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ABSTRACT

Successful transition for young handicapped children into other programs depends on a variety of factors, including personnel time, development of a comprehensive transition plan, positive teacher attitudes, and careful followup. Problems in transitioning may include weak evaluation procedures, limited social capacity of handicapped students, and difficulties in adjusting to the new social environment. Administrative concerns also need to be considered, such as lack of agency cooperation resulting in service overlap and inadequate preparation of parents for separation from their children. Recommended procedures for successful transition include observational visits by the receiving teacher prior to transition, inservice and conferences for staff and parents at the beginning of the transition year, determination of competencies for entry into kindergarten, training of parents as advocates, and thorough followup services. (CL)

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Transition Practices:

When Children Move From One Program to Another

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Transition for Children:
When Young Children Move From One Program to Another

by Patricia L. Hutinger

Overview

The session provided a set of procedures for successful transition of handicapped children into other programs, whether the child is moving from a 0-3 program into a 3-5 program, or from a 3-5 program into another placement. Successful, tested procedures focused on parents' needs and wishes.

Several transition situations were also presented. Solutions reflected several factors including the receiving and sending teachers, other professionals, administrative constraints, parents' roles and the child's needs. Current research on transition was included, as well as recommendations of a panel of experts in early childhood special education.

Introduction:
Factors Related to Effective Transition

Insights into the problems, solutions and reality of procedures used to move handicapped youngsters from one program into a new one are of critical importance to those working in early childhood handicapped programs if progress demonstrated in early intervention programs is to be maintained. When future directions in programming for handicapped young children are planned, attention to the careful development and implementation of effective transition practices must be an accepted and expected part of services to children and their families.

Transition practices are defined as "those strategies and procedures which are planned and employed to insure the smooth placement and subsequent adjustment of the child as he/she moves from one program into another; for example, from an early childhood handicapped program to a regular kindergarten, a preschool room, or a primary special education classroom" (Hutinger, 1981). The results of a comprehensive Illinois study of preschool handicapped programs demonstrated that transition practices at best were isolated and fragmented in reality and at worst were nonexistent (Hutinger & Swartz, 1980). In the same study, data collected from six nationally known programs showed that they paid careful attention to follow-up procedures used in the transition process.

A variety of factors affect the quality of transition practices. The amount of time personnel have during each day to engage in the multitude of activities required in a program serving young handicapped children has an effect on the accomplishment of transition tasks. Personnel in programs for older children do not have the luxury of available time to do all the things they know need to be accomplished. However, program personnel must attend to a number of variables related to effective transitioning to insure maximal child growth. Administrative personnel as well must place a high priority on transition procedures if effective practices are to occur. Formal transition plans must be in place in both school districts and agencies, but these plans must be put into practice.

A comprehensive transition plan must consider the child's environment both prior to moving and after placement in a new program. Characteristics of the receiving teacher are related to the success of the child's transition.

A receiving teacher who is willing to work with children with handicaps is essential when children move into mainstreamed placement with regular educators. Follow-up by the sending teacher is also important. Administrative involvement and teacher training are major components in effective transition practice. Of critical importance is the involvement of the child's parents as well as expectations for the child (Hutinger, 1981).

Problems Which Affect the Quality of Transitioning Practices

The results of the study of preschool handicapped programs in Illinois (Hutinger and Swartz, 1980), which also included the responses of a group of nationally known experts in early childhood special education pointed to the following problems which affect the quality of transitioning practices.

1. There is a limited amount of time for personnel to accomplish all that needs to be done.
2. It is difficult to establish program priorities, what needs to be done first.
3. Evaluation procedures are weak, as they relate to transition.
4. Special education students who have a problem with acceptance/acceptability have a limited social capacity with peers.
5. Environmental characteristics which need to be considered include:
   A. Open and less structured classrooms cause more problems for the special student than a more rigid and structured situation.
   B. Different types of handicaps have different impacts in the classroom.
   C. A handicapped child's reaction to a typical problem may be exaggerated by others because that child is handicapped.

D. Parents may have problems accepting the child's new program change. They may feel more comfortable with the child's present placement.

6. Program personnel should attend more closely to developmental ability rather than characteristic categories such as B.D., L.D., etc.

7. Public school personnel tend to ignore personnel from preschool, day care, or Head Start programs.

Public School Administrators' Concerns on Transition into Preschool

The director of a large five county special education cooperative in Illinois and a preschool coordinator (Swanson and Black, 1982) point to a number of administrative concerns related to moving handicapped children from an agency-administered 0-3 program into the public school preschool program. Swanson and Black list the following concerns.

1. Often times parents who request birth to three programs need professional guidance in seeking kinds of service to avoid splintered approach.
2. 0-3 services seem to be based on medical support services (or mental health).
3. Parents being served by 0-3 may be advised on medical needs rather than the educational needs of the child.
4. Role of school is often not clearly defined to agency and parent of 0-3 or 0-5 child.
5. Parents usually have a very close personal contact with 0-3 because they are with the child as services are being given. However, when they enter public school programs this changes. Parents may become

distrustful because they feel they are no longer an important part of their child's program.

6. Schools often make the mistake of not developing basic curricular goals and defining the limitations of their programs.
7. Agencies work autonomously to each other rather than cooperatively, and this reflects an overlapping of services. (are we cost efficient in this). This may force parents to choose what they perceive as the "best," therefore creating a great deal of conflict in parents and among agencies.
8. Schools follow ISBE Rules and Regulations. Parents (at times) are led to believe that because 0-3 recommends it, it must be so.
9. Schools and other agencies must learn to pursue ALTERNATIVES of service and to make maximum use of a minimum of resources.
10. After the child enters school and becomes a student, the role of 0-3 worker is unclear. At times they appear to take on the role of an ADVOCATE or WATCHDOG to insure that the teacher is doing what 0-3 teachers want.
11. Can the parent shop around for services? In our area some have been led to believe they can. In Illinois the R & R's state the decision for special education services must be made at a multi-disciplinary staffing and that parents and public school personnel must reach a consensus on placement and IEP goals.
12. Separation of child from parent - we do an inadequate job of preparing parents for this and in follow-up. Need to define roles and responsibilities of all involved to achieve a smooth transition.

13. How do we look at the total child and determine priorities in relation to the long range goal of independence?

Recommended Procedures for Transition

A number of recommendations were made by the national experts that were a part of the Illinois study of preschool handicapped programs (Hutinger & Swartz, 1980). Members of the national panel suggested the following procedures and characteristics of effective transition.

1. The receiving teacher should make observational visits to the child's early childhood program prior to transition.
2. Inservice and conferences for both parents and early childhood staff need to be provided at the beginning of the transition year.
3. Parents and early childhood staff should be involved in the child's annual IEP review.
4. Competencies for entry into kindergarten and primary programs need to be determined. The criteria should influence the preschool handicapped program.
5. Smooth progression from program to program involves:
   A. Developing a good communication system between ECH programs and primary and kindergarten programs.
   B. Building transitional practices into the ECH curriculum so there is a gradual change in classroom procedures.
6. Effective coordination needs to be established between ECH programs and primary and kindergarten programs.
7. Additional training and inservice needs to be established for regular educators. The receiving teacher should know the curriculum teaching

strategies and instructional procedures which were used in the ECH class.

8. The ECH teacher should provide direct follow-up and have knowledge of available resources that can be used by the receiving teacher.
9. The child should be asked to participate in the transition choice -- he/she should be aware of the program alternatives before a final decision is made.
10. Good records on child progress is essential.
11. Administrative involvement in transition is essential.
12. Professionals working on transition need to have an integrated approach and general understanding of the work of other professionals involved with the child.
13. Parents should be trained as "advocates" for their child.
14. Follow-up procedures are of critical importance.
    A. The receiving teacher must be offered follow-up services.
    B. Child data should be provided.
    C. A follow-up time line or schedule should be established.
    D. Teachers must be provided support through the use of adjunctive ancillary services.
15. Paid, trained advocates are needed to assume the role, responsibility, activities and coordination of the transition procedure. (However, the source of funding for such an advocate is a problem).
16. Opportunities for both formal and informal interaction between sending and receiving teachers are essential for effective transition.

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