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The Role of High-Quality Preschool Experiences in Children's School Readiness Gains

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INTRODUCTION

Young children from low-income homes often benefit most from participating in high quality early childhood environments (Geoffrey et al., 2010). It has also been suggested that a high quality preschool experience can mitigate the link between poverty and difficulties with school readiness (Ladd, 2017). The quality of the teacher and the classroom have been found to be essential to the effectiveness of the high quality preschool program. However, there are still many unknowns about which teacher and classroom characteristics are most important for young children's development of school readiness skills. Therefore, in this study we will focus on characteristics and behaviors of teachers and classrooms that are expected to increase children's school readiness skills. We will look specifically at children's executive functioning skills, or cognitive skills involved in planning and problem solving. This preliminary data will help us better understand teachers and classrooms and if different aspects of these environments relate to children's executive functioning skills.

OBJECTIVES

- To assess if characteristics of teachers and classroom quality are correlated
- To test if variables associated with teachers and classroom quality are correlated with improvements in children's executive functioning skills
- To provide findings that are useful for the future development of more effective training for teachers to ensure their students are able to reach their full potential

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

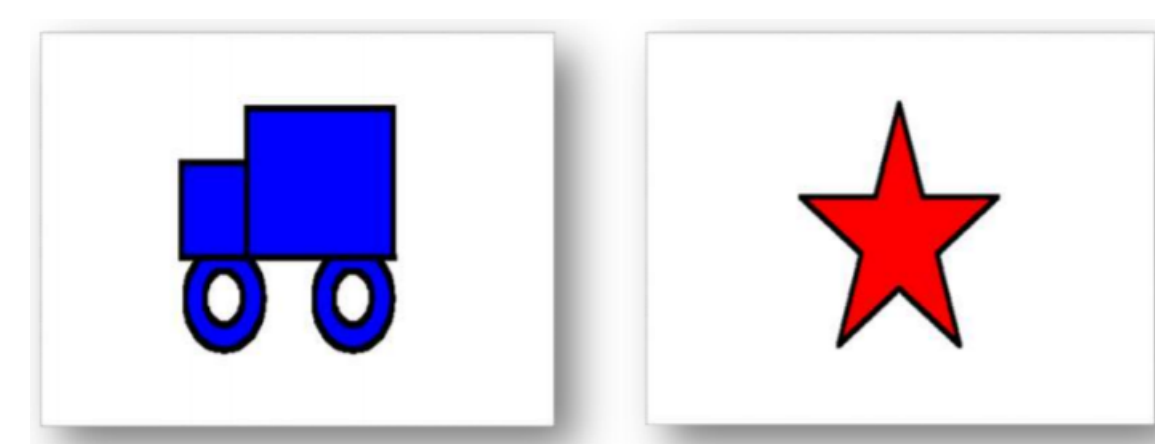
This work was supported by a contract with Preschool Promise Montgomery County (Richard Stock and Mary Fuhs, co-PIs).

METHOD AND RESULTS

- Preschool Promise project data from 31 classrooms in 2017-2018 school year (data collection is ongoing).

Child Outcome Measure

- **Minnesota Executive Function Scale**
 - N = 31 classrooms with complete fall and spring assessments
 - Card game that measures executive functioning skills, such as cognitive flexibility, working memory, and inhibitory control



Teacher and Classroom Measures

- **Teacher Education**
- **Overall Classroom Quality**
 - Classroom Assessment Scoring System (Pianta et al., 2008)
 - Assesses the quality of teacher-child interactions in three categories, which are emotional support, classroom organization, and instructional support
- **Socio-Emotional Learning**
 - Conscious Discipline Fidelity (Bailey, 2001)
 - Participation in a classroom management style that integrates all aspects of learning into one curriculum that teaches the students composure, encouragement, assertiveness, choices, empathy, positive intent, and consequences

Partial Correlations Between Teacher and Classroom Characteristics and Classroom Spring Executive Functioning Skills

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Spring Classroom Average MEFS	1.00					
2. Teacher Education	0.09	1.00				
3. Fall CLASS Emotional Support	0.14	0.42*	1.00			
4. Fall CLASS Classroom Organization	0.09	0.29	0.87**	1.00		
5. Fall CLASS Instructional Support	-0.07	0.28	0.51**	0.35*	1.00	
6. Fall CLASS Overall Average	0.05	0.39*	0.91**	0.84**	0.79**	1.00
7. Fall Conscious Discipline Fid.	0.40 [†]	0.41 [†]	0.22	0.39 [†]	0.26	0.34

Note: † $p < .10$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. Correlations control for classroom fall executive functioning skills. N = 31 classrooms (except Fall Conscious Discipline Fidelity (N = 18)).

CONCLUSIONS

Correlations among Teacher and Classroom Characteristics

We found that teachers' level of education was correlated with participation in providing emotional support for their students and their overall classroom quality scores. This gives evidence with previous research that greater teacher education is related to higher classroom quality on a number of variables.

Correlations between Classroom Spring Executive Functioning Skills and Teacher and Classroom Characteristics

Classroom MEFS scores were correlated with classroom social and emotional support (Fall Conscious Discipline Fidelity), but this medium effect size was not statistically significant. Given that this is a preliminary analysis of ongoing data collection, we plan to investigate this association with our full sample (N ~ 100 classrooms and 676 children). Also, future research will be conducted to determine if teacher and classroom quality is more or less important for gains of executive functioning skills for students living in poverty.