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Kindergarten Transitions: Families Perceptions of a Kindergarten Transition Program

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Abstract

While there is increasing research surrounding kindergarten transitions there is still a need to explore kindergarten transition guides and families perceptions of these particular experiences. This study explores family perceptions of a kindergarten transition program guide. Furthermore, the study examines families' prior experiences with kindergarten transitions as they relate to being a part of a new specific kindergarten transition program. The researcher implements pre and post meetings with families surrounding an "All About Kindergarten" parent night. Additionally, surveys are distributed to those who participated in aspects of the transition process. An interview takes place to gain further insight. The conclusions comprise of: 1) Transitions are important to consider not only for the child but for the families as well. 2) It is beneficial to speak in person with a preschool and kindergarten teacher during the transition process. 3) Preschool programs should consider a transition guide that links with public schools.

Introduction

The idea of kindergarten readiness was first assessed on a larger scale in the 1960's shortly after announcing the "War On Poverty" (Zigler and Styfco 2010). The creation of a head start program was one idea for overcoming many families and communities who were experiencing poverty. This program would focus on the health and nutrition of children and the creators believed that these basic needs must be successfully met before engaging in an educational program (Zigler and Styfco 2010). There was also an emphasis on parent and community involvement within the head start program. Additionally, head start recommended that children should be learning how to establish a variety of positive relationship. In return, this program would also offer additional employment opportunities for the poor to work with children who attended the program (Zigler and Styfco 2010). Head Start has changed in many ways since its creation in the 1960's. These changes are due to the shift in government control, new findings through studies and research, and transitions within the demographic of the american people. As stated by Zigler and Styfco 2010, without the creation of head start there may not have been a push for research in child development which has provided us with vital information on how the early years are important. Since the 1960's the exosystem has expanded in social programs and services that provide children with early intervention and other developmentally appropriate services (Zigler and Styfco 2010). Preschool centers that have opened from child development and social policy were been inspired from head start. Now more than ever there is great momentum for universal preschool today with a focus on kindergarten readiness and the transitions that come with entering public schools.

As academic demands in kindergarten increase there is greater focus on kindergarten readiness, and the overall transition to kindergarten for children and families (Hatcher, Nuner

and Paulsel, 2012). A positive experience during kindergarten transitions is a predictor for overall future student success (Hatcher et.al, 2012). A positive experience also includes the child's feeling of well being and belonging during the transition process (Fabian and Dunlop 2002). A smooth school transitions can help children feel secure, relaxed and comfortable in their new environment (Fabian and Dunlop 2002). As stated by Rathbun and Hausken 2001, Kindergarten can establish a particular feeling about the overall public school experience for the future. Therefore it is important to connect with children and families as the very beginning in hopes of maintaining that positive relationship for the years to come.

As a result of this crucial time for children, teachers and parents have expressed a variety of concerns regarding kindergarten readiness and the transition to kindergarten. According to Wildenger and McIntyre (2011) in a study including parents of 86 students among five elementary schools parents reported a variety of concerns. These concerns included socio-behavioral skills, the ability to adjust to a new school, following directions, and with displaying behavior problems. The researchers also reported that one-quarter of parents indicated more information would have been helpful concerning the specifics they could have done in order to better prepare for the transition to kindergarten. Parents also revealed that they wanted more information regarding how the kindergarten program prepared for the transition, their child's kindergarten program, and their child's new teacher. In addition, one-half of parents expressed that they also wanted more information about academic expectations in kindergarten, and about their child's skills (Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011).

In the same study Wildenger and McIntyre (2011) discussed different transition practices. According to parents the most frequently used kindergarten transition practice included visiting their child's kindergarten classroom or elementary school, attending a kindergarten orientation,

attending kindergarten registration, and receiving written communication from kindergarten staff. However, researchers continue to provide evidence that some families still have concerns. In a study of kindergarten readiness, and teachers and parents' beliefs Hatcher et. al (2012) found that a majority of parents felt a sense of anxiety about their child's transition to kindergarten and their overall experience in a new school. In addition, the researchers found that most parents and teachers were concerned with children's future school success. In the same study teachers and parents had similar perceptions regarding kindergarten readiness. They felt that literacy skills and school-related routines were generally the most important aspects in preparing for kindergarten. Teachers and parents also agreed that communication regarding children's progress is essential. However, Hatcher et. al (2012) reported that most teachers were unfamiliar with what their local kindergarten programs expected of children, and or what the screening process looked like. Lastly, it's important to note that Hatcher et. al (2012) found that most parents and teachers believed that preschool goals should be consistent with those of kindergarten.

Overall there is strong evidence of researchers exploring parent and teacher perceptions regarding the importance of kindergarten readiness, and the transition to kindergarten (Hatcher et. al, 2012; Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011). However, there is minimal research addressing family perceptions of kindergarten transition programs. The transition to kindergarten affects not only the child but the family as a whole. Therefore, it is important to further investigate how to better support families during this time. The purpose of this research is to implement components of a kindergarten transition program inspired by the research conducted by Kraft-Sayre and Pianta (2000) in a study on enhancing transitions to kindergarten. After the implementation of a kindergarten transition program parents will be interviewed to explore their perceptions of the

program. Two components of the kindergarten transition guide that will be implemented include a meeting held with parents regarding the transition to kindergarten, and a kindergarten teacher as a guest speaker at the winter family festival. At the meeting the preschool teacher and family member(s) will discuss the overall kindergarten transition process, the child's abilities, teacher/family concerns, expectations for kindergarten, and family goals. The kindergarten guest speaker will discuss kindergarten readiness, and how families can begin to help their child experience a smooth transition to kindergarten. Parents can also take that time to ask the kindergarten teacher questions. There will be a variety of handouts for parents at the family festival, and a timeline addressing specific actions that families can take leading them up to the first day of kindergarten. By using a qualitative approach we can better understand how to support families during kindergarten transitions. In promoting a successful kindergarten transition families can feel confident upon entering a new school experience.

Literature Review

Families and Kindergarten Transitions

The transition to kindergarten can add stress to the family and child. This period of time presents changes through physical terms by entering a new school, and social-emotional terms through establishing new relationships. Pianta and Kraft-Sayre (1999) conducted a study regarding parent's of 261 children, and their observations during kindergarten transitions. In the study many parents identified needing more support, and communication. Furthermore nearly 35% of parents mentioned a disruption to family life and a disequilibrium for the family. As family enter kindergarten they may experience a change in schedules due to the fact that public school starting and ending times can differ from a previous child care arrangement. This can disrupt families work schedules and cause them to seek outside after school programs. When

families face an increasing amount of change in their lives it is hard to find balance at first. This could negatively impact families experience during the transition to kindergarten.

Hatcher et.al (2012) found that parents expressed a variety of concerns regarding the transition to kindergarten in terms of academic success. Many parents were concerned with literacy skills, developmentally appropriate practice, and play in kindergarten. In addition, parents identified that communication about children's developmental progress is imperative (Hatcher et.al, 2012). Finally, most parents relied on assessment information to determine kindergarten readiness. In a comparable study Wildenger and McIntyre (2011) reported that parents with higher education were more likely to be involved during kindergarten transitions. Additionally, families of children who attended an early education program had more involvement in the transition preparation. Family involvement affects children's overall success during kindergarten transitions, and towards learning for the future (Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011).

Teachers and Kindergarten Transition Practices

Preschool teachers can feel an increasing amount of pressure in preparing children and families for kindergarten as public programs make kindergarten readiness a priority (Hatcher, et. al, 2012). In a study including teachers of 214 pre-kindergarten classrooms, and their corresponding kindergarten teachers LoCasale-Crouch, Mashburn, Downer and Pianta (2008) found that the types of transition practices that had significantly stronger benefits for children were ones that children experienced directly. In addition, contact between pre-kindergarten and kindergarten teachers about curriculum or a specific child was found to be positively associated with the kindergarten teacher perceptions of children's skills (LoCasale-Crouch et.al, 2008). However, Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2005) reported in a study exploring family-school

communication among family members of 75 children, 34 kindergarten teachers and ten preschool teachers that as children make the transition from preschool to kindergarten, family-school communication decreased. However, families express in the study conducted by Wildenger and McIntyre (2011) that communication is essential during the kindergarten transition period. Furthermore, the researchers explained that differences in family-school communication between the preschool and kindergarten year mark important challenges that need to be addressed in designing interventions that support, and sustain positive family-school relationships. This is important to note especially since multiple studies have provided evidence that family members felt a lack of communication and feel it is important during kindergarten transitions (Kaufman & Pianta, 2005; Fabian & Dunlop, 2002; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 1999).

In addition to the concerns parents and teachers expressed regarding family-school communication they also relayed concerns regarding children's overall adjustment to kindergarten (Robinson & Diamond, 2013). In a study conducted by Robinson and Diamond (2013) the associations between parents' and teachers' reports of children's adjustment during the transition to kindergarten were explored. In addition, children's interpersonal skills, social problem solving skills, and social competence were examined in relation to their adjustment in kindergarten. The researchers found that in a sample of 133 students and their families, and 23 preschools and the students corresponding kindergarten programs that teachers reported one third of children had problems following directions, lacked academic skills, and had difficulties working independently (Robinson & Diamond, 2013). In addition, these students had significantly weaker receptive vocabulary and offered fewer positive solutions to social problems. This means that approximately 44 out of 133 children had many identifiable concerns as they transitioned to kindergarten. This study provides evidence that there is still many

children entering kindergarten unprepared (Robinson & Diamond, 2013). In addition Robinson and Diamond (2013) found that children's social problem solving skills, and their ratings of their social competence in preschool were negatively associated with their kindergarten teachers' ratings of problems during the transition to kindergarten. Therefore, it is important to note that the researchers of this study provided evidence that children's interpersonal skills are related to their school-related competencies, and success in the transition to kindergarten (Robinson & Diamond, 2013). These findings are influential to preschool teachers as they prepare children and their families for the transition to kindergarten (Robinson & Diamond, 2013).

In exploring different transition practices LoCasale-Crouch et. al (2008) reported that pre-kindergarten teachers in their study individualized children's transitions by meeting with parents to discuss kindergarten, and supported connections by contacting kindergarten teachers about curriculum issues or specific children. The researchers also found that transition practices had a positive association with kindergarten teachers' perceptions of children's socio-emotional adjustment, regardless of the type and quality of the program children previously attended. These particular findings provided some of the first evidence on school readiness that pre-kindergarten teachers' use of transition practices are associated with children's adjustment in kindergarten (LoCasale-Crouch et. al, 2008).

In a similar study Kraft-Sayre and Pianta (2000) analyzed the implementation of a transition program guide based on the following principles: to build (a) family-school relationships (b) child-school relationships (c) peer relationships (d) relationships between preschools and elementary schools. The researchers found that through the implementation of a transition guide including ten preschool teachers, 37 kindergarten teachers, seven family workers, and 110 children and their families that connections were expanded on a number of

levels. By establishing a collaborative team of preschool teachers, kindergarten teachers, family workers, principals, parents, and other community representatives Kraft-Sayre and Pianta (2008) reported that many families were increasingly comfortable with their new school. This led to a decreased need for family worker involvement. In addition to forming collaborative teams the researchers also emphasized creating a transition to kindergarten timeline. As a result families were more independent, and self-sufficient in their relationships with the schools as the year progressed.

Summary and Conclusion

According to many researchers it is apparent that kindergarten readiness, and the transition to kindergarten is a crucial period of time for children and families (Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011; Hatcher et. al, 2012; Pianta & Kraft-Sayre, 1999; Fabian & Dunlop, 2002; LoCasale-Crouch et. al, 2008). During this transition families hold a variety of perceptions. Most families reported that they are generally concerned with their child's overall success (Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011). Prior research has also provided a great deal of evidence that many families and teachers are aware of kindergarten readiness, however both parties continue to report a variety of concerns regarding the transition to kindergarten (Hatcher et.al, 2012). The most identified concerns include, but are not limited to, families wanting more information regarding kindergarten transitions, and overall support (Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011; Kaufman & Pianta, 2005). Families and teachers will benefit from researchers exploring different transition programs. In this study families and kindergarten transitions will be explored by implementing a program transition guide, and specifically: What are families perceptions of a kindergarten transition program?

Research Design

Purpose of Research

The purpose of this research is to implement components of a kindergarten transition program inspired by the research conducted by Kraft-Sayre and Pianta (2000) in a study on enhancing transitions to kindergarten. After the implementation of a kindergarten transition program parents will be interviewed in order to explore their perceptions of the program. The kindergarten transition guide will outline steps teachers will take in order to provide families with general information, information unique to their child and situation, specific steps in kindergarten preparation and readiness, and overall better support physically and emotionally. At the meetings, the preschool teacher and family member(s) will discuss the overall kindergarten transition process. This includes the child's abilities, teacher/family concerns, expectations for kindergarten, and family goals. At the family festival, the Kindergarten guest speaker will discuss kindergarten readiness, and how families can begin to help their child experience a smooth transition to kindergarten. Parents can also take that time to ask the kindergarten teacher questions. There will be a variety of handouts for parents at the family festival, and a timeline addressing specific actions that families can take leading them up to the first day of kindergarten. By using a qualitative approach we can better understand how to support families during kindergarten transitions. In promoting a successful kindergarten transition families can feel confident upon entering a new school experience.

The Research Question

This research will examine the question: What are families perceptions of a kindergarten transition program? In this study families and kindergarten transitions will be explored by implementing a program transition guide. This question will explore families prior experiences

with the transitions to kindergarten, in relation to being a part of a new specific kindergarten transition program. As a result, the research question will provide educators with information regarding effects of implementing specific transition program guide. If other educators choose to use this guide to support their families, it can be easily executed using a specific outline that is provided.

Concepts

Important central concepts related to this research include schedule changes and family involvement. These ultimately affect all parties involved during the transition process from preschool to public school. Most preschool programs run 7 a.m. to 5:30 p.m., giving parents more time throughout the day to interact with their preschool teachers either during drop off or pick up time. Most public school programs don't start until 8:30 a.m. and end between 2:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m. Since typical work hours are either between eight to four or nine to five, it is more difficult for family members to connect with a public school teacher in order to establish an ongoing relationship face to face. It is common for children to take the bus to school and then home afterwards, making it much less likely for families to even step foot in the school their child attends. The change in schedules can be difficult for families because they transition from being able to connect with their child's teacher each day face to face, to little to no contact with their child's teacher. If they do reach out to the teacher it is usually no other than through possible e-mails and or phone calls, depending on the teacher.

Due to changes in schedules between preschool and public school, family involvement can decrease. Depending on families working schedules there may not be a time that works for family involvement throughout the day. Therefore, it is important to consider how the different schedules of a preschool versus a public school can impact families. This research will explore

ways to prepare families for these changes and find ways to continue to be involved in their children's learning.

Approach

Given that this research explores families perspectives I will use an intimate approach through conducting interviews with family members. The interview process will produce the type of feedback that needed to answer the research question at hand. More detailed information will help to identify the themes. This will provide more intell, events and topics that families feel are important to them during the transition process. In addition, surveys will be distributed on a larger scale to family members that include close ended questions using a 1 to 5 likert scale. A mixture of interviews and surveys will help provide a more comprehensive collection of information.

A potential weakness of this approach may be that family members could feel swayed to answer particular questions a certain way given that I may already or at some point work with their child in the program. Furthermore, some family members may generally feel influenced to answer questions a particular way in the presence of any type of authority figure. However, the surveys will help to address some of these weakness since family members can fill them out anonymously.

Method of Inquiry

I will use a qualitative approach in my research. This method of inquiry is most appropriate for this research because the interest is being placed on examining families perspectives. According to Creswell (2011) a qualitative research study is essential when you collect data in order to learn from participants to answer a central phenomenon. In order to gain more insight regarding experiences and opinions, I will be conducting intense interviews. The

interview will contain eight open-ended questions. I will ask these questions in order and as they are specifically written on the prepared question sheet. There will be a tape recorder to capture the information shared during all interviews.

The research can also be defined within a subgroup of qualitative research as a grounded theory design. Creswell (2011) states that a grounded theory design is a procedure that produces a general explanation in order to explain a process, action or interaction among people. Through this research I will attempt to explain the perspectives of families regarding a particular process that they will be a part of. The findings of various perspectives will help to better understand the idea behind kindergarten transitions.

Research Methods

Setting

The research will take place at a private, non-profit organization. This organization serves children from age three up to adults with a variety of specialized programs to meet individual needs. However, this particular research will take place in the preschool wing of the building. In the preschool wing there are three different preschool classrooms. One classroom has a one-to-one ratio with 15 children, 15 educational technicians and one teacher. The second preschool classroom has a three-to-one ratio with 12 children, three educational technicians and one teacher. The third preschool classroom 10 children who are typically developing with two educational technicians and one teacher. Interviews with family members will take place in a conference room that is a part of the preschool wing.

Sampling and Participants

Families will be recruited from the three different preschool classrooms. There are 37 children attending the preschool programs. Therefore, there are 37 plus family members that

could potentially be a part of the research. I will use purposeful sampling to select five preschool family members who have been a part of a transition from a preschool program to public school with another child in the past.

I will use purposeful sampling, specifically homogeneous sampling for the interview process. This type of sampling works best for my research because I need to interview parents of children who have previously transitioned from a preschool program to public school in order to discuss the differences regarding past experiences in relation to a new experience as being a part of the implementation of the preschool transition program. I will send a letter home to families I would like to interview. The letter will provide families with an overview of my research project and invite them to participate. At the end of the letter there will be a box where families can check yes if they are interested in being a part of the interview. If they do not want to participate they can disregard the letter. Since the interview process will be more in depth I plan to keep the sample small. I will be able to better identify themes with this type and scale of sample.

The advantages of purposeful sampling allow the researcher to intentionally select individuals that can help better understand a specific topic (Creswell, 2011). The sampling strategy that is most appropriate for this research is homogeneous sampling. The benefits of this type of sampling include selecting a group of individuals with defining characteristics (Creswell, 2011). This type of method and sampling is most appropriate for this research because it allows me to select specific individuals to potentially participate that will help me best answer and further understand the research question.

A weaknesses of purposeful sampling is that it relates to only a specific group of people, thus making it difficult to generalize amongst a greater population. This research will include a population inhabiting specific characteristics, thus featuring at least one type of commonality.

However, this type of population is not uncommon. Preschool and or some type of program prior to public school has been more mainstream. Therefore, it is likely that families would have one or more children who have been a part of a transition from preschool to kindergarten.

Methodology

I will use action research along with a qualitative approach. Within the qualitative design I will be conducting interviews and distributing surveys to family members. A qualitative approach will help me to explore my research topic with answers to in depth questions from a select group of family members. The family members chosen for interviews are based on having prior experience with kindergarten transitions. The action research will include the implementation of pre and post meetings surrounding a kindergarten parent night. The interviews will be conducted face-to-face in a conference room between myself and the individual parent. I will know if families have children who have been a part of a kindergarten transitions by reviewing their family history paperwork that they fill out at the beginning of every new school year.

Using a qualitative method allows for the researcher to further explore a group of individuals ideas to better understand a phenomenon (Creswell, 2011). There are a variety of ways a researcher can go about collecting this type of information. In addition, a qualitative approach allows for more open-ended type of questions with the participants. These types of questions can elicit a more in depth information to better understand a group of individuals and or a topic (Creswell, 2011).

Limitations to using the qualitative method include the amount of time a researcher may need to spend interviewing, and analyzing the data. A typical interview can take approximately 20 to 40 minutes, however transcribing that interview can take hours. Another limitation may

include access to participants. It may be challenging to find people who have time to participate in a lengthy interview. Additionally, interview questions may elicit uncomfortable information that the interviewer did not participate. Therefore, it is important to remember to be sensitive to the participants prior experiences with a particular subject (Creswell, 2011).

In prior research a qualitative approach has been used to explore parents' perceptions of kindergarten transitions through the use of in depth interviews. However, there is a gap in research regarding parent's perceptions after being a part of the implementation of a kindergarten transition program. This method of inquiry will allow future research to explore possible benefits to having a specific transition program guide based on parents' perceptions.

Measures

In order to collect data I will be conducting interviews and distributing surveys. The information collected from the interviews will provide with detailed perspective on families prior experiences during the transition to kindergarten and new experiences as being a part of a kindergarten transition program guide. The information collected from the parent surveys will provide me with a greater amount of information to help support ideas stated in the interviews. Information collected for interviews and surveys will be reliable because they are opinions of people where there is no right or wrong answer, rather an explanation of a general idea.

In order to ensure that the data I am collecting will fit the research I will ensure that the surveys are only distributed to family members of children who are in a preschool program and will be transitioning to a kindergarten public school program in the future. To ensure the data I collect for the interviews will best answer the research question I will ask if the family member has had a child transition to a kindergarten program in the past in order to compare their new experience with the kindergarten transition program guide that has just been implemented.

However, this information will also be collected by reviewing the family members history as well prior to asking them to participate.

Data Collection/Procedure

The data collection for the interviews will take place one-on-one and face-to-face with five different family members. The questions asked will be open-ended. This will allow for the participants to elaborate as they feel comfortable, and relay personal experiences and perspectives. There will be eight questions asked in order. The interview will be audio-recorded and I will ensure the participant that all audio recording will be deleted after the research project is completed. I will use an interview protocol that will briefly describe the research topic, list instructions for implementing the interview and include the interview questions with space to write notes. Prior to beginning I will ensure the the participant has been a part of a transition to kindergarten with another child. I will also state that the interview will take approximately 30 minutes, and that they can skip any questions they don't feel comfortable answering.

Disadvantages of interviews are that the participants may not share as much detailed information and the researcher may need to use icebreakers to encourage the participant to talk (Creswell, 2011). Another disadvantage is that the presences of the researcher may evoke the participant to respond in a particular way that may be different than how they truly feel about the particular question. Lastly, another disadvantage is that the participant may be soft spoken, unclear, and or ramble making it difficult to stay on track in order to answer the question (Creswell, 2011). Therefore, it is important for the researcher to be tactful in order to ensure the participant is being heard, but also using supportive phrases to stay on track to mindful of the time spent during the interview.

Another type of data collection will also be through surveys. Surveys will be dispersed to

all 37 family members who have children who attend the three different preschool programs.

There are eight close ended questions on the parent survey. At the top of the survey participants are asked to please respond to the questions based on a rating scale of 1 to 5 by circling one of the numbers that most accurately describes your experience with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree.

Advantages of a close-ended survey are that the answers found can provide useful information to support theories discussed within prior research, and further support new findings (Creswell, 2011). Another advantage is that participants are more willing to fill out a survey because it takes less time and may be more comfortable revealing less personal information. A final advantage is that more participants can voice their opinions anonymously if they don't feel comfortable conversating about a particular topic.

Disadvantages of a close-ended survey is that there is a lack of detailed information to further describe and explore reasons for a particular answer (Creswell, 2011). Another disadvantage is the amount of time it takes to sort through the surveys and determine themes. Furthermore, the the researcher will not know ahead of time how many surveys will be returned and filled out completely to analyze.

Data Analysis

I will use a wholesome analysis as I sort through the data that is collected from the interviews and the surveys. The interview data will first be analyzed by transcribing each interview. After transcribing I will code the data in order to find themes represented in the interviews. I will use in vivo codes in order to determine phrases, ideas, and or feelings that appear most often through the transcriptions. I will then narrow down the codes representing five to seven themes. As stated by Creswell (2011), in reducing the number of themes the

researcher can provide a more in depth discussion as you report your findings.

The surveys will be analyzed in a similar manner. As I read through each survey I will categorize the most popular answer to each question. I will input this information into a table in excel in order to keep track of the answers reported on the surveys. Afterwards I will compare the responses of the surveys to the themes revealed from the interviews in order to further support the perspectives of families.

Expected Findings

Through my analysis I anticipate that I will find families who express a variety of concerns they had regarding their child's prior transition to kindergarten. These findings will support a great deal of past research that overall states families need more support during this time of change and overwhelming amount of new information. I also anticipate that I will find that families have had a number of negative experiences with past transitions to kindergarten through a lack of support and or information.

Additionally, I expect to find that families are not sure how to best communicate with public school teachers and other administrators due to their opposing schedules of work and school. These findings will also support prior research since one of the major concerns identified among several different articles was lack of communication.

Finally, I expect to find that as being a part of the new kindergarten transition program families will feel more supported with having a advocate who can bridge the gap between preschool and public schools. I also anticipate that families will find it most helpful to have meetings, speakers, and festivals where families can ask specific questions in real time in order to alleviate any concerns going forward.

Potential Issues and Weaknesses

One limitation to this research is that the sample size is small in comparison to prior research, thus making it difficult to generalize the findings. However, this research can be replicated among greater populations in order to determine if the findings are reliable. Additionally, this research can be replicated with a more diverse population. The current population where this research takes place is limited in diversity among staff and students.

Another potential barrier is that this research is solely exploring the perspectives of parents during the transition to kindergarten. Prior research has included perspectives of parents and teachers during the general transition to kindergarten, however there is limited research considering both perspectives during a specified program implemented by preschool and public school teachers. Future research would benefit from including perspectives of parents, teachers and children during the implementation of this kindergarten transition program.

Research Narrative

Pre-Meetings

Meetings were held with five families prior to the *All About Kindergarten* event. At the meetings a general kindergarten readiness assessment was shared that identified strengths and areas to work on within a variety of developmental domains. Among the domains included social-emotional development, work habits, motor skills, reading and writing skills, math and science readiness, technology readiness and creative arts readiness. A writing sample and comprehension questions surrounding a particular book read with the student was also discussed at this meeting. Afterwards, parents were asked to share their concerns and share any specific topics that they would like to be addressed from the kindergarten speaker at the upcoming event.

Kindergarten Parent Night

An *All About Kindergarten* parent night was held on a Friday evening a week after the initial pre-meetings with families. The event was held in a conference room that included six families, myself and a kindergarten teacher as the guest speaker. Two families had a grandparent also attend the event. The kindergarten teacher was provided with topics of interest that families had expressed were of interest to them during the pre-meeting. The kindergarten teacher first discussed general information regarding the transition process and then addressed families specific questions. Specific topics that were discussed included self-care readiness, communication, transportation, before and after school care, class size, what families can do at home for preparation, and options for visiting their new school. A kindergarten readiness pamphlet was also provided to families that discussed the above topics in detail, provided titles of articles for further research, and a list of suggestions for ways parents can further prepare the for the upcoming transition at home.

Post Meetings

Post-meetings were held a week after the kindergarten parent night. At the post meetings specific information about what to expect at the upcoming kindergarten transition meeting. The families that I work with take part in a formal kindergarten transition meeting in the spring prior to their child transitioning to kindergarten that fall because they have individual education plans. The kindergarten transition meeting would be held at the public school of the parents choice. At this time the school would propose how they could best support the child and what their day would look like. A plan is also made for the year in regards to their learning goals, adult support, and transportation plan. Additionally, families were asked if there were further questions that they had regarding the overall transition process and or experience thus far.

Surveys and Interviews

At the end of the post meetings families were handed an eight question survey to fill out. The survey was based on a rating scale of 1 to 5. Families circled one number that most accurately described their experience in relation to the kindergarten transition guide with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree. Five family members filled out and returned the survey. The survey asked questions to better understand what parts of the transition process was most beneficial. Questions also looked at the amount of support families received from their preschool program and their public school program. The final question asked families how important they felt this transition process was for their children's future and overall learning experience.

One family member participated in an interview. The mother whom I interviewed had gone through the preschool to kindergarten transition process two years earlier with another child. The purpose of the interview was to answer questions about the transition guide and overall process in more detail and in relation to any past experiences. The questions asked about the overall transition process for both the child and family while also comparing specifically what has been going well and what has been most difficult thus far. Other questions asked to discuss how the preschool program and public school program has supported their family during this transition. One question asked the family member to talk about information they had prior to being a part of this transition process. Lastly, the family member was asked if they were interested in sharing any personal information that may affect their transition, the importance of collaboration and how they felt this time may or may not be important for their child's future learning.

Through the surveys and interview several themes emerged to better answer the question

surrounding perspectives of a kindergarten transition guide. Additional unexpected information came to light from the interview that relates specifically to providing further support to families during this crucial time. The findings from the survey are displayed in a chart and answers what aspects of the transition guide families found most beneficial. Findings from the interview explain in further detail why this type of support was important and specifically what preschools and public schools can do in the future to continuously support children and families.

Data Analysis

The purpose of this research was to explore family perceptions of a kindergarten transition program. This research implemented components of a transition guide identified by Kraft-Sayre and Pianta (2000) in a study on enhancing transitions to kindergarten. This research also considered families' prior experiences with kindergarten transitions as it related to being part of a new specific kindergarten transition program.

The participants included five family members who had prior experience with the kindergarten transition process. These family members were also preparing to transition at least one child to kindergarten this coming fall. Out of five family members one agreed to participate in an interview. Four families had been a part of this preschool program for a year, one family had been their for 6 months.

The most significant information that resulted from the survey identified that five out of five participants strongly felt that they had most of the information they needed in order to have a successful transition to kindergarten for their child. Information from the parent interview to support these findings include the statement: "Going to Kindergarten Night at his preschool and public school made a difference for us." Furthermore, the parent stated: "I liked meeting and talking with a kindergarten teacher personally and hearing in person what I can do at home to

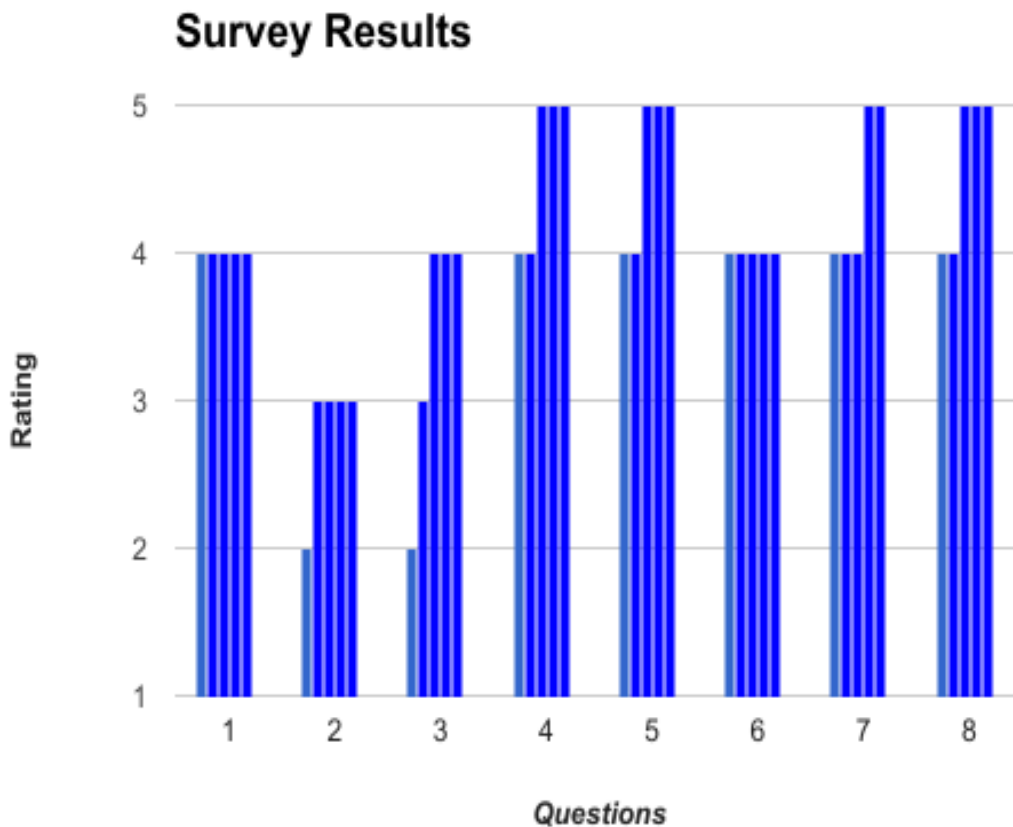
support my child made me feel better.” This statement supports the findings from Wildenger and McIntyre (2011) who relayed that communication is essential during the kindergarten transition period and that family-school communication between the preschool and kindergarten need to be addressed in designing interventions that support, and sustain positive family-school relationships. Lastly, this parent indicated that: “Meeting staff who will be working with my child ahead of time relieves my anxiety.”

Other results from the survey found that three out of five participants reported that they strongly felt the information they received regarding the transition process from preschool to kindergarten was clear and ways were discussed how they could support their child during this time. Three out of five participants reported that they strongly felt they have had adequate support from public school as they begin the transition process from preschool to kindergarten. Three out of five participants reported that they strongly felt that if there is more support during the transition process from preschool to kindergarten that their child would have a more successful learning experience for the future. These particular findings support prior research, in which according to Hatcher et.al (2012) a positive experience during kindergarten transitions is a predictor for overall future student success. Moreover, two out of five participants reported that they strongly believe there are specific actions a preschool program and public schools can take that create a more successful transition process for children. Information from the parent interview to support these findings consist of the parent affirming that: “I want public school to be prepared for my child.” They specifically stated that: “I want the school to know his name and his needs.”

Families specifically agreed more with questions four, five, and eight from the survey. Question four asked: “The information that I did receive regarding the transition process from

preschool to kindergarten was clear and discussed ways that I could support my child during this time.” Three out of five families strongly agreed with this statement. Question five asked: “I have had adequate support from my preschool center as we begin the transition process from preschool to kindergarten.” Three out of five families strongly agreed with this statement. Question eight asked: “I feel that if there is more support during the transition process from preschool to kindergarten that my child would have a more successful learning experience for the future.” Three out of five families strongly agreed with this statement. Figure 1 displays results from the survey questions.

Figure 1



Unexpected Findings

Additional findings that were unexpected from this research included statements from the parent referring to herself stating: “I’m the worrier!” “He seems okay so far.” The parent further mentioned that she often wonders: “Will I have to change my work schedule even more to support my child if he has a hard time with morning and afternoon programs?” It is clear that this parent has other questions in regards to their personal family life and how this transition will affect any set routines. This parent further stated that: “Structure and schedules are important to myself and my child.” These findings are unexpected in that they identify more of a concern for the parent themselves in being prepared versus the child during the transition process. However, these findings do support previous research from Hatcher et. al (2012) who found that a majority of parents felt a sense of anxiety about their child’s transition to kindergarten and their overall experience in a new school.

Conclusions

This research was conducted in order to better understand family perceptions regarding a kindergarten transition program. Previous research has explored parents perceptions’ of the overall transition process but there continues to be a gap regarding particular feelings surrounding components of a transitions program. Furthermore, in this study families identified how they specifically benefited in relation to prior experiences with transitions to kindergarten.

Family Perceptions

As stated previously in past research by Wildenger & McIntyre (2011) and Kaufman & Pianta (2005) the most identified concerns included from families but are not limited to, wanting more information regarding kindergarten transitions, and overall support (Wildenger & McIntyre, 2011; Kaufman & Pianta, 2005). According to the five families who participated in

this study who felt that they had most of the information they needed in order to have a successful transition to kindergarten for their child. Furthermore, 60% of families strongly agreed that they received adequate information regarding the transition to kindergarten from the preschool, and that the information was clear and concise. Most importantly, 60% of families agreed that support during the transition process from preschool to kindergarten for their child would benefit them in having a more successful learning experience for the future.

One explanation for the success of this kindergarten transition program is due to the personalized attention families received during the pre and post meetings in order to best answer their questions one-on-one and during the kindergarten transition parent night. Families were able to participate in a small and large group setting to ensure they they had opportunities to ask questions about their personal experience and also receive general information regarding the overall transition process. During the initial meeting families also received a kindergarten readiness assessment that indicated their children's strengths and room for improvement so families could easily identify skills in a particular developmental domain that they could work on with their child outside of school.

Another explanation for the success of this research is that the kindergarten transition guide provided families with support, direction and perspective of a variety of professionals and other parents who could provide additional insight regarding the transition process. Families were able to continuously talk with their preschool teacher and connect with a practicing kindergarten teacher. This was stated as specifically helpful in the parent interview. Also providing the kindergarten teacher with family concerns prior to her speaking at the event ensured that families questions were addressed. Hearing other family perspectives regarding the kindergarten transition at the parent night allowed families to gain further insight and generate

additional questions some may have not thought about alone.

In Summary

As stated previously by Kraft-Sayre and Pianta (2008) that by establishing a collaborative team of preschool teachers, kindergarten teachers, family workers, principals, parents, and other community representatives that many families were increasingly comfortable with their new school. This research attempts to bridge the gap between preschool and kindergarten so that families experience a smooth transition and feel confident to continue communicating with their children's school, teachers, and other members who may work with their child. Kraft-Sayre and Pianta (2008) further state that as a result of a kindergarten transition timeline families were more independent, and self-sufficient in their relationship with the school as the year progressed.

Even though this study did not follow families through to the actual physical transition to kindergarten, I do believe that families felt the guide and timeline they were provided with would continue to give them the additional support and information they needed in order to continue to have a successful transition in the beginning of their new school year.

Implications

Implications of this research show that kindergarten transition guides are not only important to consider for the child, but for families as well. As a result from the survey and parent interview it was shown to be specifically beneficial to speak in person with a preschool and kindergarten teacher during the transition process. Although pamphlets and packets can be helpful in obtaining information a personalized experience can be much more powerful in helping families make a more fluid transition. Just like a teacher's approach in their classroom with their students every family is different and has different needs.

As a result of this study, preschool programs should consider a transition guide that links

with public schools as well. If preschools and public school programs are on the same page they can only better support families during this time. This could prove to be difficult as some locations have multiple preschool and public school programs, however similar areas could streamline this process to make it possible for future learners. This guide could then be shared with families and other participants well in advance.

Future Educational Research

Future research would benefit by implementing this kindergarten transition guide with a larger population of families and children to see if the same results hold true. Similar research could also be conducted that follows up with families after they have been a part of this kindergarten transition guide and within the public school systems for more than one year to explore aspects of continued collaboration and communication. This type of longitudinal research would be helpful in supporting the importance of starting to communicate with families early on in order to build the much needed trust and support to maintain an ongoing relationship.

Additionally, practitioners and administrators should continuously ask for feedback from families during the kindergarten transition process in order to best address their needs. What may be important to families now may change in the future. However, the idea of supporting families in general during kindergarten transitions should always be an important part from both schools perspective.

Personal Learning Reflection

The research process has provided me with a great deal of reflection as a learner and as a future educator. I am grateful that this particular research project was broken down into sections so that I could better understand the purpose and provide more thoughtful discussions along the way. This research project has also helped in reading other research and understanding the

different types of available. I have learned how to decipher amongst different types of research and to look deeper within the method, process, references and in order to determine the validity and impact on the field of research.

This particular research has impacted me as a person through having a better understanding of family differences and needs. I feel I have become more sensitive to the unknown and I am more open-minded in learning how to better support families and children in a multitude of ways that is in addition to the kindergarten transition process. I have also learned how to better communicate with families, specifically how to keep a constant flow of communication open in order to maintain a sense of trust and support.

This research has impacted me as a professional through building my confidence in reading research and looking for articles that are relevant, valid and reliable to better understand a question I may have and or a particular topic of interest. I work with children who have a variety of developmental disabilities and delays, therefore I am always looking for new ways and or interventions that work with my population of children. Learning the research process has provided me with the much needed skills to be more effective in finding research that I can use to support ideas I have while working with students in the classroom.

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Appendix A - Adult Informed Consent

ADULT INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Dear Parents,

You are invited to participate in a research project being conducted by Sarah Allen, a student at the University of Maine at Farmington. The purpose of this research is to obtain information regarding how to best support families during the transition process from preschool to kindergarten. If you decide to participate, you will be asked to take part in one interview that will take approximately 20 minutes. This interview will be audio recorded and transcribed. After the interview is transcribed, any identifying information will be removed.

Risks: There is the possibility that you may be uncomfortable with some questions, and you are free to skip any questions you do not wish to answer. The time and inconvenience of meeting for the interview is a potential risk of participating in this study.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits to you from participating in the study. However, as a participant you may enjoy sharing your perspective and experience. Aside from this benefit to the participant, this research will help me understand and identify specific ways that families benefit and or feel a better sense of support during the transitions from preschool to public school.

Confidentiality: This research is being conducted under the direct leadership of the instructor, Dr. Chris Strople. Your identity will be known by myself, the instructor, however you will not be identified in documents produced for this course or for publication/presentation. The original Informed Consent and a participant key will be kept by myself in locked file cabinet. Any other documents and files from this study will all be kept in a locked file cabinet in my office.

Voluntary: Participation is voluntary. If you choose to take part in this study, you may stop at any time. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. There are no repercussions for not joining/joining in this study.

I, _____, fully understand the purpose of this research and the procedures to be followed. I understand that my records will be kept confidential, my participation is voluntary, and that I may withdraw at any time without penalty. I also recognize that I may skip any questions I don't wish to respond to. Results of this research will be shared in the form of one or more publications and verbal presentations. If you have any questions about this study, please contact me, Sarah Allen at 207-423-9518. You may also reach the faculty advisor, Dr. Christopher Strople at 207-778-7015. By signing below, I assert that I fully understand the above and give my consent to serve as a subject in this research. (If you would like a summary of the results, please make the request of the researcher at the contact given above).

(Date)

(Signature)

Appendix B - Administrator Consent

ADMINISTRATOR CONSENT FORM

Dear Erin Hansen,

As you are aware, I am working to get my masters in Educational Leadership from the University of Maine at Farmington. As the final piece, I am required to conduct a research project in the Winter and Spring of 2017. I am interested in obtaining more information regarding how to better support families during the transition period from preschool to kindergarten. For this research, I will be asking parents of preschool children to participate in a questionnaire and asking 5 of those parents to participate in an interview.

What I am asking:

- Permission to distribute questionnaires to approximately 30 preschool parents.
- Permission to interview 5 preschool parents.
- Permission to gather data from parents and then publish in a public forum at the Farmington campus.

I will:

- Inform parents of the nature of my study and obtain written consent forms from the parents.
- Inform parents that participation is voluntary and can leave the study at any time.

I will not share identifiable data about specific parents or others involved in the study.

If there are any questions about the research, you may contact the principal investigator, Sarah Allen at 207-423-9518. You may also reach the faculty advisor, Dr. Christopher Strople at 207-778-7015.

Thank you for considering my request to conduct research.

I _____ have reviewed the research plan for Kindergarten Transitions: Families Perceptions of a Kindergarten Transition Program. I give my consent to conduct this research at the Morrison Center in Scarborough, Maine. I am aware that I may also ask to view the report at the end of the study.

Date

Name

Position in District/Site

Appendix C - Parent Survey Questions

Please respond to the questions based on a rating scale of 1 to 5 by circling one of the numbers that most accurately describes your experience with 1 being strongly disagree and 5 being strongly agree.

1. I believe I have all of the information I need in order to have a successful transition to kindergarten for my child.

1 2 3 4 5

2. I wish I had more time to talk with the preschool teacher(s) and or public school teacher(s) about the transition process from preschool to kindergarten.

1 2 3 4 5

3. I believe that there should be more collaborative events among the preschool and public school that my child and I could have attended to discuss the transition process further.

1 2 3 4 5

4. The information that I did receive regarding the transition process from preschool to kindergarten was clear and discussed ways that I could support my child during this time.

1 2 3 4 5

5. I have had adequate support from my preschool center as we begin the transition process from preschool to kindergarten.

1 2 3 4 5

6. I have had adequate support from the public school during the transition process from preschool to kindergarten.

1 2 3 4 5

7. I believe that there are specific actions a preschool program and public schools can do that create a more successful transition process for children.

1 2 3 4 5

8. I feel that if there is more support during the transition process from preschool to kindergarten that my child would have a more successful learning experience for the future.

1 2 3 4 5

