

LITERATURE REVIEW

What Does the Research Tell Us About Early Childhood Transition?

Rosenkoetter, S., & Schroeder, C. (2008). *What does the research tell us about early childhood transition?* Lexington: University of Kentucky, Human Development Institute, National Early Childhood Transition Center.

BOTTOM LINE

This literature review includes 58 studies with 33 focusing on children, 18 on families, and 8 on policy. Across child, family, and policy areas, research to date has not led to the identification of research-based practices. The best available research on family issues underscores the importance of strong communication between families and program staff, as well as the importance of families receiving information responsive to their questions. Extensive experience-based knowledge and policy exists to support active family-professional partnerships in planning for transition. Overall, research needs to be improved in its scientific rigor and in the clarity and specificity in which it is reported.

Beach Center on Disability

Making a Sustainable Difference in Quality of Life



Action Steps

- Be aware that, although a great deal of research has been done on transition practices, the current state of research does not include articles with sufficient scientific rigor to be able to identify practices that can be characterized as “research-based.”
- Recognize that several studies describing parents experiences with transition result in recommendations that can be considered to be the “best available research” even though this body of research does not yet meet the criteria of being considered “research-based.”
- Recognize that extensive experience-based knowledge and policy exists to support active family-professional partnerships in planning for transition.
- Participate in research studies in order to build the research base if opportunities present themselves.

Key Findings

- The literature review includes a narrative summary of research, tables that identify characteristics of studies (for example, type of disability, program from which children are transitioning from and a program to which they are entering, specific focus), and one-page annotations of each study.
- Studies focusing on *child issues*
 - ◆ Of the 33 studies addressing child issues, 19 focused on the transition from preschool into kindergarten. No studies focused on the transition from early intervention services into preschool. The remaining studies focused on transitions at different points within the birth-8-year-old span.
 - ◆ Five themes emerged from the review on child issues.
 - ◆ The use of transition practices led to positive outcomes for children primarily related to children learning in advance key skills needed in the next environment.
 - ◆ High quality childcare and teaching practices geared to the appropriate developmental level for each child were associated with higher academic achievement, better social outcomes, and improved adjustment in the next environment.
 - ◆ Factors in the child’s environment (for example, extent to which parents were involved in school activities, conversations with adults, income level) influenced child outcomes.

- ◆ Positive teacher-child relationships and peer relationships appeared to contribute to positive child outcomes, including making successful transitions to the next environment.
- ◆ Children vary in their readiness for school and in their adjustment to school in light of socioeconomic, cultural, and teacher factors.
- Overall, the research studies on child issues did not provide clear documentation of how specific transition practices influence particular child outcomes.
- Studies on *family issues*
 - ◆ Eighteen studies addressed the topic of transitions for families of young children; however, no studies were found that focused families characterized by cultural and linguistic diversity.
 - ◆ The majority of family studies focused on the transition from preschool to kindergarten.
 - ◆ The findings provide support for the importance of family-professional partnerships related to transitions.
 - ◆ The majority of studies focused on families' perspectives regarding their involvement in the transition process. Most families characterize their transition experience as successful, although they also identified concerns and stresses. A key factor was communication with program staff and receiving information related to their questions.
 - ◆ Future research needs to explore the impact of transition strategies related to family support on child and family outcomes and to involve families from diverse backgrounds.
- Studies on *policy issues*
 - ◆ Eight studies focused on policy with half of them focusing on the transition from early intervention to preschool.
 - ◆ The authors did not identify key themes across the eight studies.
 - ◆ Topics addressed by the various studies include perspectives of professional and parent stakeholders on the policy/administrative implementation of transition (for example, inter-agency policies, funding), similarities and differences between early intervention programs that are included in Part C of IDEA and preschool programs that are included in Part B of IDEA, and historical views of transition implementation.

- ◆ Most of the existing research on policy is descriptive. There is a need to conduct comparative research to make policy recommendations on the most effective policy options.
- Conclusions
 - ◆ Across child, family, and policy areas, research to date has not lead to the identification of research-based practices.
 - ◆ Overall, research needs to be improved in its scientific rigor and in the clarity and specificity in which it is reported.

Methods

- The authors conducted an extensive search of research related to transition published from 1990 through March, 2006 focusing on children between birth and 8 years of age.
- Their search resulted in 58 articles – 33 focusing on children, 18 on families, and 8 on policy.
- Each article was reviewed by two people. When major discrepancies existed, a third reviewer was brought in.

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