Building on Common Ground: Supporting Children through Strong Prek-K Teacher Relationships

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Leadership

is about making others better as a result of your presence and making sure that impact lasts in your absence.

–– Sheryl Sandberg
COO of Facebook
Goals for Today

- **Analyze** national data trends in relation to Prek and Kindergarten practices
- **Explore** the role of authentic alignment to support children’s speaking and listening abilities and overall success
- **Identify** and **share** effective practices to support the development of children’s speaking and listening skills for our youngest learners
- **Reflect on** the role we can play individually and systemically to insure positive school experiences for our youngest learners
What Do We Know?

- The early childhood years (birth – age 8) are the most powerful years for learning, growth and development.

- Very sensitive time for brain development.

- Development occurs in ALL domains.

- Young children need a wide variety of engaging and appropriately challenging environments and experiences during this phase.
What Do We Know?

- Children Today
  - Are technologically savvy
  - Use technology as a main means of communication & play
  - Live in a fast-paced world
  - Live in increasingly diverse communities
  - Spend more time INSIDE than OUTSIDE
  - Are more overweight than the generation before
  - Spend less time with their families than they do in child-care
  - Are exposed to more dangers and threats than their parents were as children
What Do We Know?

- Although the 21st Century brings new experiences for young children, *their developmental patterns and ways of learning have not changed*
Quiet Individual Reflection

- What do **YOU** know about how 4 & 5 year olds learn?

- What do the theories say? What does brain research say?

- What do young children need?
  - To be happy
  - To be healthy
  - To be successful

Jot your thoughts down on sticky notes
1 thought per note
BE SPECIFIC!
Creative Collaboration
“I Am 4” OR “I Am 5”

- Gather into “grade alike” small groups (*no more than 4*)
- Share & Discuss your ideas
- Sort your sticky notes
- Create a poster illustrating what your small group knows about young children who are 4 OR 5 years old
Let’s Share!
What did you notice?
Commonalities

4 year old

Both

5 year old
What Do We Know?

- Families are their children’s first teachers
- Families bring a wealth of knowledge to the table
- The culture of a family influences a child’s experiences in kindergarten
- Positive relationships between families and teachers support children’s success

(Keyser, 2006)
What Do We Know?

- **Solid Foundation of Theory**
  - Piaget
  - Dewey
  - Montessori
  - Froebel
  - Bruner
  - Vygotsky

- **Common Understanding Throughout All Theories:**
  - Young children learn skills and concepts best through *active exploration and interaction* with their environment
What Do We Know?

- **Key Foundational Processes** underlie children’s developing competence and predict success in school across the age-span from age 3 through grade 3:
  - **Executive function**: focused attention, persistence, planning, reasoning, flexible problem-solving
  - **Self-regulation**: regulating emotions, behavior, & thinking according to situation
  - **Oral Language development**
  - **Positive relationships**

(Bredenkamp, 2012)
What Do We Know?

- Research repeatedly shows that the quality of interactions between children and teachers has long lasting impacts on child development and learning.

- A positive relationship between a child and her teacher predicts school success through 5th grade.

- Relationships are constructed through meaningful language interactions.

(Pianta, 2009; Ritchie, 2013)
What Do We Know?

• The development of executive function helps children:
  – move between their own perspective and the perspective of another
  – recognize that others have needs
  – organize their own learning
  – thrive in a variety of learning environments
What Do We Know?

- The brain’s synaptic network makes connections when children...
  - Play
  - Touch
  - Think
  - Move
  - Discuss
  - Interact with each other & teachers

in an enriched learning environment where they have opportunities to be **physically, socially,** and **intellectually** immersed in learning.

(Rushton, 2001)
What Do We Know?..

- When children are actively engaged in a task, learning outcomes are strengthened.

- Classrooms function best and provide the most opportunities for learning when students are well-behaved, consistently have important things to do and are interested and engaged in learning tasks.

(Boykin & Noguera, 2011; CLASS, 2009)
What Do We Know?

- **Oral language development is key to learning**
- Children need to talk…to think out loud
- Children need opportunities to build their vocabulary through meaningful and engaging learning experiences and conversations.
What Do We Know?

- Children learn and develop best when they are a part of a community of learners – a cooperative group in which all participants consider and contribute to one another’s well-being and learning.

(Phillips & Scrinzi, 2013)
What Do We Know?

Children...

- are more highly motivated to learn
- learn more
- enjoy learning more
- feel more positive towards the subject being studied
- have increased positive regard for their teachers
- are more accepting of one another

when they work together collaboratively with peers as opposed to working competitively or individually

& Johnson, 2013)
What Do We Know?

- **Choice** in the classroom
  - Supports children’s intrinsic motivation to learn
  - Encourages children to learn from each other
  - Draws on different strengths, abilities and interests
  - Maximizes children’s learning
  - Gives meaningful practice

(Bredekamp & Copple, 1996; Hendrick, 1996; Deci & Ryan, 2002; American Psychology Association, 1997; Gardner, 2007)
What Do We Know?

- When we offer children choices, we are allowing them to practice the skills of *independence* and *responsibility*, while we guard their health and safety by *controlling and monitoring the options*.

(Maxim, 1997)
What Do We Know?

- Children develop in four domains—physical, cognitive, social, and emotional—and not at the same pace through each. No two children are the same; each child has a unique rate of development. In addition, no two children have the same family, cultural, and experiential backgrounds.

- Assessment is challenging during early childhood because a child’s development is rapid, uneven, episodic, and highly influenced by the environment.

(Guddemi & Case, 2004)
What Do We Know?

- The expression of what young children know and can do would best be served in ways other than traditional paper and pencil assessments.

- A “one-size-fits-all” assessment will not meet the needs of most young children.

(Guddemi & Case, 2004)
What Do We Know?

- The research is consistent…

**Teachers must be intentional** in the way they interact with children during their *play*…as they work to provide effective and appropriate instruction supported with observation-based assessment while interacting with children in engaging learning environments.
What Do We Know?

- “The importance of play to young children’s healthy development and learning has been documented beyond question by research. Yet play is rapidly disappearing from kindergarten and early education as a whole.”

Miller & Almon, 2009
The Crisis in the Kindergarten Report
What Do We Know?

“research shows that *pretend play* strengthens capacities, including sustained attention, memory, logical reasoning, language and literacy skills, imagination, creativity, understanding of emotions, and the ability to reflect on one’s own thinking, inhibit impulses, control one’s behavior, and take another person’s perspective…”

*DAP p. 132*
And yet…there’s a problem!
Importance of PreK/K Alignment
What do the data say???

EDUSNAP

- Minute-by-minute experiences of children through the course of a day
- 27 variables
- Random selection of 4 children (2 boys, 2 girls)
- Analyzes amount of time in activity settings, engagement, academic content
PreK and Kindergarten Activity Settings

**Pre-K**
- Choice: 54%
- Whole Group: 17%
- Meals: 12%
- Individual: 3%
- Small Group: 6%
- Group Work: 0%

**Kindergarten**
- Choice: 19%
- Whole Group: 30%
- Meals: 9%
- Individual: 17%
- Group Work: 2%
- Small Group: 3%
- Transitions: 20%
What are the implications?
Prek or Kindergarten?
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What do you NOTICE?
Important elements of ALIGNMENT

**STANDARDS**
What children are expected to know and do.

Standards are set by states and describe the skills and competencies students should develop by the end of each grade.

**CURRICULA**
What children are taught.

Classroom experiences that support state standards and the state’s early learning developmental guidelines.

**INSTRUCTION**
How children are taught.

Teachers at every level who are trained in child development and prepared to provide experiences that meet children’s developmental needs.

**ASSESSMENTS**
What and how children's progress is measured.

Assessments that inform instruction and are based on standards that measure what children have been taught.

Activity: What Do You Wish You Knew?

- What do you wish you knew about the other grade level that would help you be a more intentional teacher?
  - As a Pre-K teacher, what are the things you wish you knew from the kindergarten teacher’s perspective?
  - As a K teacher, what are the things you wish you knew from the pre-k teacher’s perspective?
  - As an administrator, what questions do you have about Prek and K practices?

- Jot down your ideas & questions
Shoulder to Shoulder

• When the music starts, begin walking around the room.
• When the music stops, raise your hand signal:
  - Prek: Thumbs up
  - K: High Five
  - Admin: Peace Sign
• Find a partner that is NOT job-alike and share 1 question you wrote down.
From Martin to Beaufort: My Transition
Prek-1st Grade

Welcome to Eastern Elementary
Observations

- Prek and K teachers did not communicate
- Had misperceptions about one another’s standards
- Prek felt there was pressure to push academics
- Prek understood formative assessment tool (TS Gold) and K was just learning the process for KEA
- Both groups needed PD on center/play-based learning and appropriate practices with a focus on skillful questioning
PreK-K Collaborative PD

Foundations for Early Learning and Development-NC Standard Course of Study Crosswalk

- **Goal APL-6:** Children use a variety of strategies to solve problems.
- **Indicators:**
  - APL-6n: Describe the steps they will use to solve a problem.
  - APL-6o: Evaluate different strategies for solving a problem and select the strategy they feel will work without having to try it.
  - APL-6p: Explain how they solved a problem to another person.
  - APL-6q: Seek and make use of ideas and help from adults and peers to solve problems (“how can I make this paint get off my pants?”).
- Monitor and evaluate their progress and change course if necessary.
- Check their answers to problems using a different method, and they continually ask themselves, “Does this make sense?”
- Understand the approaches of others to solving complex problems and identify correspondences between different approaches.
Table Activity Example:
Formative Assessment and Standards

- With your table group, observe the picture of children working with blocks.
- Discuss possible learning that is being demonstrated based upon the children’s work.
- What questions might you ask the child to probe deeper into their understanding?
- Link possible learning to Foundations or Common Core/Essential Standards. Write possible learning goals on the chart paper provided.
Modeling Best Practice Through PD
Modeling Best Practice Through PD
Modeling Best Practice Through PD
Modeling Best Practice Through PD
Reaping the Rewards

- Walls of communication began coming down

- K teachers began to visit Prek teachers; planned meaningful transition activities (class visits, included each other in parent info nights, etc.)

- Transition planning for students with special needs took place

- Teachers began sharing ideas and practices began to align across grades

- Prek included TS Gold reports in folders that transitioned to K and K teachers ACTUALLY looked at them!!!

- First grade began to wonder why they weren’t involved!!!
More Observations…

- Lots of time where children were working independently even when the work was designed in stations
- Lots of paper-pencil activities
- Questions from teachers stopped short of leading children to metacognitive thinking
Growing this Idea Upwards

- 1st grade teachers began to ask how they could incorporate more active learning in their instruction

- K teachers began to talk with 1st grade teachers about students in meaningful ways as well as supporting families in transitions

- Round 2 of the professional development series began
Focus on the Predictors

- Small group instruction
- Peer collaboration
- Oral Language Development
- Vocabulary Development
- Early Math Concepts
- Scaffolded Instruction
- Metacognition
STEAM in the Early Years
STEAM in the Early Years
STEAM in the Early Years
PD +
Collaboration +
Permission to Take Risks
=
....
Opportunities for High Level Thinking, Collaboration, and Oral Language Development
Teachers Valuing Children Talking and Striving to Reach Metacognitive Thinking
Sharing Our School’s Vision

- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gr-JGM-Fpw8](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gr-JGM-Fpw8)
What Will You Do About It?

Part 1

- Jot down what you are already doing in your classroom/school that demonstrates aligned practices and helps insure smooth transitions for children.

- Write down next steps for improving alignment in your classroom and/or school.

Part 2

- Turn and Talk

- Share with your shoulder partner what you are already doing. Then share what your next steps will be.
Share Out!

time to share
How Can I/We…

- Improve the alignment of appropriate practices from Prek to K?
- Insure the continued development of children’s oral language and speaking & listening skills from Prek forward?

What is the first step???
It Starts with a Conversation!
Favorite Resources

1. Basics of Developmentally Appropriate Practice
2. Developmentally Appropriate Practice
3. Negotiating Standards in the Primary Classroom
4. First School
5. Teaching Kindergarten
6. Developmentally Appropriate Practice: Focus on Kindergartners
7. Is Everybody Ready for Kindergarten?
Favorite Resources:

- Developmentally Appropriate Practice: Focus on Preschoolers
- The Intentional Teacher: Choosing the Best Strategies for Young Children's Learning
- Play: The Foundation that Supports the House of Higher Learning
- Making and Tinkering: Solving Design Challenges With Young Children
- Roots & Wings: Affirming Culture in Early Childhood Programs
- Expressing Creativity in Preschool
Favorite Resources

- **Purposeful Play**: A Teacher’s Guide to Igniting Deep & Joyful Learning Across the Day
- **Saving PLAY**: Addressing Standards through Play-Based Learning In Preschool and Kindergarten
- **Developmentally Appropriate PLAY**: Guiding Young Children to a Higher Level
- **Planning for PLAY, Observation, and Learning**: in Preschool and Kindergarten
- **choice time**: How to Deepen Learning Through Inquiry and Play
- **Developmentally Appropriate Practice**: Focus on Children in First, Second, and Third Grades
NC Online Resources

- NC Guide for the Early Years, Second Edition
  

- NC Office of Early Learning
  
  http://www.earlylearning.nc.gov/Kindergarten2Grade3/Kindergarten.asp
  
  http://www.earlylearning.nc.gov/Kindergarten2Grade3/resources.asp
  
Online Resources

• The Crisis in the Kindergarten Report

• ASCD, The Whole Child Initiative
  http://www.ascd.org/whole-child.aspx

• ASCD, The Whole Child Initiative, What Works
  http://www.wholechildeducation.org/what-works

• ASCD, The Whole Child Initiative, Making The Case
  http://www.wholechildeducation.org/take-action/making-the-case
Online Resources

• *FirstSchool*, Frank Porter Graham Child Development Institute, Chapel Hill, NC

  http://firstschool.fpg.unc.edu/

  http://firstschool.fpg.unc.edu/firstschool-briefs-firstschool-learning-environments-supporting-relationships

  http://firstschool.fpg.unc.edu/node/99
Online Resources

• National PreK-3rd Grade Workgroup: PreK-3rd Every Year Matters
  http://prek-3rdgradenationalworkgroup.org/node/1

• Reducing the Achievement Gap by 4th Grade Webinar Series
Online Resources

• Center on the Developing Child, Harvard
  • Executive Function
    http://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/reports_and_working_papers/working_papers/wp11/
  • Other Reports and Working Papers
    http://developingchild.harvard.edu/resources/reports_and_working_papers/

• Jensen Learning (Eric Jensen) – Teaching with the Brain in Mind
  http://www.jensenlearning.com/
Online Resources

- NCAEYC Milestones Journal Articles
  - NC’s PreK & K Demonstration Program article pg. 2
  - Centers in K pg. 19

Video Resources

• New Jersey Department of Education
  • Video Series: High Quality Kindergarten Today

High-Quality Kindergarten Today is a 3-part series that highlights best practices in kindergarten based on the comprehensive NJ Kindergarten Implementation Guidelines. Throughout the series, Dr. Dorothy Strickland, Rutgers University Education Professor, Emerita, talks about developmentally appropriate teaching practices in the kindergarten classroom.

• http://www.nj.gov/education/ece/k/hqktoday/
For more support
or
just to keep in touch

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