

Topic: **Build child, family, and community relationships that promote child development and learning.**

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Context

Since the passage of PL 99-457 in 1986 [early intervention programs under the Education of the Handicapped Act; now Individuals With Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)], much attention has been focused on the transition process for young children with disabilities and their families. The transitions in services that occur from 0-5 have been described as potentially stressful events for families of children with disabilities. Researchers and policy makers have learned much about the complexities involved in providing high quality transitions for children and their families.

Purpose of the Article

The article provides a review of the literature on transition practices for young children with disabilities and their families. Future directions for more integrated approaches to transition research, policy, and practice are presented.

Research Supporting Transition Services

The current research in transition services has emerged from special education and early childhood.

Research for Children with Disabilities. Several studies have focused on the specific skills children with disabilities need to function effectively in kindergarten and first grade, while other studies have focused on the experiences of families during transition. More recent research has helped categorize transition activities into high-intensity (e.g., individualized) and low-intensity (e.g., whole class or large group) practices. Teachers reported using mostly low-intensity practices, such as talking to the parents before schools starts, open houses, and sending information home to parents. Most

transition activities occurred before the start of the school year, and teachers used more practices when the classroom included children with disabilities. Some research has focused on collaboration and coordination across agencies, producing a guidelines for transition planning.

Early Childhood Research. The research in transition for typically developing children has focused on the importance of school readiness (e.g., cognitive and literacy skills, adaptive skills, social adjustment) and later academic achievement especially for children who are at-risk for entering kindergarten ready to learn. Researchers have also reported the positive impact that high-quality EC classroom environments and teacher/child relationships have on children's adjustment to kindergarten. Researchers have also suggested that transition practices may support families' adjustment to the new school and ultimately promote positive child academic and behavioral outcomes.

Current Issues and Recommendations for Future Research

Although much progress has been made in understanding transition services for all children, there are still four areas of continuing concern that should be addressed in future research and practice.

Context-Oriented Approach. Providers must move from child-oriented to context-oriented approaches by understanding the complex factors associated with transition, including program factors (e.g., relationship between programs and teachers), teacher factors (e.g., teacher-child relationship), family characteristics (e.g., family efficacy, support systems), and child characteristics (e.g., ability level, age at transition, friendships).

Multiple Types of Transition. Providers must also understand that there are multiple transitions that occur in a young child's life before entering formal school, including vertical transitions that occur over time (e.g., early intervention to preschool; within programs from classroom to classroom) and horizontal transitions that occur within a fixed period of time (e.g., a day or week). For example, children who come from low-income families may move between communities several times and transition frequently from one program to the next. Children with disabilities are often served by multiple service providers and must adjust to horizontal transitions across a day, week, or month. Children with early medical complications such as low-birth weight require extensive support as they transition from hospital to home. Less attention has been paid to research on these various aspects of the transition process.

Transition Supports for All Children. IDEA regulations address the transition of children exiting early intervention at age 3 and Head Start regulates transitions to school. However, there are no comparable regulations supporting the transitions of children with disabilities to kindergarten or children not served in either of these federally supported programs from birth through age 8. A cross-sector framework for transition planning is needed that spans birth through primary school services for *all* children and their families.

Implementation of Transition Practices. Many transition practices have been identified in the literature. However, the practices often lack specificity and may focus more on preparation and less on adjustment. Providers need to offer global transition planning within and across programs, while individualizing specific strategies based on child, family, and program context (p. 236). Some of the transition practices and strategies that have been supported in the literature include (p. 237):

- Arranging for children and families to visit different programs and schools before a final decision on programs is made.
- Visiting child's home *before* program/school starts.
- Visiting child's home *after* program/school starts.
- Arranging for children to visit their future teachers and classrooms.
- Providing opportunities for a child's family to talk with preschool and kindergarten staff about the special needs of their child and/or details like meals, transportation, and special services available.

- Inviting children in early intervention to a play group/time/visitation for observation.
- Offering visits to the new school prior to transition for personal introduction of child and family to new environment (e.g., 1:1 visit, small group visit, NOT open house).
- Implementing gradual transition into preschool and kindergarten with specific goals and objectives.

Further, the outcomes of interest for successful transition should go beyond academic achievement to include the child's adjustment to the environment and the perceptions of parents and staff on what constitutes a successful transition.

Conclusion

The article provides an overview of the literature on transition for young children with and without disabilities. The authors propose creating a national research agenda that can begin to address the ongoing concerns and issues faced by the fields of early childhood and early childhood special education. Research on the transition process needs to be integrated into a "framework of planning and implementing seamless services for young children, birth through formal school entry" (p. 238).

About Research-to-Practice Briefs

Research-to-Practice Briefs provide summaries of key studies that inform practice related to early childhood special education. The series is designed specifically to support community college faculty who prepare candidates to work with children with special needs in the early childhood setting.

About the ACCEPT Project

The ACCEPT (Advancing Community College Efforts in Paraprofessional Training) Project is a federally-funded cooperative agreement between the U. S. Department of Education Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) and the University of North Carolina at Charlotte College of Education. The focus of this effort is the inclusion of special education content in the coursework and experiences provided within the associate degree program in early childhood education at targeted state-supported community colleges in North Carolina.

Contact the ACCEPT Project

p: 704-687-8859
f: 704-687-3493
e: info@acceptproject.org
w: www.acceptproject.org