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Project Title: Head Start Home-Classroom (Dis)Continuity and Children's Self-Regulation

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Project Abstract:

Young children's self-regulation is shaped by recurring experiences with people, objects, and symbols in their immediate environment. Evolutionary-developmental theoretical perspectives posit that these early experiences serve as environmental cues that adaptively shape development. There is evidence that high quality experiences in the home and the preschool classroom each positively impact young children's self-regulation (e.g., Cadima et al., 2016; Lengua et al., 2014). Research also suggests that high quality experiences in one environment, such as the preschool classroom, can have a compensatory effect on development for children with low quality experiences in another environment, such as for children living in poverty (e.g., Watamura, Phillips, Morrissey, McCartney, & Bub, 2011). Thus, (dis)continuity in cues from two environments may have implications for children's development. However, less is known about different patterns of (dis)continuity between children's home and preschool environments (Belsky, 1980), and how patterns of (dis)continuity relate to self-regulation.

Using a mixed methods approach, this collaborative study investigates patterns of Head Start home-classroom (dis)continuity and how those patterns of experience relate to self-regulation. Specifically, this study will address the following research questions across two phases:

Phase 1: Quantitative

1. What are patterns of (dis)continuity in Head Start home and classroom environmental experiences?
2. How do patterns of (dis)continuity relate to children's self-regulation?

Phase 2: Qualitative

3. What are Head Start parents' and teachers' perceptions about the importance of early home-classroom (dis)continuity for children's proximal processes?
4. How do parents and teachers perceive home-classroom (dis)continuity impacting children's self-regulation?

Phase 1 will include person-centered, quantitative secondary data analyses using the Head Start Family and Child Experiences Survey 2009 Cohort (FACES 2009; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2013) to investigate the complex interrelationships between children's home and classroom environments and self-regulation. The derived patterns of Head Start home-classroom (dis)continuity will capture the experiences of children in Head Start and inform research, policy, and practice at the national level.

Phase 2 will include collection of qualitative data via focus groups with Head Start parents and teachers from a targeted local community served by a community partner in the southwestern U.S. Understanding how (dis)continuity is perceived in this context has the potential to inform local Head Start practices including professional development for teachers and home-school partnerships.