



CHILD'S TRANSITION TO FIRST GRADE (PRIMARY LEVEL) : MOTHERS' PERCEPTION

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Abstract

A positive experience with early transitions, serves as a model for future transitions in children. Outcomes of parental involvement show, children achieve higher grades, better attendance; have positive attitudes, higher graduation rates. Mothers as compared to fathers are more involved in child's schooling. The objective was to ascertain the perception of mothers' regarding: a) challenges faced by the child and the mother; b) strategies to overcome challenges during the transition process from preschool to first standard (primary school). The samples of 50 mothers were interviewed. Results revealed that a) challenges faced by the child were categorized as follows: a) academic aspects; b) behavioural aspects; c) class structure; d) expectations from the primary level; e) school schedule; f) co-curricular activities and g) peers; b) challenges faced by mothers included: difficulty in understanding child's writing, child lacks sleep, school refusal; difficulties in attending parent-teacher meetings; c) the mothers' suggested, e.g. the preschool and primary school staff could hold meetings and orientation sessions to introduce parents and child to the expectations of the school. This would foster positive relationships, collaborating with school, help children feel that their school and family are linked; thereby facilitate a smooth transition from preschool to first standard (primary school).

Keywords: Transition, Mother's Role, Family/Parent Involvement, Role of School

Introduction and Review of Literature

A positive experience with early transitions, serves as a model for future transitions in children. Success in transition depends on family involvement. A family may be involved in transition in many ways and for varying amounts of time. Informed parents are less likely to be

stressed about their child's transition to school and more able to support their child in overcoming their confusion and frustration and in adapting to the new environment. Research findings suggested that parents had strong feelings about their children's transition to school and valued their own experiences of involvement in their children's early childhood programmes. Therefore, it leads to parents' involvement practices in kindergarten. One hallmark of a quality early care and education setting was the degree to which it involved families. But research indicated that family involvement needed to be continued beyond the preschool years.

Parents should be aware that children model behaviour; they learn from parents how to speak, understand others and show respect. Transition programmes helped parents in following ways a) helped parents learn about child's strength, weakness, learning abilities and developmental level b) facilitated support during personal and emotional crises c) helped parents support their child's learning at home d) promoted bonding between parent and child e) helped parents study further and pursue education along with providing learning opportunities f) maintained connection with the school after programme through employment, friendships and so on (Kreider, 2002).

Children in studies in developed countries expressed their anxiety and apprehension about their entry into school and what the whole process means to them (Griebel & Niesel, 2002; Peters 2000; Clarke & Sharpe, 2003). This became a hurdle for child's successful transition to school. Academic stress in preschool children had also lead to nail biting, stomach ache, vomiting, constipation and other psychological problems that arise from stress. Separation anxiety was of great difficulty for some children. Many settled in the first few days and many could not deal with it until they were counseled. "While a preschool atmosphere is more like going to a friend's place, a proper institution grade one was quite unnerving for a child," says psychologist Anjali Chhabria. (Wadha, 2008).

Parents may be confused about their own role and the new routines and procedures associated with school. Parental expectations of children changed as children commenced schooling, with pressure on children to read, write and demonstrate numeric skills (Margetts, 1999). In a study on the school Lambay and Chavan (1993) found poor education of parents, lack of time on the part of parents (they are pre occupied with survival needs), the role of children in the family economy & child care, lack of proper infrastructural facilities in home and community as the major reasons for school drop- out & failure. Parents feel they have nothing to contribute, and are unable to understand the planning process or the service system. Also, parents feel that they don't know how to become involved in a meaningful way, and have language and cultural differences. Also sometimes they do not feel welcome at the school (Lambay & Chavan, 1993)

Children were faced with personal challenges associated with the shift in identity from a preschool to school child and the challenges of taking on the behaviours and demands of the new role (Griebel & Niesel, 2000). They must also cope with a range of physical, social and academic challenges associated with the new school environment. When children experienced social and

behavioural adjustment difficulties in the early years of school, they were more likely to continue experiencing these problems throughout their schooling and into later life (Ladd & Price, 1987; Belsky & MacKinnon, 1994; Cowan & Cowan, Schultz & Henning, 1994).

School refusal behaviour is defined as the refusal to attend classes or difficulty remaining in school for an entire day. Youngsters who resist going to school in the morning but eventually attend, those who go to school but leave at some point during the day, those who attend with great dread that leads to future pleas for nonattendance and those who miss the whole day. Test anxiety is defined as the experience of intense somatic, cognitive and behavioural symptoms of anxiety during test-taking situations that usually interferes with test performance (Kearny, 2000). The fear of school as it was associated with submitting for the first time to authority and rules outside the home, being compared with unfamiliar children and experiencing the threat of failure. Some children refused to go to school because they were afraid of being ridiculed, teased or bullied by other children or being criticized or disciplined by their teacher (Kearney, 1993; Silverman, 1996).

Success in transition depends on many factors, one of which is family involvement in the transition process. The level and type of participation in the transition process will vary across families, based on each family's interests, resources, and ability to be involved. There is no "ideal" level of participation that fits all families. A family may be involved in transition in many ways and for varying amounts of time. At the very least, one may learn about the transition process and provide consent for various transition-related activities. Informed parents are less likely to be stressed about their child's transition to school and more able to support their child in overcoming their confusion and frustration and in adapting to the new environment (Margetts, 2002).

Studies indicated that when parents were involved in their children's schooling, children achieved higher grades and better school attendance; they had more positive attitudes and behaviors, higher graduation rates, and greater enrollment in higher education (Henderson & Berla, 1994). Therefore, it was important that parents were given information about the procedures of the first day at school and what is expected of them and their child.

Methodology

The objective of the study was to ascertain the perception of mothers' regarding: a) challenges faced by the child b) challenges faced by the mother; c) strategies to overcome challenges during the transition process from preschool to first standard (primary school). The sample consisted of 50 mothers. An in-depth interview schedule was formulated comprising of 37 items (open and closed ended) and face-to-face interview was held to ascertain the responses. Snowball sampling technique was used for contacting the mothers.

Mothers whose child is studying in the first standard (primary school) was included in the study and consisted of 50 mothers. Sample characteristics are as follows: The age ranged from 23 to 40 years with a mean of 32.90 ($SD = 3.649$). Of the participants selected, 32 mothers had

their male child while 18 mothers had their female child studying in first standard (primary school). Regarding the religion, participants were predominantly Hindus (43). The sample also included four Sikh, two Christian and one Zoroastrian respectively. Types of family that the participants encompassed were extended family (22), nuclear family (20) and joint family (8). The monthly income level of families of the participants varied. Two of the families had income level between Rs. 10,000 to 20,000, five between Rs.20, 000 to 30,000, twelve between Rs. 30,000 to Rs. 40,000; ten between Rs. 40,000 to Rs. 50,000 and majority of the families had their income level of Rs 50,000 and above. There were 39 mothers with first born child and 11 mothers with their child being the second born studying in the first standard.

In relation to educational qualification, 29 mothers had pursued their graduation, 11 were post graduate degree, nine had post graduate diploma and one had completed her doctorate. A majority of participants were home makers (34) followed by seven who ran their self owned business, four were engaging in service based occupation, two were conducting tuition/coaching classes, two were working as a free lancer and one mother was an academician by profession. In relation, to the time schedule for paid work, 11 participants engaged in part-time employment and five in full time employment. The monthly income level of the employed participants varied with more of the participants having income less than Rs. 10,000 and some having income between Rs. 10,000 to Rs 50, 000 and above. Of the participants selected for the study, only three mothers indicated that their child's preschool was not attached to the primary school, while the remaining 47 mothers mentioned that the preschool were attached to the primary school. None of the mothers indicated that they belonged to the category of single parent family; nor did their child repeat or was retained in first standard (primary school). None of the mothers' who participated had an exceptional child. They also mentioned that they had not undergone any change of job, change of residence change in stages of family size due to arrival of a new baby, ill health condition due to chronic illness of the mother and child or any other transition. None of the mothers had any kind of psychopathology problem/physical handicap who consent to participate in the study.

Results

Barriers/challenges faced by the child while transitioning

Mothers' perspective regarding the challenges faced by their child while transitioning from preschool to first standard (primary school) has been classified into seven categories (Refer to Table 1). They include: a) academic aspects; b) behavioural aspects; c) class structure; d) expectations from the primary level; e) school schedule; f) co-curricular activities and g) peers.

Barriers /challenges faced by the mother

Varied responses regarding the barriers/challenges faced by mothers while transitioning their child from preschool to first standard (primary school) were classified into six categories (Refer to Table 2). They were as follows: a) academic aspects, such as difficulty in understanding child's writing, difficulty in copying from other child's note book, unable to help your child in

completing home-work, difficulty with reading and writing; b) difficulty in handling behaviour of their child, such as anxiety, school refusal; c) school schedule, such as facing difficulties in attending parent teacher meetings as the timings were not feasible,

TABLE: 1

**Mothers' perspective regarding barriers/challenges faced by the child while
Transitioning from preschool to first standard (primary school)**

Difficulties/barriers/challenges faced by the child	Mothers f (n=50)
Academic , such as reading long sentences, copying the content from blackboard	28
Behaviour , such as being anxious, irritated, feeling sleepy and shy	25
Class structure , such as facing it difficult to adjust to one/two teachers per subject, fixed places to sit in class	22
High expectations , such as being independent, grasping concepts once explained	20
School schedule , such as adjusting to long hours, a reduced amount of break time, lot of home work	18
Co-curricular activities , such as participating in drawing, dancing, music, sports	17
Peers , such as facing difficulty in making new friends, adjusting to them	10

Note: Multiple responses were obtained.

TABLE: 2

Mothers' perspective regarding barriers/challenges faced by herself (mother) when her child transitioned from preschool to first standard (primary school)

Difficulties/barriers/challenges faced by the mother	Mothers f (n=50)
Academic aspects , such as having difficulty in understanding child's writing, difficulty in copying from other child's note book	25
Behaviour aspects , such as handling child's behaviour, such as anxiety, irritability, school refusal)	22
School schedule , such as facing difficulties in attending parent teacher meetings as the timings are not feasible	15
Unapproachable attitude on the part of school , such as difficult for working mothers as their job schedules clash with school schedule, teachers and staff unapproachable	14
Peers , such as handling/ helping child in making new friends, talking to them	10
Lack of Family support , such as catering to the needs of husband, in-laws, as well as child's education	8

Note: Multiple responses were obtained.

TABLE: 3

Suggestions provided by mothers for facilitating/enhancing smooth transition of Child from preschool to first standard (primary school)

Suggestions for Mothers/Parents, preschools and primary schools	Mothers f (n=50)
Mothers/Parents	
Listening patiently to child's communication regarding school experiences	46
Discussing with the child and explain him/ her about the changes in the primary school	44
Communicating regarding the methods for smooth transition regularly with the teacher	31
Attending sessions organized by the school at both levels	7
Visiting primary school with the child and introducing him/her to the school area/layout, such as classroom, library, playground, bathroom and people, such as supervisor, teachers and helpers.	6
Preschool staff	

Organizing parent education programmes, talks and sessions by educators / experts on transition	35
Holding individual/personal interactive meetings with parents for helping child in transitioning from preschool to first standard	21
Inviting parents to share feedback and suggestions on difficulties and success of child's transition to primary school	17
Organizing convocation ceremony at the preschool and inviting parents to witness the same	13
Primary school staff	
Organizing orientation sessions to introduce you to the primary school such as, rules and expectations of the school, the curriculum/syllabus, school timings, fee structure	42
Holding parent-teacher meetings with the focus on transition	27
Planning and conducting home visits for the child who may find it difficult to adjust to the primary school	2

Note: Multiple responses were obtained.

children did not eat their lunch due to less amount of break time, unable to complete home-work, child is not taking down messages in calendar and not informing parents regarding the weekly tests therefore parent is unaware which becomes a problem, daily routine of eating, sleeping, studying time affected; d) unapproachable attitude on the part of primary school, such as difficulty for working mothers as their job schedules and job priorities clash with the school schedule, lack of flexibility on the part of the school for attending meeting and school activities, teachers and staff unapproachable, school does not inform parents about the activities; e) peer problems, such as handling/ helping child in making new friends, talking to them, working with the child to prepare/to help him/her handle peer pressures, helping child resolve daily social issues (e.g. which friends house do we meet for drawing/dancing classes, sharing toys, taking turns while playing catch and cook during outdoor play); f) lack of family support, such as catering to the needs of husband, in-laws, relatives and child's education is look at as only mothers responsibility according to family members, managing home and child's educational needs becomes burdensome along with the daily chores.

Suggestions to facilitate/enhance smooth transition of child from preschool to first standard (primary school)

Range of responses were obtained as suggestions provided by the mothers for parents in helping their child move from preschool to first standard (primary school) [Refer to Table 3]. The responses were further classified into three categories. Suggestions for a) prospective mothers/parents (whose child will be transitioning from preschool to first standard); b) preschool

staff; c) primary school staff. Those of the mothers who provided suggestions for prospective mothers/parents (whose child will be transitioning from preschool to first standard) suggested: a) to listen patiently to what the child has to say/ communicate/narrate about his/her school-related experiences; b) to discuss with the child and explain him/her about the changes that he/she would come across in the first standard; c) to communicate and share regarding the methods for smooth transition regularly with the class teacher.

Those mothers who offered suggestions to the preschool staff indicated that the preschool staff should: a) organize parent education programmes by educators/experts on transition; b) hold individual/personal interactive meetings with parents for helping their child in transitioning from preschool to first standard (primary school); c) invite parents to share feedback and suggestions on difficulties and success of child's transition to first standard (primary school); d) organize convocation ceremony at the preschool and inviting parents to witness the same.

Those mothers who suggested the primary school staff included that the primary school staff should: a) organize orientation sessions to introduce parents and child to the primary school area/layout, such as rules, regulations, expectations of the school, the curriculum /syllabus, extracurricular activities, school timings, fee structure; b) hold parent-teacher meetings with the aim of helping child in his/her transition to primary school while almost none of the mothers suggested to plan and conduct home visits for the child who may find it difficult to adjust to the primary school.

Discussion

The lack of emotional well-being can cause worry and stress leading to aggression, fatigue or withdrawal, all of which have the potential to impair learning capacity (Featherstone, 2004). Children can become disaffected, disorientated and inhibited (Fisher, 1996), resulting in behavioural problems which impact on commitment, motivation and relationships (Kienig, 2002). In the present study, multiple responses were obtained when mothers' were asked about the barriers/challenges faced by their child and by them (mother) while transitioning the child to first standard (primary school). More of the mothers indicated that their child and they themselves encountered difficulties in relation to academic and behavioural aspects, while the other aspects mentioned by the mothers included class structure, high expectations from primary school, school schedule and so forth.

In the present study, more of the mothers mentioned that they communicated with the child regarding transition Children's emotional and social wellbeing are key ingredients in how well children settle into school (Fabian, 2000). Therefore, communicating with the child and asking about his/her feelings toward teachers, old friends, new friends, school. Mothers' also set aside time on a daily basis for explaining him/her academic and non-academic aspects to help overcome the barriers / challenges faced while transitioning from preschool to first standard (primary school). Transition to school means more than just the short period during which children start school. It is now recognized as a potentially extensive period (Kagan and Neville,

1996) which helps to determine children's later academic success (Entwisle and Alexander, 1992). Research indicates that families are highly concerned and willing to help their children succeed in school, but uncertain of how to do so (Delgado-Gaitan 1990; Epstein 1990; Goldenberg and Gallimore 1991). (<http://www.ncela.gwu.edu/pubs/forum/1704.html>).

The mothers' employed an array of methods, for themselves, in relation to overcoming the barriers faced, while transitioning her child from preschool to first standard (primary school). The mothers: a) prioritized tasks that had to be accomplished before the child returned from school, b) requested for support from the family members. Surprisingly, a substantial majority of the mothers did not employ the illustrated ways/methods for the same: a) meeting and communicating with school coordinator/teachers for sharing the difficulties faced during adjustment to first standard (primary school) b) asking for leave from job/work place.

In the current study, a substantial majority of the mothers (43) mentioned that it is important to prepare mothers for her child's transition from preschool to first standard (primary school); whereas only seven mothers did not agree with the same. The individuals as a source in assisting mothers' included: a) the teachers and coordinators of the primary school; b) parents, teachers and experienced parents (whose children have already adjusted to first standard). Margetts, (2000) notes that transition programmes should be based on a philosophy that children's adjustment to school is easier when children are familiar with the situation, parents are informed about the new school and teachers have information about children's development and previous experiences. Certain continuities should be aimed for such as continuity of peers, of expectations between settings (including teacher and child behaviours) of programming for children's learning.

Conclusion

A shared conceptual framework of the child as a learner who is about to enter school is badly needed in early education (Broadhead, 1995). Therefore, instead of seeing child development as an inevitable linear trajectory, we see it as complex interactive process which reflects the imbalanced, irregular, transforming process which merges development with learning, individual qualities, with cultural influences, through an intricate weaving of multiple factors which coalesce in the overcoming of difficulties and adaptation in transition. Therefore, it states that positive and responsive relationships are vital to successful transitions and that effective transitions involve communities of individuals rather than individuals in communities (Dockett & Perry 2004). Home and school can work together to achieve this by collaborating to provide children with positive experiences as they are initiated into school and building good memories of this particular 'rite of passage' (Kessler, 1999), so that they are indeed set up for later.

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