be proactive



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### Children's Books about Starting Kindergarten

- *All Ready for School* - Leone Adelson
- *Look out Kindergarten, Here I Come!* - Nancy L. Carlson
- *Miss Bindergarten Gets Ready for Kindergarten* (series) - Joseph Slate
- *My First Days of School* - Jane Hamilton-Merritt
- *Timothy Goes to School* - Rosemary Wells
- *The Night Before Kindergarten* - Wing and Durrell



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## Key References

Division of Early Childhood (DEC). *Young Exceptional Children: Practical Ideas for Addressing Challenging Behaviors*. Longmont, CO: Sopris West.

O'Neill, R. E., Horner, R. H., Albin, R., Storey, K., & Sprague, J. (1990). *Functional Assessment of Problem Behavior: A Practical Assessment Guide*. Pacific Grove, CA: Brookes/Cole.

Pianta, R.C., Cox, M. (1999). *The Transition to Kindergarten*. Baltimore: Paul Brookes Publishing Co.

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Saifer, S. (1990). *Practical Solutions to Practically Every Problem: The Early Childhood Teacher's Manual*. St. Paul, MI: Guilford Press.



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## Activity

- Describe a child that is having challenging behaviors in your classrooms
- Identify concerns regarding transition to kindergarten
- Develop strategies to facilitate a smooth transition



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Questions  
and  
Please complete  
evaluation forms



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