



Factors that Influence Smooth Transition to Junior
Kindergarten: Outcomes of a Voluntary Parent
Program to Prepare Children for School

Final Report
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What was the purpose of the study?

The purpose of this study was to assess the outcomes of a voluntary program, Thames Valley Neighbourhood Early Learning Program, in which parents learned how to help their children adjust to school. An additional goal was to identify the key factors that are associated with the smooth transition of children to junior kindergarten. Findings from this research can help inform parents, teachers, and community partners about the important issues related to adjustment to school.

What took place?

- 1) One hundred and four parents completed a survey in Spring, 2004 about their satisfaction with a school readiness program in London, Ontario and about the activities they and their children engaged in at home and in the community prior to their children starting kindergarten.
- 2) Ninety teachers rated the readiness of junior kindergarteners in communication, math, and literacy skills as well as the amount of time children took to adjust to junior kindergarten (1 = adjusted from day 1, 2 = adjusted from first week, 3 = adjusted within first month, and 4 = still not adjusted). Three ratings of adjustment were completed: a) adjustment to classroom routines, b) social/emotional adjustment, and c) behavioural adjustment.
- 3) The results of the survey were analyzed Summer, 2004.

What did we learn about teacher's ratings of children's adjustment to junior kindergarten?

Ninety teachers rated the time it took for children to adjust to junior kindergarten. Most children (ranging from 68-78.8% across three rating scales) adjusted within the first week of school. Additional children adjusted within the first month of school (14-26.6%). Four to six percent of children had not fully adjusted following the first six months of kindergarten.

Did parent's attendance at a school readiness program influence teacher's ratings of children's adjustment to school?

Teachers rated a higher percentage of children whose parents were participants in the school readiness program as adjusting to school from the first day to within the first week than children whose parents had not attended the program. Seventy one percent of children of participants compared to 65.8% of children of non-participants were rated as adjusting to classroom routines within the first week. Eighty three percent of children of participants compared to 73% of children of non-participants were rated as adjusting

behaviourally within the first week of school. More non-participants than participants were rated by their teachers as not yet adjusted to school after a 6 month period.

Parent's ratings of the time their children needed to adjust to school generally concurred with the ratings by teachers. Seventy five percent of parents who participated compared with 70% of non-participants rated their children as adjusting within a few weeks or less. More parents of non-participants rated their children as still not adjusted to junior kindergarten 6 months from the start of school.

What factors influenced children's adjustment to junior kindergarten?

Five factors were shown to be related to children's overall adjustment to junior kindergarten (average of teacher's ratings on social routines, social/emotional adjustment, and behavioural adjustment).

Child Factors

Teacher's ratings of the readiness of children in communication skills as well as their readiness in literacy and math skills were associated with children's overall adjustment to kindergarten. Readiness was rated by teachers as 1= not prepared at all to 4 = well prepared.

Family and Environmental Factors

Three activities in which children and their families engaged at home or in the community were associated with children's adjustment to kindergarten. They were:

- a) Total number of activities children engaged in at home (e.g. helping with chores, going for a walk, playing with children outside the home).
- b) Frequency of literacy based activities at home (e.g. being read to by an adult, doing computer activities, doing crafts, drawing, or colouring).
- c) Frequency with which children visited the library with a parent.

What did parents learn from participating in a school readiness program?

Parent's responses to an open-ended question were compiled and grouped into themes. The following common themes emerged from an independent analysis by several members of the research team:

- Parents learned about activities they could do at home with their children to help with adjustment to school.
- Parents learned what their children would be taught in junior kindergarten.
- They learned about the importance of reading to their children.
- They learned about the activities that their children preferred and the community centres children liked to visit.
- Parents learned about the professionals and agencies who offered services to children in their community.

What changes did parent make as a result of attending the school readiness program in London?

The common themes that emerged included the following:

- Some parents read daily to their children after attending the program.

- Some parents completed literacy and number activities with their children (e.g. sounding out letters and identifying letters or numbers).
- Some parents reported spending time with their children and talking with their children about what to expect at school or about their preferences for activities.

What did we conclude?

Most children adjust to junior kindergarten within the first month or less of the start of school as judged by their teachers and parents. Some 4-6 percent of children take a longer time to adjust.

Children whose parents participated in the school readiness program were less likely to take a long time to adjust to junior kindergarten than children whose parents had not participated.

Parents reported learning about the expectations for their children at school, about services and programs available in the community, and about how to spend quality time doing activities their children prefer to do.

Some parents who attended the school readiness program changed their interactions and activities with their children based on what they had learned.

School adjustment and school readiness are complex and influenced by a number of child and family factors. Further study is needed to better understand the factors that may influence school adjustment.

Completed and Future Work

The study's goals proposed in the 2003-2004 application for funding to Easter Seal Society of Ontario have been completed. Research about transition to school will continue:

- 1) A second survey will be completed in February, 2005, by parents of children who entered junior kindergarten in Fall, 2004. Questions regarding social communication and competence of children will be developed and added to the survey.
- 2) Additional studies are planned for 2005-2006
 - a) A validation study will compare the ratings by parents and teachers of children's skills and adjustment to kindergarten with the performance of children on language, social, and cognitive measures.
 - b) A qualitative study will examine in depth the perceptions of parents and teachers about those skills that are most important for children's adjustment and social and academic success at school.

Dissemination activities:

Findings from this research study will be disseminated in several ways:

- a) A research report will be presented and distributed to teachers at Thames Valley District School Board, London
- b) A brief research summary will be disseminated by the Ontario Rehabilitation Research Network and by the Research Alliance for Children with Special Needs.