

## The Concordance between Teachers' and Parents' Perceptions of School Transition Practices: A Solid Base for the Future

Annarilla Ahtola  
University of Turku

Piia Maria Björn  
University of Eastern Finland

Tiina Turunen  
University of Turku

Pirjo-Liisa Poikonen, Marita Kontoniemi, Marja-Kristiina Lerkkanen and Jari-Erik Nurmi  
University of Jyväskylä

This study focuses on parents' and teachers' perceptions of practices aimed at easing the transition to formal schooling (e.g., familiarization with the school, discussions about the school entrants). A total of 230 preschool teachers, 131 elementary school teachers, and 2,662 mothers and fathers filled in a questionnaire containing items on how important they considered different preschool-school transition practices. The participants considered the various transition practices to be at least somewhat important. On average, familiarization with the school was considered to be most important, whereas teacher co-operation and joint writing of curricula were considered to be least important. The perceptions of the participant groups differed from each other significantly in almost all practices. We suggest that the information on school entrants should be transferred within joint meetings between transition partners and other professionals whenever possible.

*Keywords:* school transition, transition practices, perceptions, parents, teachers

Until recently, studies concerning transitions from preschool to formal schooling have been mainly conducted from the viewpoint of developmental psychology, and the main body of research has focused on individual children and their readiness for school (e.g., Lemelin et al., 2007; Lloyd, Irwin, & Hertzman, 2009). However, transition to school must not be

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Annarilla Ahtola, Department of Psychology, University of Turku; Piia Maria Björn, School of Educational Sciences and Psychology, University of Eastern Finland; Tiina Turunen, Department of Psychology, University of Turku; Pirjo-Liisa Poikonen, Department of Education/Early Childhood Education, University of Jyväskylä; Marita Kontoniemi, Teacher Training School, University of Jyväskylä; Marja-Kristiina Lerkkanen, Department of Education/Early Childhood Education, University of Jyväskylä; Jari-Erik Nurmi, Department of Psychology, University of Jyväskylä. The study was conducted at the Centre of Excellence in Learning and Motivation Research financed by the Academy of Finland (No. 213486 for 2006–2011), and other grant from the same funding agency (No. 268586 for 2013–2017).

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Annarilla Ahtola, Department of Psychology, University of Turku, 20014 University of Turku, Finland. E-mail: [annarilla.ahtola@utu.fi](mailto:annarilla.ahtola@utu.fi)

This article was originally published with errors. This version has been amended. Please see Erratum (<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2015.1041800>).

conceptualized only in terms of individual school entrants (see also Carlton & Winsler, 1999; Graue, 1999; Kim & Suen, 2003; La Paro & Pianta, 2000; Meisels, 1999, 2007; Niesel & Griebel, 2007; Ramey & Ramey, 1998; Snow, 2006; Vernon-Feagans & Blair, 2006). Instead, according to the Ecological and Dynamic Model of Transition suggested by Rimm-Kaufman and Pianta (2000), surrounding contexts—such as the family, the preschool, and the school, as well as successful relationships between these—should be taken into consideration as they ease the discontinuities of school transition. This perspective on school transition leans, of course, on the bioecological model of development by Bronfenbrenner and Morris (1998; see also Bronfenbrenner, 1979), which consists of concentric micro-, meso-, exo- and macro-systems. Meso-systems, the important interrelations among the child's micro-systems, that is, family, preschool, and elementary school, are of particular interest. Therefore, the present paper takes into account the viewpoints of parents, preschool teachers, and elementary school teachers on school transition and on interrelations during this transition phase.

Transition practices—activities that build and strengthen relationships between families, preschool, and elementary school—are today considered the primary means of supporting a child's entrance into school (for example, see Broström, 2003; Clark & Zygmunt-Fillwalk, 2008; Dockett & Perry, 2001; Einarsdottir, 2006; Einarsdottir, Perry, & Dockett, 2008; Kagan & Neuman, 1998; Pianta, Cox, Taylor, & Early, 1999; Pianta, Kraft-Sayre, Rimm-Kaufman, Gercke, & Higgins, 2001; Thorsen, Bø, Løge, & Omdal, 2006). In this study, transition practices are defined as reciprocal organization activities and cooperation (vertical connection), one of the aims of which is to connect with families (horizontal connection). In fact, in the Finnish language, the phrase “transition practices” carries more of a meaning of “cooperation of the transition period,” which highlights the reciprocal nature of the transition phenomenon from preschool to elementary school. Forming vertical connections that are characterized by mutual trust and respect, as well as shared responsibility between preschool and elementary school professionals, is essential (Dockett & Perry, 2001; Einarsdottir et al., 2008; Pianta et al., 2001). Positive contacts between preschool and elementary school personnel develop an adequate foundation for further mutual activities, which, in turn, create and strengthen positive relationships, as well as home-school interactions.

Transition practices operate in several ways. First, various mutual activities between preschool and elementary school, such as joint events and collaborative teaching, help to familiarize preschoolers with the elementary school environment and people and thus reduce the abruptness of the change. Second, passing on useful information about school entrants (for example, group dynamics, or the special needs of some children) is needed (Broström, 2003; Thorsen et al., 2006). Third, cooperation at the level of organizations and teachers and other professionals bridge and reduce discontinuities in concepts, expectations, curriculum, pedagogy, and discipline between preschool and elementary school (Carlton & Winsler, 1999; Einarsdottir, 2006; Einarsdottir et al., 2008; Kagan & Neuman, 1998; Rimm-Kaufman & Pianta, 2000). An example of this kind of effort is joint writing and revising of the curricula of preschools and elementary schools (Ahtola et al., 2011). Fourth, in addition to connecting with each other, preschool and elementary school teachers must collaborate with families (for example, see Mangione & Speth, 1998; Margetts, 2007). Elementary school teachers should establish a personal level of trust and rapport with families before school even starts (La Paro, Pianta, & Cox, 2000a, 2000b; Nelson, 2004; Pianta, Cox, Taylor, & Early, 1999). Parental trust in teachers is built up through parent-teacher interaction and is therefore dependent on each teacher's individual characteristics (Adams & Christenson, 2000; Christenson, 2004; Tschannen-Moran, 2001) and teaching practices (Lerkkanen, Kikas, Pakarinen, Poikonen, & Nurmi, 2013).

Well-planned and focused transition practices have been shown to lead to better learning and adjustment in school (Ahtola et al., 2011; LoCasale-Crouch, Mashburn, Downer, & Pianta, 2008; Margetts, 2007; Schulting, Malone, & Dodge, 2005). Consequently, it is reasonable to recommend that they are widely used in preschools and schools. It seems that the implementation rate of transition practices is positively related to the teachers' perceptions on the importance of these practices: teachers, who consider these practices important, also report more active implementation of them (Ahtola, Poikonen, Kontoniemi, Niemi, & Nurmi, 2012). This is why it is of interest to look into these perceptions more closely, even though we must take into account the possibility of response bias, too. According to Rous, Hallam, McCormick and Cox (2010), who studied transition to the preschool, there was some variation in preschool teachers' ratings on various transition practices. Contacting parents before the school starts was indicated to be a good idea by most of the teachers, as well as written records of child's past experiences (both about 70%). However, visiting the incoming children's programs or receiving them to the classroom was indicated as a good idea only by 30–40% of the teachers. Ahtola et al. (2012) used a small dataset of 36 elementary school teachers, in which discussions with preschool teachers on school entrants were typically considered very important. Children's familiarization with the school environment was considered of somewhat lesser importance, but clearly more important than parents meeting the teacher before school starts. Thus, the previous results on how important transition practices are considered by teachers are somewhat conflicting. What is more, to our knowledge, there are very few, if any, studies on preschool teachers', elementary school teachers', and parents' perceptions of transition practices. As these three participants are the core collaborators during the transition phases (in which the child enters formal schooling or moves within the school system from one level to another), it is important to investigate perceptions of each group, as well as to find out whether a concordance exists or does not exist between these groups.

Across cultures, there is a detectable accord, at least to some extent, between how parents and teachers generally perceive school transition and the roles of the school and parents in it. Chan's (2012) report focused on exploring the concordance between respondents' (children, parents, and teachers) emphasis on academic achievements versus emotional support straight after the child has entered primary school in Hong Kong. Children and their observed performance during the transition period indicated that they had varied expectations of the transition. In contrast, parents had high expectations for their children's academic ability and self-discipline. Both elementary school teachers and the parents of preschoolers ranked pre-academic skills as the most important developmental area, whereas preschool teachers ranked them as the least important. In addition, importance of connection amongst preschools, elementary schools, and parents was acknowledged. Earlier studies conducted in Australia and the USA also suggest that children, parents, and teachers emphasize different issues when considering entering school (Dockett & Perry, 2004a, 2004b; Piotrkowski, Botsko, & Matthews, 2000). According to Korkmaz (2007), teachers' expectations about the roles and responsibilities of parents, schools, and teachers in enhancing student learning are manifold.

There are relatively few reports available on the differences between parental perceptions of school transitions by gender. However, recent studies reveal differences in how mothers and fathers rate the importance of school as a source of knowledge (Nichols, Nixon, Pudney, & Jurvansuu, 2009), and that parent characteristics had slightly differential effects on youth's academic motivation and achievement (Dotterer, McHale, & Crouter, 2009). Based on these results, a cautious conclusion may be derived that fathers and the mothers may also view the importance of transition practices quite differently.

### **The Finnish Educational System**

The present study was conducted in Finland, where compulsory formal education consists of nine years of comprehensive school and starts at age seven, somewhat later than in, for example, many European countries or in the USA. Preschool education is voluntary for families, although practically all six-year-olds attend voluntary preschool, which is free of charge (Kumpulainen, 2012). In fact, preschool is likely to become compulsory for all children in the near future (Kinos & Palonen, 2013). In this paper, we use the term “preschool” to refer to pre-school activity for six-year-olds, and the term “Grade 1” to refer to the first year of elementary school for seven-year-olds. In Finland, children aged five years and younger attend part- or full-time daycare activities, in which care, education, and teaching form an integrated whole (Hännikäinen, 2003). They are located in daycare centers.

Even though more and more preschool classrooms are now located in elementary school buildings, the majority of preschool classrooms are still located in and organized by daycare centers, (Kumpulainen, 2012). This reflects the different educational origins and traditions of Finnish early-childhood education and preschool versus basic education (see Hännikäinen, 2003). The preschool curriculum contains seven subject areas, but instruction and activities are integrated in thematic learning and play throughout the day. The goals of the preschool education curriculum place greater emphasis on fostering the child’s personal and social development than on the formal or systematic teaching of academic skills. Children’s need to learn through imagination and play is taken into account. However, children are read to and encouraged to play with letters, words, and numbers, and through these playful activities, 25% of children learn to read during the preschool year (e.g., Lerkkanen, Rasku-Puttonen, Aunola, & Nurmi, 2004). Moreover, special attention is given to children’s development of pre-literacy and pre-math skills in order to avoid the risk of later academic failure.

In this context, the function of transition activities is, on one hand, to help children and adults prepare and adjust during this time of change, and, on the other hand, to actually lessen the discontinuity between elementary school and the preceding preschool. Currently, a major reform is underway in terms of both macro- and exo-systems in Finland. Approximately 50% of municipalities have already transferred the administration of early education from social services to the school department. Recently, early education as a whole has also become a part of the basic education system at the national level, as it already is in other Nordic countries, including Sweden, Norway, and Iceland (Petäjämäki & Pokki, 2010).

The Finnish system as a whole is based on high-quality public services (e.g., locally organized early education, basic education, and healthcare). Finnish society heralds egalitarian values, with the school system offering the same basic nine-year education with free hot lunch for everyone. Local municipal authorities organize and, with government support, fund preschool and basic education. In addition, local authorities have considerable power in guiding education policies and content, as the municipalities are allowed to apply and modify the national core curricula to their context.

### **The Present Study**

Flexible and well-organized transition practices between preschool, elementary school, and the families predict, and may even lead to, better learning and adjustment in school (Ahtola et al., 2011; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008; Schulting et al., 2005; see also Margetts, 2007). This led us to examine how important these various transition practices are perceived

to be by parents and preschool and elementary school teachers, the actual partners of supportive network during the school transition process. In particular, we aimed to reveal possible differences between parental and teacher perceptions of the importance of school transition practices. We hypothesized that the views may differ, as the position and role of parents, preschool teachers, and elementary school teachers are different in the school transition phase. In addition, we examined the effect of gender (within parental and teacher samples) on these perceptions.

## Methods

### Participants

The data for the present study were drawn from the longitudinal First Steps Study: Interactive Learning in the Child-Parent-Teacher Triangle (Lerkkanen et al., 2006), a prospective follow-up of approximately 2,000 children from four municipalities from the beginning of their preschool year (August, 2006). In total, 3,218 parents (50.0% mothers; 50.0% fathers), 236 preschool teachers (96.2% female; 3.8% male), and 135 elementary school (Grade 1) class teachers (91.1% female; 8.9% male) participated. Out of these, 2,662 parents (82.7%), 230 preschool teachers (97.5%), and 131 elementary school teachers (97.0%) completed the questionnaire concerning transition practices. Teachers and parents were asked for their written consent before being included in the study. The parents' educational level was fairly representative of the general Finnish population (Statistics Finland, 2007).

### Procedure

The questionnaire was completed by parents (separate questionnaires for mothers and fathers) and by preschool teachers during the spring of 2007 at the end of the preschool year, and by elementary school teachers during the spring of 2008 at the end of Grade 1. The questionnaires were returned in prepaid envelopes to the researchers.

### Measurements

#### Questionnaire on transition practices.

The importance of seven transition practices was examined. First, several questions about transition practices were adapted from the existing literature (Einarsdottir, 2003; Pianta et al., 2001; see also, for example, Einarsdottir et al., 2008; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008) for the pilot questionnaire, which was trialed in a pilot study for preschool and elementary school teachers in a large Finnish town that did not participate in the final study. The final set of seven practices pertinent in Finnish schools was then selected and summarized. Compared to earlier research on transition practices, which has often included quite general activities such as flyers and open-house meetings (see, for example, Pianta et al., 1999; Schulting et al., 2005), the practices in this set are somewhat more intense and specific to the transition to elementary school. These practices were as follows:

- (1) The preschool group familiarizes itself with elementary school activities and people by visiting the elementary school or by having the elementary school teacher and/or pupils visit the preschool group.

- (2) The preschool teacher and the elementary school teacher cooperate (for example, by organizing joint events, planning teaching together, or teaching together).
- (3) The preschool teacher and the elementary school teacher organize a joint event on starting school for the parents of school entrants.
- (4) The child, the parents, and the future Grade 1 teacher meet personally before the start of elementary school.
- (5) The preschool teacher, the Grade 1 teacher, and special workers (e.g., special education teachers, school psychologist) discuss the school entrants' skills, peer relations, and so on.
- (6) The child's preschool education plan and/or "growth portfolio" (including, e.g., the child's output) is passed on to the elementary school teacher.
- (7) The preschool teachers and the elementary school teachers write and revise the preschool and Grades 1 and 2 curricula together.

The participants rated the importance of these practices on a scale of 1–5 (1 = not at all important; 5 = very important).

### Analysis Strategy

Preliminary analyses at the level of single transition practices were conducted by using univariate analysis of variance (ANOVA) and *t*-tests. In final analysis, because we had several transition practices as dependent variables, we decided to use a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) in order to test effects of participant group (parent, preschool teacher, elementary school teacher). The MANOVA takes correlations between dependent variables into account. Wilks' lambda values are reported for MANOVA; the results of Pillai's trace were almost identical. Out of the seven transition practices in the study, we had complete data from parents, preschool teachers, and elementary school teachers for five practices. For Practice 3 (a joint event for parents), we only had data from parents and preschool teachers, and for Practice 7 (curricula written together), we only had data from preschool teachers and elementary school teachers. This is why these practices were not included in MANOVA, and we used a univariate analysis of variance to further test for differences in these perceptions.

### Results

The descriptive results in [Table 1](#) show that the participants considered the various transition practices to be at least somewhat important, as the average means varied between 3.43 and 4.42, that is, greater than 3 ("somewhat important") on scale 1–5.

Simple one-way analyses of variance revealed that, for all but two practices, parents, preschool teachers, and elementary school teachers differed from each other significantly in terms of how important they rated the practices on scale 1–5 ([Table 1](#)). For the most part, parents and preschool teachers considered the practices more important than the elementary school teachers. However, this was not the case in terms of discussions about the school entrants, which were considered more important by both teacher groups than by parents. [Table 1](#) also reveals a significant gender effect: the male participants (among both the fathers and the teachers) considered all but one practices to be less important than the female participants.

Table 1

*Means and Standard Deviations for Transition Practice Variables, on Scale 1–5 (1 = Not at all Important, 5 = Very Important), and the Results of One-Way Analysis of Variance and T-Tests*

	All Mean ( <i>SD</i> )	Parents Mean ( <i>SD</i> )	Teachers preschool Mean ( <i>SD</i> )	Teachers elem. School Mean ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>F</i>	Male Mean ( <i>SD</i> )	Female Mean ( <i>SD</i> )	<i>t</i>
1. Familiarization with the school	4.42 (0.80)	4.44 (0.79)	4.35 (0.75)	4.20 (0.95)	6.90*	4.33 (0.79)	4.47 (0.80)	4.67**
2. Teacher co-operation	3.62 (1.04)	3.63 (1.03)	3.63 (1.03)	3.20 (1.13)	11.01**	3.63 (0.98)	3.61 (1.08)	−0.43
3. A joint event for parents	3.86 (1.04)	3.86 (1.04)	3.84 (1.11)	–	0.04	3.76 (0.97)	3.92 (1.08)	4.16**
4. Discussions on the school entrants	3.98 (0.95)	3.88 (0.95)	4.68 (0.61)	4.66 (0.69)	119.56**	3.69 (0.96)	4.14 (0.91)	12.76**
5. Preschool education plan and/or “growth portfolio” passed on	3.79 (1.02)	3.79 (1.02)	3.73 (1.04)	3.89 (1.05)	0.98	3.69 (0.99)	3.85 (1.03)	4.13**
6. Personal meeting with the teacher	3.97 (1.03)	3.99 (1.02)	4.09 (0.94)	3.35 (1.23)	26.11**	3.88 (1.00)	4.02 (1.04)	3.63**
7. The curricula written together	3.43 (1.01)	–	3.67 (0.92)	3.01 (1.02)	40.72**	2.60 (1.10)	3.48 (0.99)	3.84**

*Note.* \* $p < .01$ . \*\* $p < .001$ .

In addition, parents', preschool teachers', and elementary school teachers' perceptions of importance differed from each other in terms of ranking these practices (Table 1). For parents, familiarization to school and a personal meeting with the teacher before the school starts were the most important practices, whereas for both teacher groups, discussions between professionals about school entrants and school familiarization were the most important practices. Teacher co-operation had one of the lowest rankings for all participant groups, whereas written information (preschool education plan) was ranked higher by elementary school teachers than by parents or preschool teachers. The perceptions of male and female participants were rather similar in this respect, but small differences were revealed: Male participants considered personal meeting with the teacher and joint event for parents more important than female participants, in terms of rankings.

Correlations between transition practice variables were moderate, .17–.45 (Table 2). This confirmed that, in the final analysis, MANOVA was in order: The three participant groups, gender, and all the practices were analyzed simultaneously (for example, see Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). These results of MANOVA (Table 3) confirmed the preliminary results presented in Table 1: parents, preschool teachers, and elementary school teachers clearly differed from each other in their general perception of importance of transition practices, as did male and female participants. However, the effects of group and gender were very small, as the Eta values were only .02 and .01, respectively. There was no interaction effect between group and gender. In more detail, Table 3 shows that these significant differences between parents, preschool teachers, and elementary school teachers were repeated at the level of individual practices, except for passing on the preschool education plan. Mostly, the differences were between parents and elementary school teachers, so that parents considered the practices more important than elementary school teachers. However, discussions on school entrants were considered more important by both teacher groups than by parents. In addition, for most practices, the gender effect was also repeated at the level of individual practices: Female participants considered most practices to be more important than male participants, however, this was not the case for teacher co-operation and passing on the preschool education plan. There was also one interaction effect, for personally meeting with parents before the school starts. The further detailed graphics revealed that the interaction effect was for male elementary school teachers with the lowest rating of importance. However, since this segment sample was small (12), we consider this result to be only suggestive in nature.

Table 2  
*Correlations Between Study Variables: Transition Practices, and Gender (n = 228–3036)*

	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Familiarization with the school	.42**	.29**	.20**	.19**	.17**	.34**
2. Teacher co-operation	–	.36**	.28**	.31**	.24**	.45**
3. A joint event for parents		–	.31**	.25**	.27**	.24**
4. Discussions on the school entrants			–	.41**	.22**	.18*
5. Preschool education plan passed on				–	.28**	.25**
6. Personal meeting with the teacher					–	.38**
7. The curriculum written together						–

*Note.* Pearson correlations are presented; non-parametric Spearman rho-coefficients were similar.

\**p* < .01. \*\**p* < .001.

Table 3  
*Multivariate Analysis of Variance: Practices 1,2, 4–6*

	Wilks' $\Lambda$	DF1	DF2	Eta squared
Intercept	0.28***	5	3013	.72
Group (parent, teacher, teacher)	0.96***	10	6028	.02
Gender	1.00*	5	3013	.01
Group×Gender	1.00	10	6028	.00
Tests of between-subject effects, <i>F</i> (df)	Group		Gender	Group×Gender
1. Familiarization with the school	6.76** (2)	Parents > ES teachers	4.03* (1)	0.84 (2)
2. Teacher co-operation	7.90*** (2)	Parents, PS teachers > ES teachers	1.19 (1)	1.35 (2)
4. Discussions on the school entrants	20.48*** (2)	Parents < PS teachers, ES teachers	4.78* (1)	0.66 (2)
5. Preschool education plan passed on	0.37 (2)	–	2.75 (1)	1.26 (2)
6. Personal meeting with the teacher	22.33*** (2)	Parents, PS teachers > ES teachers	10.31** (1)	4.13* (2)

Note. DF = degrees of freedom. ES = elementary school. PS = preschool.

\* $p < .05$ . \*\* $p < .01$ . \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

Because we had only partial datasets for two transition practices (i.e., joint event and writing curricula), these practices were tested with ANOVA. For the joint event for parents, there was no difference between parents' and preschool teachers' perceptions. Neither were there any gender or interaction effects. For the importance of the curricula written together, there were differences. Preschool teachers considered this practice to be more important than elementary school teachers,  $F(1) 874.85, p = .022$ , and male teachers considered this to be less important than female teachers,  $F(1) 1086.46, p = .019$ . No interaction effect was found.

## Discussion

The first aim of this study was to investigate how parents and preschool and elementary school teachers perceive the importance of various preschool-elementary school transition practices. Overall, the results revealed that parents, preschool teachers, and elementary school teachers considered transition practices to be rather important. None of the practices were considered "not important." On average, familiarization with the school was considered to be the most important, whereas teacher co-operation and joint writing of curricula were considered to be the least important. Interestingly, previous research shows that contact between preschool and kindergarten teachers as well as joint writing of curricula are among the most important transition practices in terms of school achievement and adjustment, even though these practices may not be implemented very often (Ahtola et al., 2011; LoCasale-Crouch et al., 2008; see also, Rous et al., 2010). When it comes to co-operation at the level of school professionals and school organization, rather than everyday activities in the school and with the children, it appears that the importance is not quite understood.

The question may arise as to whether the teachers in preschools and elementary schools really do have time to interact and write curricula together, especially as there may be several daycare units sending children to one elementary school, and the distances may be long. Interestingly, it seems that the practical reasons or other possible obstacles, such as lack of time or administration issues, in fact are not clearly related to the actual implementation of transition practices (Ahtola et al., 2012).

The second aim of the present study was to reveal possible differences between parental and teacher perceptions of the importance of school transition practices. General perceptions of importance of various transition practices differed between parents, preschool teachers, and elementary teachers. To be more specific, parents tended to consider transition practices more important than teachers, especially those in elementary school. This may be due to the very personal nature of school transition for parents; their child is about to start formal schooling, and this usually represents an important change for the child and the whole family, both practically and symbolically. Furthermore, in the case of a child needing extra support in learning or being able to function within the school environment in general, parents usually emphasize planning for the transition as well as the support of teachers (see Walker et al., 2012). Considering the differences between preschool teachers and elementary school teachers, at the time that the questionnaire was completed, from the perspective of the elementary school teachers the school transition had already taken place, and thus transition practices may not have seemed so important anymore. In contrast to some other countries, we suggest that differences in formal education are not a major factor to explain the differences between preschool teachers and elementary school teachers, because high level and quality of all teachers is a norm throughout the Finnish educational system: a Master's degree in education is the norm for elementary school teachers, and a Bachelor's degree for preschool teachers. What is more, Master's degree in early education is becoming more common in preschools.

The only clear exceptions to the pattern mentioned above were discussions about school entrants, which were considered more important by teachers than by parents. However, parents also seem to understand the importance of passing on information—in fact, when they consider personal meeting with the future teacher rather important, the parents may also think about things they would like to tell to the teacher about their child. Interestingly, passing on written information about school entrants was perceived in a similar fashion by parents and teachers. Previous results suggest that passing on information is useful, at least when the information is comprehensive and documented for repeated use (Ahtola et al., 2011).

We also examined the effect of gender on perceptions concerning transition practices. In the present data, the male participants unanimously (among both the fathers and the teachers) considered most practices to be less important than the female participants. One possible explanation for this might be that parental educational levels have different indirect effects on expectations towards the school system (Dotterer et al., 2009). Furthermore, this finding might also be due to an everyday assumption that fathers and male teachers tend to emphasize actual learning outcomes and measurable facts instead of good communication between parents and teachers and information-sharing practices.

### **Limitations**

There are several limitations concerning the present study that should be taken into account in any attempts to generalize the present study. First, there were only 20 male

teachers altogether, making the results concerning gender differences within teacher groups rather suggestive in nature. This is, however, also due to the fact that most of the preschool and Grade 1 and 2 teachers in Finland are female, which is also typical in other countries. Secondly, only one-item selections were used. If dimensional data analysis procedures had been done, maybe a wider interpretation would have been possible. However, the items now used in the analyses were selected so that they represented reality—they did not allow for possible misinterpretations or emphasis of attitudes towards other groups (i.e., parents versus teachers, preschool teachers versus elementary school teachers). Third, the data was gathered at different time points: first from the parents and the preschool teachers (at the end of the preschool year), and a year later from the elementary school teachers (at the end of the Grade 1). This was due to the longitudinal study procedure, but it may have had an effect on the results. It may partly explain why elementary school teachers systematically gave the lowest ratings for almost all transition practices. Finally, the educational system in Finland differs from that of many other countries. For example, Finnish children experience their first educational transitions, preschool and Grade 1, a year or two later (preschool entry at the age of six years, and commencement of the Grade 1 in elementary school at seven years of age) than is the practice in many other countries. Hence, due to such international differences concerning educational foundations, there is need for caution when generalizing our results across the world.

### **Conclusion and Practical Implications**

Overall, the results of the present study add to the literature in school transitions by showing that there is a concordance, at least to some extent, among Finnish parents, preschool teachers, and elementary school teachers in their perceptions of the importance of various practices used in the transition to elementary school. Now that we know that agreement exists between the parents' and teachers' opinions in transition practices, this work can have a much higher probability of success. On the other hand, the differences in perceptions mirror the different roles and positions of these groups. On the basis of these findings, we especially suggest that the information on school entrants should be transferred within joint meetings between parents, preschool teacher, and the future elementary school teacher and other professionals, whenever possible. This procedure would meet the needs of each transition partner in an ideal fashion.

The importance of organization level co-operation and teacher co-operation needs to be emphasized in schools and with local authorities. Both top-down and bottom-up developmental activities are needed to enhance the implementation of transition practices (Ahtola et al., 2012). Furthermore, on a national level, the Finnish Basic Education Act has recently been reformed. According to the reform, one of the most critical changes in the everyday work of the teachers is a substantial increase in reporting of children's skills and needs for support in learning. Consequently, there is also a growing need for systemizing transition practices across municipalities, elementary schools, and daycare centers. Deeper understanding of parents' views and personal experiences on school transition and transition practices are of interest in future research, as well as the transition practice experiences of the children themselves.

### **Disclosure statement**

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

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