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Predicting Pre-Kindergarteners' Executive Function Skills: The Role of the Classroom

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Predicting Pre-Kindergarteners' Executive Function Skills: The Role of the Classroom

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Abstract

This study examined how classroom organization and structure influenced 1,065 pre-kindergartener's acquisition and cultivation of executive function skills across 80 pre-kindergarten classrooms. Measures of the pre-kindergartener's gains in cognitive flexibility, sustained attention, working memory, inhibitory control, and work-related skills were related to the amount of classroom time spent in instruction, the proportion of instructional time spent in whole-group, small-group, and centers, the number of times out of the classroom, and the number of classroom transitions. Results suggested that specific aspects of pre-kindergarten classroom organization and structure have an effect on children's executive function gains, especially with regard to children's sustained attention, working memory, inhibitory control, and work-related skills. Findings implicate the importance of identifying ways to improve children's executive function skills so that they can succeed in school. Simple changes to a classroom's organization and structure have an impact; therefore, it is important not only to focus on supplemental curriculum to improve children's executive function skills, but to focus on how learning is structured.