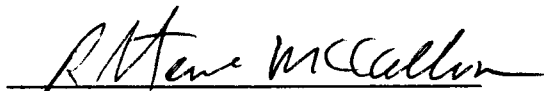
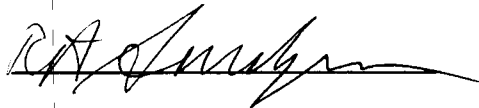


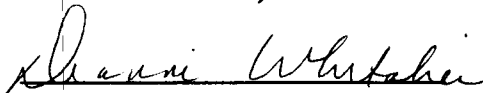
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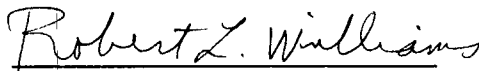
I am submitting herewith a dissertation written by Stephanie Spencer Carroll entitled "An Analysis of Academic Factors Associated With A Transition Program Integrated With First Grade." I have examined the final copy of this dissertation for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, with a major in Education.


Ralph S. McCallum, Major Professor

We have read this dissertation
and recommend its acceptance:







Accepted for the Council:


Associate vice Chancellor and
Dean of the Graduate School

**AN ANALYSIS OF ACADEMIC FACTORS
ASSOCIATED WITH A TRANSITION PROGRAM
INTEGRATED WITH FIRST GRADE**

A Dissertation
Presented for the Doctor of Philosophy Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Stephanie Spencer Carroll
May, 1998

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ABSTRACT

Transition programs were created for kindergarten students who are not developmentally ready for the curriculum and increased structure of the first grade. After a transition year, students are placed in a regular first grade program. This study presents findings from one school that integrates transition students with first grade students. These transition students were compared with a previous transition class that was homogeneous and with a group of students who were recommended for transition but due to budget cuts were not placed. Academic and special education data were collected from the cumulative records of forty-eight students who were recommended for transition. This study found no significant differences in these three groups of students ($N = 48$) in achievement, number of referrals for special education, or special education placement ($p > .05$).

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this study was to compare academic achievement, retention, referral for special education, and placement in special education of three groups of students: (1) students in a transition class integrated with first grade, (2) students who participated in a homogeneous transition class, and (3) students who were recommended for transition but not placed due to budget cuts. A review of the literature on the relationships between transition classes and the academic achievement of students revealed that the research is limited, considering the number of years that this type of programming has been used and its increasing popularity in recent years. Investigations of this type of preventive programming are needed to expand the knowledge base and to share ideas that may be beneficial in planning appropriate programming.

School systems struggle with the problem of providing effective instructional programming for children who complete kindergarten but who are not developmentally ready for the first grade. Retention is often utilized to address this problem. However, research concerning the effectiveness of retention indicates that the practice of repeating the same curriculum a second time does not increase academic achievement in the long term and may have a number of

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negative effects on students (Holmes & Matthews, 1984; Smith & Shepard, 1987).

Transition classes provide an additional academic year between kindergarten and first grade for students who are not ready for the first grade curriculum and the increased structure of the first grade classroom. In order to mature developmentally and strengthen readiness skills, students are placed for an extra year between kindergarten and first grade in a self-contained homogeneous class with an adjusted curriculum. These transition classrooms have grown in popularity as the practice of retention has decreased in many schools. Various labels have been assigned to these classrooms including, "transition first grade," "junior first grade," "pre-first grade," and "readiness room". Whatever the name, the principal emphasis of the transition classes is preventing future academic failure. It is presumed that with this extra time, a child will experience the maturation necessary in order to be more successful in the school environment.

In the past, the only option for students who were not developmentally ready for first grade was retention. The neutral and sometimes even negative effects of retention have been well documented. Research has shown that neither academic achievement nor self-esteem increases, but rather, retention has a negative impact on students' academic achievement and self-concept (Holmes &

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Matthews, 1984; Smith & Shepard, 1987). Retention has also been associated with the increased probability of students dropping out of school (Hahn, 1987; Hammack, 1986; Nason, 1991).

Furthermore, in some studies, students who were recommended for retention but were promoted achieved at a higher level than students who were retained (Nicklason, 1987; Rose, Medway, Cantrell, & Marcus, 1983; Smith & Shepard, 1987). Even when individual plans are used to address retained students difficulties, after three years there are no significant differences between these students and similar students who were promoted (Peterson, DeGracie & Ayabe, 1987). In a review of the literature, Jackson (1975) indicated that there is no support for retaining rather than promoting a student. In a synthesis of the research that included more than 100 studies, Shepard and Smith (1990) concluded that "retained children actually perform more poorly on average when they go on to the next grade than if they had been promoted without repeating the grade" (p.86).

Holmes and Matthews (1984) concluded the following from their meta-analysis of retention studies:

Those who continue to retain pupils at grade level do so despite cumulative

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research evidence showing that the potential for negative effects consistently outweighs positive outcomes. Because this cumulative research evidence consistently points to negative effects of nonpromotion, the burden of proof legitimately falls on proponents of retention plans to show there is compelling logic indicating success of their plans when so many other plans have failed. (p. 232)

Students who are retained and students who attend transition programs share some characteristics. These include a greater percentage of males, especially those who are chronologically young or physically small for their age; students from lower socioeconomic status; and minority students (Langer, Kalk & Searls, 1984; Smith and Shepard, 1987).

Some researchers believe that the negative effects of retention may also be evident for students who attend transition classes. One difference between transition and retention is that a retained student repeats the same curriculum, whereas a transition student is exposed to a curriculum that is "designed to provide them with developmentally appropriate practice which can lead to success in school, confidence in self, and a positive attitude toward learning" (Uphoff, 1990, p. 3). The poor academic results of retention may be a result of the retained

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student repeating the same curriculum that was not successful the first time (Rihl, 1988).

Retention implies failure of the student. Although transition was conceptualized to be a positive experience designed to prevent failure, it is viewed by some researchers to be another name for retention (Boettger, 1991; Nason, 1991; Shepard & Smith, 1986). The process of being identified as in need of transition services may be a negative experience for a child and may change the expectations that parents and teachers have for that child (Bredekamp, 1990).

Many teachers and parents support the transition programming (Bell, 1972; Fitzgerald, 1994; Horm-Wingerd et al., 1993). However, no controlled research study has found significant academic differences in favor of transition students after first grade when compared to at-risk students who progressed to first grade (Bell, 1972; Boettger, 1991; Bredekamp, 1990; Brewer, 1990; Day, 1986; Ferguson, 1991; Jones, 1985; Leinhart, 1980; Matthews, 1977; Meeks, 1982; Mossburg, 1987; Shepard & Smith, 1986; Smith & Shepard, 1987; Talmadge, 1981).

After reviewing the research on transition rooms and finding only one study in which the reading achievement of students was higher than the regular

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progressing child (and these results diminished after third grade), Gredler (1984) concluded:

. . . the review of transition placement studies have formed consensus perspectives: Research indicates that transition room children either do not perform as well or at most are equal in achievement levels to transition room eligible children placed in regular classes. (p.469)

Another important objective in transition programming is improved self-concept. However, studies have shown that the academic self-concept of transition students is negatively impacted (Bell 1972; Boettger, 1991) when compared to promoted elementary peers.

Research has also shown that transition students have an increased need for special education services as they progress through school (Caggiano, 1984; Ferguson, 1992). Phelps (1992) found that by middle school 79% of the transition students in the study had received special assistance such as Chapter I or resource.

Much of the research suggests that the homogeneous programming for transition students is not having the desired effects. Homogeneous ability grouping does not increase academic achievement (Dawson, 1987; Goodlad, 1984; Kulik & Kulik, 1985); when compared to heterogeneous groupings, the effect size

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is essentially zero (Slavin, 1988). Ability grouping of students may also deprive them of the example and stimulation that are provided by students who are functioning at higher academic levels (Ferguson, 1992; Fitzgerald, 1994). Slavin (1988) recommends that students have a primary identification with a heterogeneous class and should only be grouped as needed for math or reading instruction. Fitzgerald (1994) states that "...at risk students can be preferably served in other than homogeneous special placements" (p. 47).

Uphoff (1990), a transition program proponent, concedes that all transition rooms are not effective and he identifies the characteristics of good programs. These characteristics include: transition placement that occurs prior to the personal experience of failure by the child; parents involved as decision makers; small class size, usually 12-15 students; flexibility in progression and avoidance of tracking students; developmentally appropriate curriculum; and the use of multi-faceted assessments.

Research findings have not shown gains in academic achievement or self-concept for students placed in a homogeneous transition class prior to first grade. A study that investigated the outcomes of a transition program integrated with first grade could not be found in the literature. In contrast to other studies, the current

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study included a group of students who participated in a transition program that was integrated with a first grade class. Therefore, these students were with age-appropriate peers receiving a developmentally appropriate curriculum. This study compared the academic performance, referral rate and placement in special education, and retention rate at the end of second grade of students placed in a transition program integrated with first grade, students placed in a homogeneous transition program, and students who were eligible for transition but were placed in first grade.

2. Conceptual Framework for Transition Classes

Kindergartners range in age developmentally from three to eight years. Therefore, not all children at the end of kindergarten are ready for first grade. In most schools, students progress through a predetermined sequence of grades. Often, differences in learning rates of children are not taken into consideration. Homogeneous transition classes were developed in an attempt to provide more developmentally appropriate programming for students who are chronologically eligible for first grade but are developmentally behind their peers. The expectation is that as a child in transition matures physically, intellectual development follows.

The developmental theories of Jean Piaget and Arnold Gesell support this expectation. Piaget (1961) stressed that cognitive development is a sequential process of discrete stages linked with maturation. He identified four periods of development corresponding with infancy, early childhood, childhood, and adolescence. In each of these periods, he identified specific characteristics and limitations of cognitive skills that occur at approximate ages (e.g., inability to conserve), allowing for variations in individuals. According to Piaget, physical experience, logico-mathematical experience, social interaction, the process of equilibration and physical maturation (e.g., central nervous system development)

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all contribute to development. Equilibration is an internal self-regulating process of reconciling maturation and experience in an attempt to maintain a steady state.

Piaget (1961) described the process of equilibration:

... if the development depends...on internal factors (maturation)...and...on external factors (physical or social), it is self-evident that these internal and external factors equilibrate each other. We believe that the mental equilibrium and even the biological one presumes an activity of the subject...It consists in a sort of matching, oriented toward compensation...(p. 279).

In this theory, the timing of experience is also important. Children can only profit from an experience if they are developmentally ready.

Gesell's (1980) clinical observations led to normative descriptions of the ages at which children typically perform certain social, emotional, intellectual, and physical skills. His observations support Piaget's theory that all children go through developmental stages, but not at the same chronological age. The term developmental age was used by Gessell to describe where a child is functioning in these areas as a whole. Readiness to learn is dependent on the developmental age at which the child is functioning.

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Currently, placement in a grade focuses on chronological age rather than developmental age. Members of the Gesell Institute state that many school difficulties are the direct result of children being inappropriately placed according to their chronological age rather than developmental age (Gesell Institute, 1980).

Both of the theories of Piaget and Gesell focus on development as ordered and predictable. However, the maturationalist view of Gesell emphasizes that children behave primarily as a function of physiological growth, while Piaget's views are more interactionist emphasizing both physical changes and social environments, as well as, the interactions between the two that affect development.

Theoretically, children who are not developmentally ready to progress to first grade should benefit from transition programs. Research suggests, however, that any benefits may be short term (Bell, 1972; Boettger, 1991; Bredekamp, 1990; Brewer, 1990; Day, 1986; Ferguson, 1991; Fitzgerald, 1994; Gredler, 1984; Jones, 1985; Leinhardt, 1980; Matthews, 1977; Mossburg, 1987). Additional information is needed because these studies reported the effects of homogeneous transition programs. Students who remain with their peers should benefit from the experiences and social transmission that aids cognitive development (Piaget, 1961). This study will provide information about the success of children who

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were determined not to be ready for first grade and were placed in a transition class that was integrated with a first grade class. Specifically, the performance of these children will be compared to the performance of children who were placed in a homogeneous transition program and to children who were recommended for transition but progressed to first grade because a transition program was not offered.

3. Research Questions

This research compared three groups of students at the end of second grade on scores from the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) in the areas of reading, mathematics, and total battery score, the number of retentions, referrals for special education services, and placements in special education. The research questions were as follows: are there significant differences among students in a transition class that is integrated with first grade (T1), students who were in a homogeneous transition class (T2), and students who were recommended for transition class but placed in a first grade class (T3) in (1) Total Reading scale scores on the TCAP; (2) Total Mathematics scale scores on the TCAP; (3) Total Battery scale scores on the TCAP; (4) The number of retentions; (5) The number of special education referrals; and (6) The number of special education.

4. Methods

This study compared three groups of students who had been referred for transition at the end of their kindergarten year. The analysis provides a better understanding of academic expectations of these students by comparing students who participated in transition with those students who were recommended for transition but did not attend due to budget cuts. To protect the confidentiality of the school and school district, pseudonyms are used in this description. Participants for this study were students enrolled in second, third, fourth and fifth grades at a mid-sized elementary school in suburban East Tennessee.

Terms and Definitions

The following terms and definitions are used in this study:

Academic achievement is the degree of mastery in subjects taught in school. Achievement was measured by the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) Reading, Mathematics and Total Battery scale scores.

Birth month is the month in which the subject was born. All children in this study were five years old when they entered kindergarten.

Brigance is a criterion-referenced screening assessment that is used to assist teachers in planning an appropriate program for students. The total scores

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from the spring of a student's kindergarten year were used in this study.

Gender is the subjects' identification as male or female.

Homogeneous transition program is a transition class that consisted exclusively of students recommended for the program.

Recommended but not placed in transition indicated that the recommendation for the student was placement in the transition program but the student was placed in first grade because a transition program was not offered.

Retention referred to a student's remaining in the same grade rather than being promoted to the next grade. For purposes of this study, placement in transition was not considered a retention.

Special education placement is a previous or ongoing placement in any special education program.

Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program is a standardized test used to measure the academic achievement of students that is administered annually beginning in second grade.

Transition is the academic year between kindergarten and first grade.

Transition integrated with first grade is a heterogeneous class that consisted of students recommended for transition and first grade.

Sample

The data for this study were collected during May 1997 in a public elementary school located in a suburban area of East Tennessee. For the 1996-97 school year, Pine View Elementary School had a total enrollment of 652 students in grades K-5 of which 13.19% were of minority status. At the time of this study, approximately 13% of the total student population at Pine View Elementary was receiving free or reduced lunches. The sample was limited to students attending this elementary school, because at that time no other school in the system offered a transition program integrated with a regular first grade class.

Data for this study came from the students' cumulative record entries through their second grade school year (1994 through 1997). Students were identified from a review of the cumulative records of all students currently enrolled at Pine View Elementary in the second (114), third (121), fourth (101), and fifth (100) grades. From this review, 48 subjects were identified as either having been placed in transition integrated with first grade ($N = 12$), placed in a homogeneous transition class ($N = 17$), or recommended for transition but placed in first grade the year the program was not available ($N = 19$). Seventy-five percent of the sample was comprised of males and no significant gender difference was found

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among the three groups ($\chi^2 = 3.009$; df, 2; $p > .05$). The minority status (14.6%) of the sample was comparable to the population at Pine View Elementary.

Program Description

Transition programs were designed to be a half-step progression between kindergarten and first grade and differ from grade retention in that students do not receive the same instruction as the previous year. The program is designed for children of normal intelligence whose learning problem is that they are not developmentally ready for the increased expectations of first grade. The primary purpose of the transition program is to improve students' academic performance and to develop a positive attitude towards learning by giving children more time to mature, more time to master specific skills, and greater individual instruction, thus preventing a pattern of failure (Busta, 1990).

The instructional program for transition classes is designed to improve reading and math readiness, to further develop expressive and receptive language skills, to increase a child's ability to follow the directions and school procedures, and to nurture social and emotional maturity. The curriculum is developmental rather than remedial and is highly individualized. It includes high levels of sensory involvement and activities of shorter duration than would be found in a first grade

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curriculum. The curricula is developed to fit the needs of the students rather than standards mandated by local or state governing bodies (Rihl, 1988).

Transition programming has been offered at Pine View for more than ten years. This program is provided for kindergarten students who have not developed the school readiness skills to be successful in first grade. School readiness is described in the Pine View Transition Information Packet as:

“...the ability to shut out everything else and concentrate on the learning at hand. This is difficult to do in a school room. It also means putting up with bells, waiting one’s turn in line, adhering to rules and schedules, and adjusting to many different teachers. It means being self-confident so that thinking energy isn’t used up with worrying. School readiness is the ability to cope and learn at the same time.”

Pine View Personnel believed that transition will eliminate a great number of first grade failures and boost self-esteem, as well as give the student a “priceless gift of time.” The rationale for the program was that children who go to school before they are mature enough to cope may suffer for the rest of their lives for this one mistake in timing.

Children are selected for this program by teacher recommendations in the

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spring of their kindergarten year. The characteristics of these children include difficulties finishing their work in a timely manner, problems sitting still and completing work silently, being disorganized, being easily frustrated, and having a short attention span. In addition to these characteristics, the teachers also consider a student's birthdate. Children who are recommended for transition often have birthdays in May through September.

Parents make the final decision about placing a child in the transition program. A transition information packet (Appendix A) given to parents contains characteristics of transition students, objectives of the transition program, and descriptions of learning readiness and school readiness. Although most parents accept the teacher's recommendations, a few decide to place their child in first grade.

The enrollment in the transition class has been limited to approximately fifteen students a year to allow for more individual instruction. This program is more structured than the kindergarten program and unlike kindergarten it includes reading instruction. Students remain in the program for the entire year and then progress to the first grade.

Due to budget constraints, the transition program was not available for the

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1992-93 school year. When the transition class was reinstated in the 1993-94 school year, it utilized a traditional homogeneous classroom structure. Beginning in the 1994-95 school year, it began utilizing team-teaching within a regular first grade class. The teachers chose to team teach for the flexibility of shared responsibility (one teacher could teach while the other one prepared lessons), as well as provide the transition students to have the example of peers who were functioning at a higher developmental level. The transition and first grade students were combined and share the same curriculum for most of the day, with the exception of reading and math instruction. One of the main goals of this program was to make the students feel good about themselves and eager to try new situations. To reduce the pressure placed on students, assessment of students progress was conducted by observation of performance rather than formal testing.

Data Collection and Instrumentation

A letter requesting permission to gather information for the purpose of this study was sent to the coordinator of research and evaluation for the district. Once permission was granted, approval from The University of Tennessee Human Subjects Institutional Review Board was requested and received.

The following information was collected for students in the study: transition experience, grade, date of birth, gender, ethnicity, referral for special education, placement in special education, retention history, Brigance K & 1 Screen results, and TCAP Total Reading, Total Math, and Total Battery scores for

second grade.

All kindergarten students were administered the Brigance K & 1 Screen (Brigance, 1987) in the spring by their teachers. The Brigance is criterion-referenced screening assessment that is used to assist teachers in planning an appropriate program for students. The screening assesses the following skill areas: personal data response, color recognition, picture vocabulary, visual discrimination, visual-motor, body image, rote counting, alphabet recitation, numerical comprehension, letter recognition, auditory discrimination, and writing (personal data and numerals). Students are evaluated in each area and a total score is calculated. After the results are obtained, screening personnel review the data and determine recommendations as needed. However, the final placement decision for the transition class is determined by teachers, administrators, and parents after reviewing all assessment information in the child's individual case.

Five subjects were missing Brigance scores from the spring of their kindergarten year. The total Brigance raw scores of the three groups were compared using an ANOVA. Table 1 shows the comparison of the means of the T1 group (N = 12), T2 group (N = 17) and the T3 group (N = 19). No significant differences were found ($F = 1.594, p > .05$). This indicates that the subjects in this study had similar skill development when the recommendation for transition placement was made. Table 2 displays the means and standard deviations by group for the kindergarten Brigance.

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Beginning in the second grade, the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) is administered to students. These tests are administered by the classroom teachers in the spring of the year. The TCAP provides both norm referenced and criterion referenced scores. The norm referenced scores are presented in the form of percentile ranks, stanines, normal curve equivalents, and scale scores. The scale scores are of particular value in this study because they are of equal interval value and can be used for both individual and group comparisons. Two subjects in this study did not have second grade TCAP results in their records.

Table 1
Comparison of Kindergarten Brigance Raw Score Means

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	207.108	2	103.554	1.594	.216
Within Groups	2598.462	40	64.962		
Total	2805.570	42			

Table 2
Means and Standard Deviations for Kindergarten Brigance Raw Scores

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
T1 (Integrated)	16	71.50	92.50	83.47	6.01
T2 (Homogeneous)	11	65.00	95.50	78.45	9.39
T3 (Promoted)	16	64.50	97.00	83.50	8.85

5. Data Analysis

Each question was tested to determine whether statistically significant differences existed between students who attended transition program integrated with first grade (T1), students who attended a homogeneous transition program (T2), and students who were recommended for transition but a program was not available (T3). In order to determine if a statistically significant difference existed between the groups, analyses of variance (ANOVA) procedures were performed utilizing the scaled scores for Total Reading, Total Math, and Total Battery on the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) administrations in second grade. Scale scores were used for analysis because of their equal interval value. For the questions addressed using nominal data, retention history and special education referral and placement, the nonparametric test of chi square for independent samples was used to determine statistical significance.

6. Results

Several analyses were conducted to determine whether differences occurred across the three groups: the transition group integrated with first grade (T1), the traditional transition group (T2), and the promoted group (T3). Initially, analysis of variance (ANOVA) was conducted for each of the following dependent variables from the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP): Total Reading, Total Mathematics, and Composite scores. Scores were unavailable for three subjects. A comparison to the total second grade mean scores for Total Reading, Total Mathematics, and Composite TCAP at this elementary school can be made from the table located in Appendix B.

An ANOVA was used to test the group differences in means of the Total Reading score on the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP). Table 3 shows that the means of the three groups were not significantly different. Table 4 shows the means and standard deviations for the three groups.

Similarly, an ANOVA was used to test the group differences in means of the Total Mathematics score on the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP). Table 5 indicates that the means of the three groups were not significantly different. Table 6 shows the means and standard deviations for the three groups.

An ANOVA was also used to test the group differences in means of the Composite score on the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP).

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Table 7 indicates that the means of the three groups were not significantly different. Table 8 shows the means and standard deviations for the three groups.

It was anticipated that the chi square method would be conducted for each of the following dependent variables: retention, referral for special education, and placement in special education.

Due to minimum expected counts in three cells (no students were retained in the T1 and T2 groups), chi square could not be used to compare retention rates according to group. Table 9 shows the frequencies of retention by grade for the three groups.

Chi square was used to compare special education referrals according to group. The results, $\chi^2 = .628$ (df,2), indicated that the number of students referred did not differ significantly as a function of group membership.

Chi square was also used to compare special education placement according to group. According to the results, $\chi^2 = 2.017$ (df,2), the proportion of students placed in special education was not significantly different across the three groups.

In the test of the six questions, five resulted in nonsignificant differences among the three groups. Group placement did not result in significant findings in achievement test scores, referral for special education services, or special education placement at the end of second grade. The group differences in rate of retention could not be calculated due to three cells having less than the minimum

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expected count, but observation of the raw data indicated that the subjects who progressed to first grade had a higher frequency of retention than would be expected for the population of the elementary school used in this study.

Table 3
Comparison of TCAP Total Reading Scale Score Means

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	4498.870	2	2249.435	.713	.496
Within Groups	135751.500	43	3157.012		
Total	140250.370	45			

Table 4
Means and Standard Deviations for TCAP Total Reading Scale Scores

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
T1 (Integrated)	16	547.00	747.00	652.75	55.85
T2 (Homogeneous)	12	552.00	770.00	658.00	56.40
T3 (Promoted)	18	452.00	696.00	635.17	56.34

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Table 5
Comparison of TCAP Total Mathematics Scale Score Means

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	4619.385	2	2309.693	1.215	.307
Within Groups	81768.528	43	1901.594		
Total	86387.913	45			

Table 6
Means and Standard Deviations for TCAP Total Mathematics Scale Scores

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
T1 (Integrated)	16	579.00	726.00	651.00	33.27
T2 (Homogeneous)	12	576.00	721.00	625.25	41.72
T3 (Promoted)	18	497.00	727.00	637.39	52.03

Table 7
Comparison of TCAP Total Battery Scale Score Means

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1167.422	2	583.711	.378	.687
Within Groups	66343.882	43	1542.881		
Total	67511.304	45			

Table 8
Means and Standard Deviations for TCAP Total Battery Scale Scores

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
T1 (Integrated)	16	595.00	716.00	662.06	35.40
T2 (Homogeneous)	12	593.00	724.00	654.67	39.50
T3 (Promoted)	18	539.00	704.00	650.39	42.28

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Table 9
Frequency of Retention by Grade

	Grade		Total
	First	Second	
T1 (Integrated n=12)	0	0	0
T2 (Homogeneous n=17)	0	0	0
T3 (Promoted n=19)	3	6	9
Total	3	6	9

7. Discussion

The transition program is an early intervention strategy developed to provide developmentally appropriate programming to students who at the end of their kindergarten year do not possess the academic or social skills to be successful in the first grade. The purpose in providing this extra year between kindergarten and first grade is to allow children who are at risk for future academic difficulty “the gift of time” and a lower teacher-pupil ratio. This should allow them to gain the skills that are necessary to be successful academically and socially as they progress through school. Unlike retention, the transition program does not require the student to repeat the same curriculum for a second year.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the academic achievement, retention rates, and special education referral and placement at the end of second grade of three groups of students recommended for participation in a transition program. The first group of students were recommended for transition and were placed in a transition class that was integrated with a first grade class (T1). The second group of students were recommended for transition and were placed in a homogeneous transition class (T2). The final group was comprised of students who were recommended for transition but a program was not offered (T3).

The analysis of standard scores from The Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program indicates that there were no statistically significant differences in the reading, math, or total battery achievement of the students in this

study. These findings are consistent with prior research studies indicating that placement in a transition program rather than progression to the first grade does not result in increased academic performance (Bell, 1972; Ferguson, 1991).

Slavin (1988) states that homogeneous grouping may deprive students of the example and stimulation of other students who are functioning at higher academic levels and recommends that students have a primary identification with a heterogeneous class and only be grouped as needed for reading and math. Piaget (1961) suggests that social transmission aids in cognitive development and the experience of interactions with older children should provide optimal stimulation. This structure was utilized in the transition program that integrated transition students with first grade. However, this configuration did not result in any significant academic differences between these students and students who were grouped homogeneously. In fact, this strategy may have a negative social effect when the first grade students progress to second and the transition students to first grade. These transition students may perceive themselves as inferior when their classmates progress to the next grade without them again.

Due to minimum expected counts, a formal analysis could not be conducted on the rate of retention for these groups. None of the students who had participated in transition had been retained by the end of second grade (participation in transition was not considered a retention for purposes of this study). This may be due to the fact that these students were already older than

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their peers and many school systems prefer not to hold students back for more than one year. Of the nineteen students who were recommended for transition but progressed to first grade, nine (47.37%) had been retained by the end of second grade.

Referral rates for special education were not significantly different for the three groups in this study; however, the frequency for referral was 58.3% , considerably higher than the average referral rate of approximately 21% at this school. Over half of these referrals were made in the first grade.

Placement in special education was not significantly different for these three groups; however, the frequency of 45.8% indicates a higher rate of special education placement than for the rest of the student population at this school (15.64%) and for all students in kindergarten, first and second grades (5.84%). These students were identified as learning disabled (20.8%), speech/language impaired (14.6%), health impaired (8.3%), and developmentally delayed (2.1%). The finding that a large proportion of students recommended for transition required special education services despite the "gift of time" is consistent with the research that transition students have an increased need for special education services (Caggiano, 1984; Ferguson, 1992; Phelps, 1992).

Research indicates that transition students have a higher proportion of males, especially those who are chronologically young, and of minority membership (Langer, Kalk, & Searls, 1984; Smith & Shepard, 1987). In this

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study, the frequency of males was 75% of the sample. Students who were born in June, July, August, or September also comprised 75% of the sample. However, minority membership (14.6%) of the sample was commensurate with the population at Pine View Elementary.

Because very few school districts monitor the progress of students who attend transition programs, they are operating under an intuitive model that "the gift of time" results in students being more successful academically and having better self-concepts than those students who are retained or socially promoted. Future research needs to examine the identification and intervention methods used to identify students as at-risk for future academic problems, as well as those students who would benefit from retention or a transition program. Although there were no significant differences in this study between students who were promoted to the first grade and those placed in transition, social promotion alone does not address the needs of the students as indicated by their higher rates of retention and special education services than would be expected for the population.

Social promotion is the practice of passing students on to the next grade regardless of their level of mastery. This practice began to emerge in the 1930s, partially in response to the research on the negative effects of retention on students (Steiner, 1986). Neither retention nor social promotion necessarily provide appropriate instruction for students and may exacerbate their academic problems

(Pierson & Connell, 1992; Karweit, 1991).

Currently, there is a movement for tougher academic standards for students with researchers, educators, and politicians calling for students to be promoted based on achievement rather than be socially promoted (Grant, 1997; Haas, 1997; Ordovensky, 1997; Ritter, 1997). This issue has gained the support of President Clinton, who has called for the abolishment of social promotion and plans to set up national education standards for reading and mathematics (Baker, 1997). Several questions posed by Larabee (1984) concerning promotion based on academic standards should be considered in the development of these policies: (1) Is the policy of raising promotional standards likely to increase student achievement? (2) Is the standard based exclusively on test scores or is it based on multiple criteria? (3) How related are the skills tested to those taught in the classroom? (4) Is there a greater emphasis on retaining low achievers or providing them with remedial instruction? (5) What will be done with students who continue to fail to meet the standards?

Ending social promotion simply by establishing a new set of criteria for progression from grade to grade will not address the underlying causes of failure. Sandra Feldman, the president of the American Federation of Teachers, cautions that neither social promotion nor holding kids back without help are successful strategies for improving learning (Sanchez, 1997). The underlying problem must be addressed through early assessment of the student's learning problems and

individualized intervention with appropriate remediation and services before students fail. Several alternatives to social promotion or retention have been presented in the literature, including multiage grouping (Nye, 1993), "half-step" grades (Thomas, 1992), counseling and guidance strategies (Wircenski, 1990), remedial classes and specialized curriculum (King, 1995), and more intensive instruction through after school tutoring, Saturday classes, and summer programs (McIver, 1991).

The focus should not be on whether to retain or promote a student, but rather on how to identify students with academic difficulties and intervene to give these students the support needed to succeed. The cost of effective remediation is less than that of an extra year in school or of promoting students who do not have the necessary skills to be successful. Schools must be furnished with the resources to provide teachers with the training, support, and time to address the needs of children experiencing academic difficulty. President Clinton in his State of the Union Address (1998) called for an end to social promotion in America's schools and has said, "Stop promoting children who don't learn, and we will give you the tools to make sure they do." Hopefully, these "tools" will allow for early identification and intervention to address the needs of students prior to the consideration of social promotion or retention.

Some educators and researchers have suggested that there are groups of students who may benefit from nonpromotion (retention or transition). These

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students include those who are of average ability but are chronologically young for their grade (Grant, 1997) and students who are in white, suburban, and middle class school districts (Holmes, 1986). However, Niklason (1987), looking at ability, did not find retention to be beneficial academically or socially.

The Light's Retention Scale (1991), consisting of nineteen evaluation categories, was designed to identify students who would benefit from retention. Items to determine whether a student should be retained or promoted include: school attendance, intelligence, present level of academic functioning, physical size, age, gender, previous retention history, presence of a learning disability, motivation, delinquency, and emotional problems. Although this scale is used by many educators, it lacks reliability and validity to identify students for retention (Sandoval, 1980; Sandoval, 1982; George, 1993). Although some students may benefit from nonpromotion, there is little evidence at this time that will allow us to accurately predict which individuals these will be.

Although transition programming was developed as an alternative to social promotion or retention without intervention and has been available for more than ten years, Pine View has never formally assessed the academic and social-emotional goals or unintended outcomes of the program. The results of this study are consistent with prior research in indicating no academic benefits through the second grade of participation in transition integrated with first grade over homogeneous placement or even promotion. However, the program at Pine View

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has never stated these goals in behavioral terms which are measurable.

Investigation of other academic progress measures and social-emotional factors, including longitudinal data, would provide more information about the success of this program. It would be beneficial if the proponents of transition were compelled to demonstrate the effectiveness of these programs with research studies that do not rely on existing data, but rather are prospective in nature. However, before this can be accomplished, the program must clearly define what they want to accomplish. In the absence of systematic research, the controversy will continue.

If, as the research suggests, these programs are not having the desired outcomes of remedying academic difficulties, such alternatives as remediation , nongraded progression/multi-age settings, and mastery learning that allow for individual differences that are part of normal learning patterns should be explored. In order for informed decisions to be made, it is imperative that research findings on educational practices that produce positive learning results are disseminated to the people who are making decisions about a child's future - the administrators, the educators, and the parents.

8. Limitations of Study

One of the limitations of this study is that the results cannot be generalized to all transition programs. This transition program appears to be unique. However, the results support other studies about transition programs.

The Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program begins in the second grade and only one group of students who participated in the transition integrated with first grade program had completed this test. This contributed to the small sample size, which may have restricted the detection of actual differences. Future research should look at additional classes from this type of program.

This study is also limited to the data available from students' cumulative records and focused on the academic performance of students. In addition to the goal of increased academic performance, social and emotional growth is a goal of transition and was not included in this study. It would be desirable to continue the study for a longer time period and follow these students as they progress through their education measuring social and emotional factors as well as academic ones. Future research should also focus on the factors used to identify students who are at-risk for future academic problems.

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Transition Students

APPENDICES

Transition Students

APPENDIX A

Pine View Elementary School Transition Information Packet for Parents:

Transition Characteristics

Objectives of the Transition Room

Learning and School Readiness

TRANSITION CHARACTERISTICS

The child is bright as evidenced by expressive language, higher level thinking and questioning skills, and the ability to think through problems both vicariously and in reality.

The child is unable to sit in his/her seat--lots of body movement.

The child is not a behavior problem.

The child should have no known learning disabilities.

His/her attention span is short

Gross motor skills such as skipping, throwing and kicking a ball and balancing may be weak.

Emotional immaturity is evidenced by a low level of frustration and a tendency to cry easily.

The child's confidence level is low, and he/she tends to say "I can't do that" frequently when attempting a new task.

Fine motor ability is inconsistent with higher developed verbal skills.

The child tires easily, needs rest but is difficult to settle down.

Typically, the child can master kindergarten DLP and math skills.

The child often is young--late birthday.

There is an inability to sit still--needs frequent change of activities.

The child frequently is disorganized and irresponsible.

The child is capable, but he/she is either the last to complete work, or doesn't complete it in the allotted time.

Look at the child's adaptability to change and how flexible he/she is.

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Observe if the child is interested in active play or more sedentary activities.

Observe if he/she seeks out younger children as friends.

OBJECTIVES OF THE TRANSITION ROOM

To give the child time to grow.

To help the child develop a strong sense of self- to allow him to "blossom from within".

To provide an environment rich in equipment and materials, where experiences are direct and concrete, to build the foundation for later, more abstract experiences.

To provide movement experiences for development of physical and motor skills.

To promote growth in visual, auditory, and tactual perception...to sharpen the senses.

To provide an opportunity to learn and practice patterning of all kinds...visual, auditory, kinesthetic.

To provide many and varied opportunities for oral expression.

To build a foundation for chemistry, physics, and biology, through discovery and play with blocks, and natural materials such as water and sand.

To help the child relate to others socially and to be part of a group.

To help the child develop problem-solving techniques.

To promote creative expression through art, dance, music, cooking, story telling.

To help the child develop the habit of success.

To help the child establish an environment of beauty, order, and stability.

LEARNING AND SCHOOL READINESS

LEARNING READINESS:

A child who is intellectually curious and ready to learn new things is experiencing learning readiness. Most children reach this point before they reach school readiness. It requires much less of a child and means that intellectually, he is able to learn - usually in a one-to-one situation. This is done in familiar surroundings of home with little distraction and with one person for only five to ten minutes at a time. It is sandwiched between long hours of play.

SCHOOL READINESS:

School readiness is another thing entirely. It means the ability to shut out everything else and concentrate on the learning at hand. This is difficult to do in a school room. It also means putting up with bells, waiting one's turn in line, adhering to rules and schedules, and adjusting to many different teachers. It means being self-confident so that thinking energy isn't used up with worrying. School readiness is the ability to cope and learn at the same time.

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APPENDIX A

Pine View Elementary School Second Grade TCAP Mean Scores for
Total Reading, Total Mathematics, and Composite

Transition Students

TCAP Mean Scores for Total Grade*

GROUP	TEST	N	Mean
T1(Integrated)	Reading	104	664
	Math	104	642
	Total	103	665
T2(Homogeneous)	Reading	116	663
	Math	116	659
	Total	116	672
T3(Promoted-Retained)	Reading	113	669
	Math	113	652
	Total	113	668
T3(Promoted-Not Retained)	Reading	109	679
	Math	109	660
	Total	109	678

*T1 = 1997; T2 = 1996; T3(Promoted-Retained) = 1995; T3(Promoted-Not retained) = 1994

VITA

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