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KINDERGARTEN TEACHERS' KNOWLEDGE AND PERCEPTIONS OF EARLY LEARNING-RELATED SKILLS AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

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Abstract : Historically, the kindergarten curriculum emphasized social-emotional development including interpersonal and learning-related (L-R) skills (Logue, 2007). Since the implementation of No Child Left Behind (2002), the kindergarten curriculum has incorporated more academic standards and goals (Fantuzzo et al., 2007) thereby decreasing time to address L-R skills. A triangulation mixed methods design was utilized to investigate pre-NCLB to post-NCLB kindergarten teachers' perceptions of the effect of L-R skills on academic achievement. A sample (N=97) of certified kindergarten teachers with one or more years of kindergarten experience was administered surveys. Concurrently, 30 participants from the larger sample participated in the qualitative (individual interviews) phase of the study. It was hypothesized that all teachers would rate L-R skills as precursors to academic achievement; however, pre-NCLB teachers would rate L-R skills as more important than their peers. The quantitative results suggested that there were no difference in kindergarten teachers' perceptions of the importance of L-R skills. There also were no significant differences in how kindergarten teachers rated the importance of school readiness skill constructs (L-R, interpersonal, academic). However, when asked to rank these skills regarding importance, there were significant differences between the two groups with pre-NCLB teachers identifying interpersonal skills as more important to school readiness than post-NCLB teachers and post-NCLB teachers indicating academic skills as more important than pre- NCLB teachers. No significant differences were found between the groups in regards to teachers' beliefs about achievement or teacher efficacy. Qualitative data revealed level 2 codes (follows directions, listens, sits still, stays on task, works cooperatively in groups, tells needs and thoughts, motivation) describing the L-R skills that teachers identified as important for school readiness. Nine level 2 codes (builds confidence and motivation, foundation, helps access kindergarten curriculum, head start, increase learning capacity, not a determining factor, puts them behind, rate of learning, supports classroom management) emerged to describe teachers' perceptions of L-R skills effects on academic achievement. Qualitative findings also revealed possible explanations for the lack of significance found between these two groups regarding the importance of L-R skills.

Keywords: perception, academic achievement

INTRODUCTION

High-stakes testing is a growing phenomenon in today's public education system. Education policies (e.g., No Child Left Behind Act [NCLB], 2002) and programs (e.g., Head Start, Georgia Student Assessment Program) have emphasized the importance of standardized assessments and the consequences for all stakeholders (e.g., schools, administrators, teachers, students) based on student performance (Urrieta, 2004). This use of high-stakes testing has now been extended to the earlier grades. As a result, early childhood educators may feel pressure to focus more time and effort on academic instruction, leaving less time for other developmentally important areas such as socialemotional development. There is a wealth of literature indicating the importance of social-emotional development to early school adjustment and long-term success of young children; therefore, it is imperative that early childhood educators continue to enhance the growth of social-emotional as well as academic skills for children in their classrooms.

High-stakes testing in public education dates back more than a century and emphasis on this phenomenon in schools today continues to expand. From the tracking programs of the early 1900's that utilized intelligence tests to identify students to receive

either academic or vocational programming (Sacks, 2000) to the Head Start program evaluations of the 1960s and the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Act resulting in NCLB (2001), policymakers have used highstakes testing as an accountability tool to impact teaching and learning in our schools. Proponents of high-stakes testing have indicated that its purpose is twofold, to improve instruction and to increase student achievement (Amrein-Beardsley, 2009; Smith, 2005). Current educational policies such as NCLB (2001) require school districts receiving federal aid to adopt curricular standards that will guide academic content and align with the state's annual high-stakes assessments (Schmidt, 2008). By attaching rewards and/or sanctions to the results of these mandated tests, policymakers are able to influence curriculum content and instructional practices. As a result, teachers are expected to adjust their instruction to prepare students for the impending test to avoid a range of consequences for poor student performance on these high-stake measures.

Policymakers also utilize these assessments as accountability tools to determine which schools are making adequate yearly progress (AYP; NCLB, 2001) in educating students and raising student academic performance (Haertel & Herman, 2005). These accountability practices have become increasingly intense, with the promise of more stringent student consequences for low student performance (Schmidt, 2008) including student placement in a lower track, course failure, and/or grade retention. Teachers may also fear being placed on a professional development plan or losing their jobs as a result of low student test scores. Finally, schools and school districts may receive sanctions, such as being required to dismiss staff, implement a new curricular program, loss of funding, takeover by the state, or conversion into a charter school.

Historically, the focus of pre-school and/or early education programs (i.e., childcare, preschool, and kindergarten) was on social-emotional development. The pre-school and kindergarten classroom environments were places where children would be taught social and interpersonal skills which are prerequisites for students to fully and successfully participate in group and instructional settings (Logue, 2007). The social-emotional skills taught prepared students for classroom expectations needed to yield positive academic outcomes (Logue, 2007). Classroom activities focused on teaching students to share objects and attention, take turns, resolve conflicts with peers incorporating adult assistance, participate in group activities, and adjust to different routines and a new set of rules (Logue, 2007). However, as a result of high-stakes testing practices migrating down to the preschool and elementary years (e.g., Head Start Reporting System, Georgia Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills [GKIDS]) a focus on the development of students' pre-academic, academic, and cognitive skills has occurred thereby decreasing the amount of time focused on social-emotional instruction (Logue, 2007).

Social-emotional skills are an important part of school readiness. Many studies have found that educators reported that healthy social-emotional development is a critical aspect of school readiness. According to studies conducted across the country with kindergarten teachers, children need to be able to follow directions, not be disruptive, express their needs and ideas, and take turns and share in order to successfully navigate the kindergarten routine. Griffin (2007) examined the relationship between 267 kindergarten children's (46% girls; 62% White and 38% African American) work-related classroom behavior and their entry-level achievement. Students' workrelated skills were measured by teachers report on the Cooper-Farran Behavioral Rating Scale, administered in the fall of kindergarten. Students were administered a battery of achievement tests at the beginning of kindergarten, consisting of the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test-Revised (PPVT-R) and the Peabody Individual Achievement Test-Revised (PIAT-R), as well as the StanfordBinet Intelligence Scale. The results revealed that work-related skills positively related to school readiness and students' ability to succeed in early academic subjects, when other demographics, such as cognitive ability and mother's education were controlled.

There is a wealth of research that points to the positive relationship of socialemotional skills to future school success (i.e., academic achievement) Two important studies investigating the relationship of early social-emotional skills as it relates to school readiness to future academic performance were conducted by tested 184 students at the end of kindergarten using the Early Prevention of School Failure screening package and the Social Skills Rating Scale (SSRS; Gresham & Elliott, 2010). The students were then administered the Stanford Achievement Test a year later. Information about promotion and retention were gathered at the end of each school year. Results of the study revealed that two social skill areas, cooperation and self-control, predicted first grade academic success as well as promotion and retention in kindergarten and first grade. McClelland, Acock, and Morrison (2006) found a positive relationship between kindergarten learning-related skills to reading and math trajectories in 538 children between kindergarten and sixth grade. Learning-related skills include selfregulation and social competence. Latent growth curves revealed that learning-related skills, measured by teacher ratings on the Cooper-Farran Behavioral Rating Scales, had a positive unique effect on children's reading and math scores between kindergarten and sixth grade and further predicted positive growth in reading and math between kindergarten and second grade. The study also found that students with poor learning-related skills performed lower than their higher-rated peers on reading and mathematics measures between kindergarten and sixth grade.

Social-emotional adjustment has been found to be a foundational competency linked to early school adjustment study of 1,764 urban Head Start students, age 44 to 81 months, investigated dimensions of social-emotional classroom behavior (e.g., approaches to learning, problem behavior) as it relates to early school adjustment. Fantuzzo and colleagues examined the unique contribution of approaches to learning and emotional and behavioral adjustment (i.e., social-emotional or early school adjustment) to student academic achievement. The Adjustment Scales for Preschool Intervention and the Preschool Learning Behavior Scale (PLBS; McDermott, Green, Francis, & Stott, 2000) were both administered in early fall. Results revealed two distinct and reliable higher order dimensions of classroom adjustment behavior: Regulated Behavior and Academically Disengaged Behavior. The Regulated Behavior factor consisted of high positive loadings for the Attention/Persistence and Attitude Toward Learning PLBS scales and negative loadings for Aggressive and Inattentive/Hyperactive ASPI scales. The Academically Disengaged Behavior factor consisted of positive loadings for Withdrawn/Low Energy and Socially Reticent ASPI scales and a negative loading for Competence/Motivation PLBS scale. Both dimensions contributed positive unique variance to the prediction of early mathematic ability and general classroom competencies before kindergarten entry, controlling for demographics of the child. In addition, the findings indicated that each dimension contributed independently to the prediction of academic risk, controlling for child demographics.

Rimm-Kaufman et al. (2000) conducted a survey of a nationally representative group of kindergarten teachers (N = 3595) who indicated that their number one concern for incoming students was a failure to follow directions followed by behavior concerns and finally academic difficulties. In addition, research highlights the need for early intervention with children who are exhibiting

significant social-emotional difficulties. According to a survey conducted by the National Center for Early Development and Learning with kindergarten teachers, 46% of the teachers surveyed reported that more than half of their students enter school lacking self-regulatory skills and emotional and social competence to function successfully and learn in kindergarten. With the change in focus seen in many early childhood education programs, the concern is that the structure of these settings may not provide a sufficient foundation for young children's future academic growth. Further many research studies conducted over the last two decades indicated that the key attributes of social-emotional behavior in the classroom are malleable and easily influenced by intervention programs. These studies have found that social-emotional competencies such as prosocial behaviors, aggression control, emotional understanding, social-problem solving skills, and learning engagement can be developed through systematic instructional approaches in the classroom as is seen in many social and emotional learning (SEL) programs. For example, a study conducted with 67 kindergarten students examined the effects of the "Strong Start" curriculum on social and emotional competence using a time-series design (Kramer, Caldarella, Christensen, & Shatzer, 2010). Teachers and parents completed behavior rating scales for each student on four separate occasions, twice before the intervention (pre) with a 6-week interval between them, and twice following the intervention (post) also with a 6-week interval between them. The curriculum was made up of ten lessons covering topics such as recognizing one's own and others' feelings, handling anger and anxiety, being a friend, and solving problems. Topics were taught through direct instruction, example scenarios, and role-play activities. A stuffed animal was used as a mascot to enhance scenarios and role play. The program used popular children's literature to explore the topics and guide discussions. The findings revealed gains in students' prosocial behaviors and decreases in internalizing behaviors as rated by both teachers and parents (Kramer et al., 2010).

Statement of Problem

The study aimed to assess the Kindergarten teachers' knowledge and perceptions of early learning-related skills and their relationship to academic achievement in District VI of Division of Manila during the school year 2023-2024.

Specifically, it sought answers to the following sub-problems:

1. What is the level of importance of Kindergarten teachers' knowledge and perceptions of early learning-related skills and their relationship to academic achievement in terms of the following:
   - 1.1 learning-related skills to learners' school readiness;
   - 1.2 the relative importance of types of skills (i.e., learning related, academic, or interpersonal) that relate to a learner's school readiness;
   - 1.3 the relative importance of specific skills that relate to a learner's future academic success;
   - 1.4 school achievement; and
   - 1.5 efficacy in teaching learning-related skills.
2. Is there a significant difference between the groups?
3. What is the level of parents' perceptions regarding the importance of learning-related skills to learners' school readiness and academic achievement?
4. What is the level of parents' perceptions about the role of teachers in supporting the development of learning-related skill?
5. Based on the findings, what professional development program can be proposed to enhance the Kindergarten teachers' knowledge of early learning-related skills?

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presents the methodology which includes the research design, the sources of data that involved the locale of the study, the research population, the instrumentation and the tools for data analysis.

Research Design

Qualitative methodology was used to analyze the interviews. A multi-stage approach to qualitative data collection, analysis, and interpretation were used. The stages implemented were consistent with the deductive-inductive approach and the principles of grounded theory. Grounded theory is a simultaneous, recursive process of data collection, coding, conceptualizing, and theorizing based on constant comparison of the collected data. The grounded theory approach is structured in a manner that allows important constructs regarding kindergarten teachers' understanding of the importance learning-related skills to emerge from the perspectives of pre- and post- No Child Left Behind (NCLB) kindergarten teachers. The stages of the current study's qualitative analysis consisted of preparation, making decisions about the coding process, preparing coders, coding the data (deductive, inductive), and theme/pattern analysis. Further, inter-coder agreement methods, interpretation procedures, and processes to ensure trustworthiness were implemented.

Source of Data

The research was conducted using the Kindergarten teachers from District VI of Division of Manila during the school year 2023-2024.

Instrumentation and Data Collection

Preparation. In preparation for the study, the researcher immersed herself in the literature surrounding the topic of kindergarten parents' perceptions of learning-related skills and its relationship to academic achievement. Once the interviews were conducted they were transcribed and uploaded to the computer for coding. The researcher reviewed the interviews in detail and added reflections to the margins of the transcript to facilitate data analysis and development of codes.

Deductive-Inductive Coding. Deductive-Inductive coding was implemented. First, the data were reviewed and a deductive approach to coding was used. Deductive coding refers to the process through which codes are developed from preexisting theory and research. Then inductive coding was implemented to capture data that did not fit into the preexisting constructs found in the literature. During this process, the researcher conducted a line-by-line analysis of the transcribed interviews and developed codes of the participants' responses. The responses were entered into a qualitative software package and placed under appropriate codes and subcodes, describing its content and expressing their unique points. A research team committee member (school psychology doctoral student) and a PhD level school psychologist simultaneously use the developed code book to code an interview in an effort to build consensus. Coders met frequently to compare and analyze each other's breakdown of the data. During this

consensus building process, definitions were developed, concepts and categories were discussed and codes were revised. This process continued until agreement was reached on the codes to be included. The coding of each interview was compared and the agreements and disagreements discussed. This process was used to refine the coding manual and clarify code definitions. As a result, the coding manual was revised numerous times as the coders worked to establish a consensus. Each set of revisions was documented in a coding manual, notes were added indicating the reasoning for the changes made providing an audit trail of the team's coding process.

Inter-coder Agreement. In coding the interviews, inter-coder agreement was sought. The initial nine interviews were coded by two individuals. The coding of the interviews was conducted separately by the researcher and a PhD level school psychologist. The coded interviews were then compared for inter-coder agreement and discrepancies were resolved. The two individuals reviewed the interview transcriptions together and agreed upon appropriate codes. This process allowed the coders to reach a shared understanding and identify the issues in the application of the codes. Through this method several codes were revised or eliminated. This practice was continued until a mean score of 85% or better agreement was reached. Agreement of 85% or above between coders was reached by the third interview and a mean score of at least 85% was reached by the 9th interview (M = 85.12%). The remaining interviews were coded by the researcher, while the second coder reviewed the codes for agreement to ensure consistent application of the codes and avoid coder drift. Inter-rater reliability for coder drift was maintained above 90%.

Trustworthiness. Several techniques were implemented to ensure trustworthiness. Trustworthiness indicates the extent to which one can have confidence in the study's findings. In this study, a combined use of deductive and inductive coding and inter-coder agreement was utilized to assist researchers in monitoring theoretical sensitivity (i.e., biases to meaning and data based on knowledge and experience). In addition, the researchers utilized an audit trail (i.e., a detailed recording of the coding and analysis procedures) to ensure dependability (reliability) and confirmability (objectivity) of findings. In addition, the researcher used triangulation in data interpretation to take full advantage of having multiple data sources. Using multiple data sources in interpretation ensures a richer, more robust account of the findings. Furthermore, examples and direct quotes from the interviews were reported to support key findings and to manage the threats to trustworthiness. These procedures utilized in qualitative research to establish rigor are an important way to increase our confidence that the voice of the participants is heard.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter presents the data gathered, their analysis and interpretation in answer to the different sub raised in this study.

Data were analyzed based upon research questions. Descriptive and inferential statistics were employed to describe and examine pre- and post-NCLB teachers' perceptions regarding: a) the importance of learning-related skills to students' school readiness; b) the relative importance of types of skills (i.e., learning related, academic, or interpersonal) that relate to a student's school readiness; c) the relative importance of specific skills that relate to a student's future academic success; d) school achievement; and e) efficacy in teaching learning-related skills. Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to simultaneously test for differences between groups. If findings yielded significant results, univariate analyses of variance (ANOVA) were conducted to determine where differences existed. In addition, qualitative analysis was used to further analyze teachers' perceptions regarding the importance of learning-related skills to students' school readiness and academic achievement. Finally, teachers' perceptions about their role in supporting the development of learning-related skill were examined qualitatively.

Research Question 1: How do pre-NCLB (No Child Left Behind) kindergarten teachers compare to post-NCLB kindergarten teachers with respect to their perceptions of the importance of learningrelated skills to students' school readiness?

Table 1 presents the means and standard deviations for pre- (n=30) and postNCLB (n=30) kindergarten teacher perceptions of learning-related skills indicated on question 1of the Learning-Related Skills survey. The differences between these two group's perceptions of the importance of learning-related skills to students' school readiness were tested via multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA). The teachers' years of kindergarten experience (i.e., pre-NCLB or post-NCLB teacher) served as the independent variables while learning-related skills (i.e., seven learning-related items indicated on survey question one) served as the dependent variables. The results indicated no significant difference in pre- and post-NCLB teachers' perceptions of the importance of learning-related skills to students' school readiness, Wilk's = 0.962, F (7, 89) = .504, p > .05; partial ε2 = .04. These findings contradict Hypothesis 1.

Table 1

Means and Standard Deviations of Pre- and Post-No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Kindergarten Teachers' Perceptions of the Importance of Learning-related Skills to School Readiness

Item	pre-NCLB (n = 30) M/(SD)	post-NCLB (n = 30) M/(SD)	Total (N = 30) M/(SD)
Follows directions	4.50 (0.67)	4.34 (0.71)	4.41 (0.69)
Participates appropriately in groups	3.93 (0.87)	3.91 (0.77)	3.92 (0.81)
Sits still and alert	3.57 (1.04)	3.58 (0.93)	3.58 (0.98)
Finishes tasks	3.66 (1.06)	3.64 (0.86)	3.65 (0.95)
Staying on task	3.93 (0.79)	3.94 (0.89)	3.94 (0.84)
Tells needs/thoughts	4.16 (0.91)	4.04 (0.76)	4.09 (0.83)
Organizing work materials	2.89 (0.90)	3.00 (0.88)	2.95 (0.88)

Table 2
Means and Standard Deviations of Pre- and Post-NCLB (No Child Left Behind) Kindergarten Teachers' Rankings of School Readiness Skills

Item	pre-NCLB (n = 30) M/(SD)	post-NCLB (n = 30) M/(SD)	M/(SD)
Names colors & shapes (A)	0.43 (1.13)	0.25 (0.88)	0.33 (1.00)
Uses pencils & brushes (A)	0.20 (0.70)	0.34 (0.96)	0.28 (0.85)
Problem solving skills (A)	1.27 (1.74)	1.72 (2.10)	1.52 (1.95)
Knows most alphabet (A)	0.84 (1.40)	1.26 (1.95)	1.07 (1.73)
Counts to 20 or more	(A) 0.25 (0.82)	0.26 (0.79)	0.26 (0.83)
Read simple words (A)*	0.16 (0.57)	0.70 (1.55)	0.45 (1.23)
Is not disruptive (I)*	2.20 (2.00)	1.09 (1.66)	1.60 (1.89)
Shares appropriately (I)	0.09 (0.47)	0.13 (0.62)	0.11 (0.56)
Sensitive to others (I)	0.11 (0.39)	0.15 (0.69)	0.13 (0.57)
Interacting positively with peers (I)*	1.30 (1.58)	0.55 (1.05)	0.89 (1.36)
Follows directions (L)	3.93 (1.66)	3.38 (1.76)	3.63 (1.73)
Participates appropriately in groups(L)	1.20 (1.40)	1.08 (1.44)	1.13 (1.42)
Sits still and alert (L)	0.59 (1.30)	0.62 (1.39)	0.61 (1.34)
Finishes tasks (L)	0.36 (0.99)	0.36 (0.81)	0.36 (0.89)
Staying on task (L)*	0.82 (1.26)	1.62 (1.78)	1.26 (1.61)
Tells needs/thoughts (L)	1.20 (1.77)	0.98 (1.41)	1.08 (1.58)
Organizing work materials (L)*	0.02 (0.15)	0.26 (0.76)	0.15 (0.58)

Note. A = Academic skill; I = Interpersonal skill; L = Learning-related skill. Adapted from Lin, H.-L., Lawrence, F. R., Gorrell, J. (2003). Kindergarten teachers' views of children's readiness for school. Early Childhood Research Quarterly, 18, 225-237. *p<.05.

ε 2 =.148, power = .980; and Academic Borda count, F (1, 95) = 4.050, p <.05, partial ε2 = .041, power = .513.

Table 3
Means and Standard Deviations of Pre- and Post-NCLB (No Child Left Behind) Kindergarten Teachers' Rankings of Certain Skill Constructs

Item	pre-NCLB (n = 30) M/(SD)	post-NCLB (n = 30) M/(SD)	M/(SD)
Learning-Related Borda	1.16 (0.38)	1.19 (0.46)	1.18 (0.42)
Academic Borda	0.53 (0.50)	0.76 (0.60)	0.65 (0.57)
Interpersonal Borda	0.93 (0.59)	0.48 (0.49)	0.68 (0.58)

As seen in Table 3, the results revealed that pre-NCLB teachers (M = .93) ranked interpersonal skills as more important to school readiness than did postNCLB teachers (M = .48). In addition, post-NCLB teachers (M = .76) ranked academic skills as more important to school readiness than did pre-NCLB teachers (M = .53).

Research Question 3: How do pre-NCLB kindergarten teachers compare to post-NCLB kindergarten teachers with respect to their perceptions of the relative importance of types of skills (i.e., learning-related, academic, or interpersonal) that relate to a student's school readiness?

To examine a comparison of pre-NCLB and post-NCLB kindergarten teachers' perceptions of the relative importance of certain skill constructs (i.e., learning-related, academic, or interpersonal) to students' school readiness a MANOVA was conducted. The teachers' years of kindergarten experience (i.e., pre-NCLB or post-NCLB teacher) served as the independent variables and the skill constructs, learning-related, academic, and interpersonal skills, served as the dependent variables. The results of the MANOVA revealed that there was not a significant difference in how pre- and post-NCLB kindergarten teachers perceived the importance of school readiness skills, Wilk's = 0.984, F (3, 93) = .491, p > .05; partial ε2 = .016.

Table 5
Means and Standard Deviations of Pre- and Post-NCLB (No Child Left Behind) Kindergarten Teachers' Perceptions of the Importance of Certain Skill Constructs

Item	pre-NCLB (n = 44) M/(SD)	post-NCLB (n = 53) M/(SD)	Total (N = 97) M/(SD)
Learning-related	3.81 (0.69)	3.78 (0.59)	3.79 (0.63)
Academic	3.58 (0.84)	3.59 (0.78)	3.59 (0.80)
Interpersonal	3.84 (0.70)	3.73 (0.61)	3.78 (0.65)

Table 5
Beliefs About School Achievement (BASA) Scale

Item	pre-NCLB (n = 30) M/(SD)	post-NCLB (n = 30) M/(SD)	M/(SD)
Child Ability	2.87 (0.69)	2.78 (0.77)	2.82 (0.73)
Child Effort	3.13 (0.60)	3.17 (0.57)	3.15 (0.59)
Family	3.18 (0.73)	2.97 (0.68)	3.07 (0.71)
Teachers	3.97 (0.60)	4.00 (0.52)	3.98 (0.55)
Efficacy	3.73 (0.40)	3.58 (0.38)	3.65 (0.39)

The Relationship of Learning-Related Skills to Academic Achievement

Learning-related skills play a significant role in the attainment of academic achievement. These skills have been found to affect both early school success (McClelland et al., 2006) and future academic outcomes. Learning-related skills are linked to a child's academic success by providing the foundation for positive classroom behavior and setting the stage for later social behavior and academic performance. Research findings further indicated that kindergarten students who entered school with limited learning-related skills were at greater risk for low levels of academic achievement. Individual aspects of learning-related skills, such as attention, self-regulation participation, independence, and cooperation have yielded a positive relationship with various aspects of academic achievement. Researchers reported that children who had difficulty regulating their attention, emotions, and/or behavior showed lower academic achievement than their more regulated peers longitudinal study of 200 kindergarteners revealed that negative emotionality and poor self-regulation early in the year affected the types (e.g., prosocial, antisocial) of interpersonal relationships they developed with their peers and teachers. Data were collected through observations and socio-metric rating procedures and classroom-based interpersonal relationships (e.g., teacher-child, mutual friendships, peer acceptance) were found to predict the students' end-of-year achievement levels on standardized tests because of their relationship with students' classroom participation. Children with more friends, greater peer acceptance, and closer teacher-child relationships tended to exhibit higher levels of classroom participation and achievement.

Perceptions of Kindergarten Teachers about the Importance of Learning-Related Skills

Over the last several decades, studies investigating kindergarten teachers' perceptions revealed that teachers find learning-related skills important to student success in kindergarten. Through the use of large-scale surveys, studies found that kindergarten teachers reported learning-related skills as critical to school readiness and early school success. According to researchers, learning-related skills were perceived by teachers to set the stage for students to be able to engage in academic activities and as prerequisites to sustained academic performance (Dockett & Perry, 2002).

Similar teacher perceptions about the importance of learning-related skills were found in two longitudinal studies of nationally representative group of kindergarten teachers (Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta, & Cox, 2000; Lin et al. 2003). The first study consisted of 3,595 kindergarten teachers who indicated that their number one concern for incoming students was the ability to follow directions, followed by behavior concerns, and finally, academic difficulties.The participants of the next study (Lin et al., 2003) included 3305 kindergarten teachers from the Early Childhood Longitudinal Study- Kindergarten cohort. The findings revealed that kindergarten teachers viewed the social aspects of learning (e.g., tells wants and thoughts, 83.9%; not disruptive of the class, 78.6%; follows directions, 77.5%; and takes turns and shares, 73.6%) as a higher priority than academic skill development (e.g., counts to 20 or more, 14.6%; knows most of the alphabet, 21.4%; names colors and shapes, 32.3%; and uses pencils, brushes, 36.0%).

Teachers' Perceptions of Efficacy in Learning-Related Skills Instruction

It is important to consider teachers' level of efficacy in particular areas of instruction as it has been found to contribute to school-based curriculum implementation (Ransford et al., 2009). Teacher efficacy is defined as an individual's belief that he or she has the teaching skills needed to influence a particular outcome (Heller et al., 2011) and is one of the few teacher characteristics consistently related to teacher behavior and student achievement. Teachers' perception of their level of efficacy in teaching certain skills has an effect on their willingness to accept responsibility for the development of those skills. Therefore, gathering information about how confident teachers feel in their ability to provide good instruction in areas of importance, such as learning-related social skills is imperative to curriculum supporting the development of learning-related social skills being implemented with fidelity. Given the documented positive relationship of learning-related skills to student achievement it is important to explore how teachers perceive their level of competence in this particular instructional area.

In addition, schools should provide support for the development of teacher efficacy in the instruction of learning-related social skills. Research has shown that providing consultation in the area of social-emotional development (including learningrelated social skills) will help increase teachers feelings of competency (Heller et al., 2011). Providing teachers with support and feedback in consultation ultimately increases the likelihood that teachers will approach their role in the development of socialemotional skills with a high level of commitment, enthusiasm, and persistence.

Data was gathered through three questionnaires administered to 25 teachers immediately following a four day staff development program on cooperative learning. Results indicated that experience was negatively correlated with their sense of general teaching efficacy (r = -.50) and to their ratings of importance of implementing instructional innovation (r = -.57). However, experience was positively correlated with teachers' ratings of the difficulty of using the innovation (r = .43). The teachers' sense of personal teaching efficacy was found to be positively correlated with their ratings of the innovation as congruent with their current practices (r = .62), less difficult to implement (r = -.39), and important to use (r = .55).

Given the findings surrounding the relationship of teacher experience and teacher self-efficacy, it is important to investigate this relationship as it relates to efficacy in teaching learning-related skills. This study will specifically compare the perceptions of kindergarten teachers with less than 10 years of experience to those with 10 or more years of experience. This should give some

insight to the relationship of years of experience to efficacy in this area, as well as explore how teaching both pre- and postNCLB and teaching only post-NCLB effects teacher self-efficacy in the area of learningrelated skills.

Recommendations

The policy recommendations offered in this brief emanate from basic understandings and findings from the research on early literacy.

1. Literacy development starts early in life and is highly correlated with school achievement. All the domains of a child's development, including literacy, are interrelated and interdependent. The more limited a child's experiences with language and literacy, the more likely he or she will have difficulty learning to read.
2. Well-conceived standards for child outcomes, curriculum content, and teacher preparation help establish clarity of purpose and a shared vision for early literacy education. Early literacy curricula and teaching practices should be evidence-based, integrated with all domains of learning.
3. States and districts should establish standards for early literacy that are articulated with K-12 programs and reflect consistency and continuity with overall program goals. At the same time, programs should be designed to provide comprehensive support for all children, including English Language Learners.
4. In many instances, this may require major changes in policies involving standards and accountability for children, programs and the professionals responsible for them. Competent leadership in the policy arena is essential. As Roskos and Vukelich aptly state, "What early literacy policy accomplishes in the next decades depends not only on the structures placed on and in settings and programs, but also on the people who act on those structures to create patterns of activity that can either advance, resist or stall change."

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