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early developments Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center

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Improving Early Child Care and Education

From the Director's Office:

Targeting the Right Stuff

Focused Use of Money, Activities Can Improve Child
Care Quality

Reaching for the Stars

Safe Haven

NCEDL News: Transition Connections

NCEDL News: Barriers

Preschool teachers report engaging in practices they endorse



A national survey of 1,902 preschool teachers reveals that they are able, generally, to engage in the practices they endorse.

Teachers were given a list of twenty-one practices and asked to rate to what extent a practice happened in their classroom and to what extent they would want the practice to occur “in a perfect world.” Few discrepancies were found between reported and ideal practices.

Although teachers endorsed a variety of practices, on most items teachers said that they are able to use the practices they endorse, according to **Diane Early** and **Richard Clifford** at UNC-Chapel Hill and **Carollee Howes** at UCLA who conducted the study for NCEDL.

Smallest discrepancies

On many items teachers reported almost no difference between their practices and their ideals. The four items with the smallest discrepancies between beliefs and practices were:

- All children in the group have to take part in all activities.
- Children practice skills on worksheets.
- Children are involved in group lessons.
- Children spend time playing.

Largest discrepancies

Teachers reported that in a perfect world, they would engage in some practices slightly more. The four items with the largest discrepancies between beliefs and practices were:

- We have a daily science experience.
- Children have time to be alone when they want it.
- We have a daily math experience.
- We have a daily music activity.



Demographic variables

There were significant differences found in examining which teachers endorsed group-centered beliefs based on the sponsorship of their center, said Early. Group-centered beliefs are those that encourage all children to engage in the same activities at the same time and at the same pace. It is the opposite of child-centered beliefs that encourage individualized activities and pacing.

Teachers in public schools, Head Starts, and other non-profit centers endorse group-centered beliefs significantly less than do teachers in religiously affiliated or for-profit settings, the data indicated. Additionally, teachers with more education endorse group-centered beliefs less.

To measure group-centered beliefs, teachers were asked a series of questions about how often they believe certain practices would take place in a perfect world. Teachers with more education had lower scores on the measure of group-centered beliefs.

Interestingly, teachers with larger groups endorse fewer group-centered practices, said Clifford. There was no relation between the amount of time a teacher has worked at the center and her group-centered beliefs.

Conclusions and implications

Early childhood teachers largely see themselves as engaging in the practices that they endorse, said Early. On average, they do not report many barriers to conducting their classes in the ways they think are best (as evidenced both by the small discrepancies between their reported practices and beliefs and by the low ratings they give to the barriers listed in the survey).

Different teachers do endorse different practices, especially with regard to group-centered versus child-centered practices. Although teachers uniformly agree that reading, math, science and music activities should take place daily, there is not uniform agreement with respect to beliefs about practices like involving children in group instruction and insisting that children complete all activities.



Attention should be paid to helping teachers adopt knowledge and values related to child-centered practices, Early and Clifford said. Other research has indicated that child-centered practices predict the best outcomes for children. These data indicate that teachers who endorse such practices report being able to engage in them. However, teachers do not uniformly endorse child-centered practices. Changing teachers' knowledge and values may be a key to improving practice. 🌀

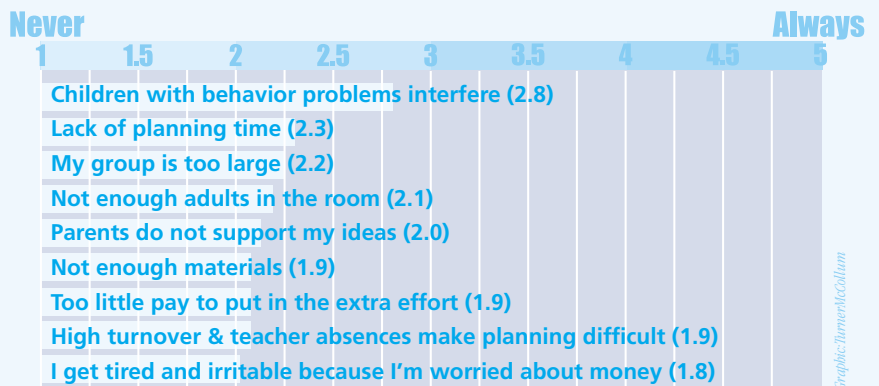


Barriers to endorsed practices

The listing below indicates the top-rated barriers to engaging in endorsed practice. Not surprisingly, all the barriers were given relatively low ratings. Earlier, the answers to questions about practices and beliefs indicated that teachers see themselves as employing the practices they endorse.

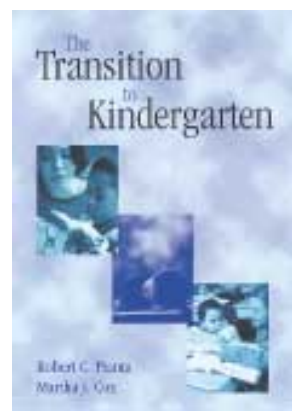
Most commonly cited barriers

The survey asked teachers, "How often do the following prevent you from teaching/caring for your group in the way you would in a perfect world?"



Graphic: TurnertCollum

New book examines critical issues in transitions



This book contains ten chapters presented at a national transitions synthesis conference sponsored by NCEDE. An additional five chapters were written after the conference, and reflect the discussions and deliberations of the synthesis groups.


416 pages
Brookes Publishing Co., Baltimore, MD

“Our aim in this book is to provide a comprehensive treatment of an area of knowledge that has been neglected for too long and is in need of systematic attention.... We want to help organize and frame the debate on critical issues regarding the early primary education of an increasingly diverse group of young children.”

The above quote is from the preface of **The Transition to Kindergarten**, which has been published as the first in a series by the National Center for Early Development & Learning at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.

Editors **Robert Pianta** of the University of Virginia and **Martha Cox** of UNC-Chapel Hill said, “The education of young children is receiving an unprecedented level of attention in the United States and, for good or bad, will be a focus of educational reform as the twenty-first century begins. Understanding and influencing the transition from home to school, from child care to school, and from early childhood to elementary programs will likely be a focus of a great deal of attention in the policy, research, and practice communities.”

Chapter subjects

1. “An Ecological Approach to Kindergarten Transition” provides a conceptual model for looking at transitions.
2. “Early Schooling and Social Stratification” looks at how early school experiences provide advantages for some children and disadvantages for others that then reinforce the sorting of individuals into the hierarchical layers characteristic of societies.
3. “Assessing Readiness” examines the national “ready for school” goal and other key issues regarding readiness.
4. “Promoting Education Equity and Excellence in Kindergarten” looks at demographic trends and educational experiences by groups of children from different backgrounds and different kindergarten programs they attend.
5. “Diverse Perspectives on Kindergarten Contexts and Practices” focuses on research related to teachers’ practices in kindergarten classrooms.
6. “Families and Schools: Rights, Responsibilities, Resources, and Relationships” reviews and identifies critical issues for families and schools in the context of children’s transition to school.
7. “Changing Schools for Changing Families” examines the nature of, and barriers to, parent involvement and innovations in school-based support for families.
8. “Beginning School for Children at Risk” reviews why the transition to school for children in poverty is considered important for scientific inquiry, education improvement and societal concern.
9. “Children with Disabilities in Early Elementary School” looks at research and practices related to the transition to school-age services for young children with disabilities and their families.
10. “Kindergarten Practices with Children from Low-Income Families” discusses research on low-income children and families and implications for schools and classrooms.
11. “Research on the Transition to Kindergarten” examines how research design and methodology constrain the current knowledge base on transitions.
12. “Personnel Preparation and the Transition to Kindergarten” suggests a rethinking of the preparation of teachers and other staff serving children and their families.
13. “The Practice of Effective Transition” offers recommendations and rationales for practices for those involved in children’s transition into kindergarten.
14. “Policy and the Transition Process” discusses specific issues with policy implications and advances a set of principles for analyzing policy related to transitions.
15. “The Changing Nature of the Transition to School” suggests significant trends for the next decade in relation to shifting demography, education of young children in public schools, and the changing nature of families and schools. 



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