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**The Impact of Rigorous Curriculum in
Transitional Kindergarten and
Kindergarten**

Lauren Clough
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April 19, 2018



Statement of the Problem

- Early childhood educators feel pressured to use rigorous curriculum, which is causing teachers to change their play-based, whole-child teaching practices (Campbell, 2015).
- Due to the federal government's No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) schools have standardized their teaching practices, raised student achievement levels and are being held accountable for student test scores.

What is transitional kindergarten (TK)?

- In order to attend kindergarten, students must be five years old on or before September 1. Students entering kindergarten will be five years old, turning six on their birthday.
- To attend transitional kindergarten (TK) in California, the student's birthday must fall between September 2nd and December 2nd of that school year. Students entering transitional kindergarten in August will be four years old, turning five on their birthday.

Literature Review

- Research has shown that play-based learning is a developmentally appropriate teaching strategy for early elementary students.
- Play-based learning can help promote language acquisition in English language learners

Research Questions

1) How does the use of rigorous curriculum impact the learning experiences and self-esteem of all students, specifically English language learners in transitional kindergarten and kindergarten classrooms?

2) How does the use of rigorous curriculum impact teachers in transitional kindergarten and kindergarten classrooms?

Methodology

- 7 transitional kindergarten and kindergarten teachers from five Bay Area school sites participated in 30 to 40 minute interviews featuring 10 open-ended questions.
- 29 transitional kindergarten and kindergarten teachers from across the United States participated in an anonymous online survey.

The First Finding

Finding one:

Rigorous curriculum had a negative effect on English learners in transitional kindergarten and kindergarten.

- The rigorous curriculum is causing many young English language learners to “hate school”, “have anxiety” as well as “undue stress” around school. One participant said that her English language learners are often “nervous and jittery” at school.
- “Paper and pencil is completely developmentally inappropriate for TK aged students. We know this...If they can’t learn because their brains aren’t ready, they can’t learn. That is just going to make them hate school”

The Second Finding

Finding two:

The process of choosing curriculum affected the way teachers perceived and used curriculum in their classrooms.

- At one interview participant's school, curriculum is usually chosen by the district with little to no input from the teachers. She said that in the future she hopes that the "district allows us to be smart, as teachers..." and that she wishes teachers would have more of a say in curriculum choice.

The Second Finding

- One participant said that after teaching kindergarten for the past twenty four years and feeling confident about what and how she was teaching, she has never felt “less confident” than she does now
- This participant explained that she has even considered early retirement due to the current stress she is experiencing using rigorous curriculum in her kindergarten classroom

The Third Finding

Finding three:

Rigorous curriculum impacted the social and emotional skill development of students in transitional kindergarten and kindergarten.

- Rigorous curriculum “doesn’t take into consideration the social emotional needs of my students, in that we have less time to devote to help create well rounded, kind people.”

The Third Finding

- “The curriculum is mostly worksheets and things to do. Every single time I say we are going to do a worksheet they (students) hate it. They are instantly checked out and have a bad attitude. Which always makes me feel like I am not doing them justice. Education is not fun for them with paper. That is my biggest complaint. The rigorous curriculum is all paper.”
- Rigorous curriculum “creates behavior problems where there should be none, and takes the joy out of learning.”

Implications

- The existing literature and research shows that teachers are feeling pressured by parents and administrators to use rigorous curriculum that features little to no play-based learning (Campbell, 2015).
- While much of the literature examined the importance of play-based learning, participants mentioned that their students were struggling with the rigorous curriculum mostly due to the lack of social emotional learning opportunities in the curriculum
- The use of rigorous curriculum in transitional kindergarten and kindergarten is also widening the achievement gap between native English speaking students and English language learners

Recommendations

- Educators must understand the impact that rigorous curriculum has on all students in transitional kindergarten and kindergarten
- Educators can incorporate more hands on learning opportunities and more play-based learning throughout each day. Educators can also include more social emotional learning activities
- In order to achieve educational effectiveness, decision making at the district, state and federal level needs to consider teacher knowledge and expertise

Questions or comments?

Thank you!