

Early Childhood Teacher Turnover in an Early Head Start Setting: A Qualitative Examination

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Abstract : Stable relationships provide a predictable and trusting environment and are essential for early development, but high teacher turnover rates in childcare settings make it challenging for infants and toddlers to form stable relationships with their teachers. This can have an adverse effect on development and learning. The qualitative study discussed in this article draws from the experiences of early Head Start teachers and administrators to describe both the impact of teacher turnover and the motivational factors that contribute to teacher retention. A case study approach was used and included classroom observations, a review of exit interviews, and perceptions from focus groups of early Head Start staff in an urban early Head Start childcare center. Emerging from the case study was the discovery that teacher turnover has an impact on the social-emotional development of toddlers, particularly in self-regulation. Additional key findings that emerged include teacher turnover leading to negative effects on learning, a decrease in preschool preparation, and increased chaos in the classroom and center. Motivational factors that contributed to teacher retention included positive leadership, the mission to make a difference, and fair compensation.

Keywords : early childhood, teacher turnover, continuity of care, early head start

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