

November 5, 2011

People for Education Conference 2011

Transitions: A challenging time for parents and children

Notes from the session

Presenters: Janette Pelletier, Director of the Dr. Eric Jackman Institute of Child Study, OISE, U of T
 Bruce Ferguson, Director of the Community Health Systems Resource Group at The Hospital for Sick Children
 Sheila Bennett, Professor and former chair in the Department of Teacher Education at Brock University
 Joanne McEwan, Chair, Ottawa Catholic School Parents' Association and the Board's PIC

Moderator: Kelly Gallagher Mackay, Director of Research, People for Education

Speaker –Janette Pelletier:

Transition in schools

- Transition into school/kindergarten
- Full day/all day kindergarten
- Parent support

Best Start – JK/SK, N=497

- Parent survey
- Parenting daily hassle questionnaire
- Parent survey items – program + service

Daily hassle items – eg. difficulty in getting the child in in the morning greatly simplified with integrated program.

Children's reports of transitions elicited through finger-puppet interviews. Description of their days full of richer learning activity at full day site vs. days full of movement between sites for normal.

What is the main message – managing transitions is about the 3Rs: Relationship, relationship, and relationship – community partners, ECEs, teachers...

Speaker –Bruce Ferguson:

In his large-scale studies of students and drop-outs, identified a key period as the transition from elementary to high school. Began to do focused research on this stage.

- Focus group
 - G8 + teachers + parents
 - G 9 and 10 + teachers + parents

- Students' Interviews

Key themes: Have to understand the transition to high school is a social process

- Transition planning to include friends, parents
- Child "at risk" language should be changed to children "in risk" because different children move in and out of risk at different times.
- Teacher should get more training in adolescent development: more group learning than focusing on individuals
- Key message from parents to children: Join activities and make more friends

Speaker- Sheila Bennett from Brock University

Research focusing on children with serious disabilities transitioning out of the school system.

50% children with DD, spend 100% time in special ed classes

Transition story: eg. Tom's Story. When Tom came to high school, he went into a specialized class for kids with developmental disabilities on the recommendation of school administrators.

- Realized he has disability for the first time
- Lost his social skills
- Life skill training was extremely rudimentary.

Socialization is crucial; research doesn't show that kids are learning more in specialized programs.

Parents looking to change the environment: making friends; teachers' care and beliefs about children's potential are key factors.

Speaker –Joanne McEwan, Ottawa PIC, mother of three

Identified key transition times – there are many:

- Move to Kindergarten
- Elementary to high school
- From one school to another
- K to G1
- G6 to G7
- Home school to other school

Support in High school is particularly critical. Things to look for:

- Open house
- August-transition:
 - Going to school for registration
 - How to get to school

- How to take bus
- Work with child to visit gym, cafeteria, etc. before school starts so they aren't feeling lost

As parent advocates:

- Encourage to have open house
- Ed week
- What are other options: recess, home work club, website, newsletter, etc.

In the question period, the focus on transitions was considerably broadened to shift from transitions between schools, or at different stages of development – to transitions *within the school day* (e.g., how is a child in middle school going to form a relationship with a caring adult if they have eight different teachers); and looking at the impact of transitions in school staff. One parent shared a story of her rural school where they have had five principals in three years – leading to a considerable breakdown of trust and parent-school relationships.