



Handout 2.1 Transition – Ask the Expert

What Does the Research Say?

Research Transitions can occur across two dimensions (Kagan 1991): **vertical movement through chronological age and development** (e.g., from early intervention to preschool special education); and **horizontal movement across settings within the course of a given day** (e.g., between child care and a preschool special education classroom).

Research suggests transition practices, particularly those for children at risk of school failure, should address interconnections of the child, family, and community (Pianta, Rimm-Kauffman, 2006). This emphasis on social context is also present in the early childhood special education literature, particularly alignment and continuity of services for families and their children and support of family and child adjustment to situations and settings using a family-centered approach.

Research documents the importance of collaboration among early childhood staff and programs, skills needed by the child to support their success in a new setting or program, and supporting positive family and practitioner experiences throughout the transition process.

Specific child-level skills found to be predictive of a more successful adjustment after transition include those in the areas of social, communication, and adaptive development, more so than academic skills (Lin, Lawrence, & Gorrell, 2003; Wesley & Buysee, 2003). Using this research as a foundation, many resources to support children's successful transition to kindergarten and first grade have been developed (Rous & Hallam, 2006).

How Has the Research Informed the Development of Strategies Identified in the Literature?

With the significant investments in early care and education, there has been an increased focus on both the quality of programs and coordination across programs. This has led to a renewed emphasis on identification of practices to support both vertical and horizontal transitions for children and families. These practices take into consideration the timing of the practice (whether or not it supports children's preparation for and/or adjustment to new settings and programs, as well as the practitioner role in supporting the practice and the impact of the practice on children's outcomes).

Critical components of a successful transition include continuity of child (and family) experiences between and across programs and settings and alignment of requirements, expectations, and practices across programs in which children (and families) participate.

Strategies that identify and minimize child and family disruptions within and across settings are a critical component to transition planning. This includes alignment of instructional approaches, as well as appropriate training and support for staff. For example, alignment across programs as to what children are expected to know and do (standards) with instructional approaches (curricula) and how children are evaluated on skills and knowledge (assessment) support both successful transitions and positive child outcomes.

As national attention continues to be focus on school readiness, both academically and socially, contextual factors of the child, family, classroom and community should be considered.

Why Is This Important for Children with Disabilities?

Young children with disabilities may have multiple vertical transitions between birth and age five—from the hospital neo-natal intensive care unit (NICU) to home, from early intervention to preschool special education, and from preschool special education to kindergarten. Associated with each of these new programs are people, settings, routines and expectations. The extent to which they align has an impact on how the child and family will experience the transition into the new program.

Communication and collaboration with parents and other practitioners is critical to ensure continuity and alignment of services and supports for children and families. Using a family-centered approach to transition is an effective means to support their adjustment. This involves preparing the family as well as the child for anticipated changes as a result of moving into a new program or setting.

Valuable strategies include making introductions to new personnel and fostering their relationships with the family, sharing information about the new schedule and the environment the child will be transitioning into, and clarifying the potential and/or expected role of family members in that new setting, e.g., whether or not family members are welcome into the new classroom and identifying the preferred form of communication for the family member(s) as well as the new practitioner/teacher.

Bottom Line

The research on program transition has shown that alignment across programs supports positive child outcomes, and that collaboration with and supporting families and practitioners through transitions are critical in ensuring a successful transition process.

About the Expert

Beth Rous, Ed.D., is professor and chair in the Department of Educational Leadership Studies, College of Education and director of the Kentucky Partnership for Early Childhood Services, Human Development Institute, at the University of Kentucky. Her research focuses on early childhood cross sector systems development in the areas of quality, transition, and professional development. She is principal investigator of the Kentucky Quality Rating and Improvement Technical Assistance System and Child Care Resource and Referral State Network and Kentucky Early Childhood Data System. She is past president of the national Division for Early Childhood (DEC).
