Transitions

In this issue

Third Culture Children: feelings of displacement and belonging

Multicultural transition

Mathematics from preschool to school

The role of play

Early childhood teachers entering the workforce

and more …
AJEC

The Australian Journal of Early Childhood (AJEC) is published four times a year and is sponsored by Early Childhood Australia. It features up-to-date articles designed to impart new information and encourage the critical exchange of ideas among practitioners in the early childhood field. The AJEC Committee invites contributions on all aspects of the education and care of young children. The journal is controlled by an editorial board and papers submitted to the journal are peer reviewed.

Early Childhood Australia is listed as a commercial publisher with DEST.

Interested authors and reviewers should obtain a copy of the guidelines for contributors from Early Childhood Australia’s website: www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au

Tel: +61 2 6242 1800  Fax: +61 2 6242 1818
Email: publishing@earlychildhood.org.au
PO Box 7105, Watson ACT 2602

For advertising rates, contact: marketing@earlychildhood.org.au

About Early Childhood Australia Inc

As the leading early childhood publisher, Early Childhood Australia aims to identify and promote best practice in early childhood. If you are an early childhood professional, a parent, a carer, studying in the field, or simply interested in the wellbeing of young children, become a member of Early Childhood Australia. Members enjoy significant savings on Early Childhood Australia’s publications and conference attendance fees, are able to participate in State Branch activities and advocacy, and join a growing community of citizens showing they are willing to stand up for children.

Current reviewers

Leonie Arthur  Louise Hard
Michael Arthur-Kelly  Cathie Harrison
Jean Ashton  Linda Harrison
Tony Attwood  Wendy Hawthorne
Barbara Backshall  Jacqueline Hayden
Lennie Barbrett  Bob Hill
Lisa Beattie  Patrick Hughes
Donna Berthelsen  Greg Hurworth
Bronwyn Beecher  Teresa Hutchins
Christina Birkin  Lynda Ireland
Iris Blythe  Christine Johnston
Margot Boardman  Anthoula Kapsalakis
Jane Bone  Elaine Keane
Michelle Braithwaite  Diana Keatinge
Freda Briggs  Deb Keen
Stig Broström  Coral Kemp
Beverley Broughton  Anne Kennedy
Carol Burgess  Anna Kilderry
Dawn Butterworth  Chris Kilham
Linley Campbell  Roslyn Kitson
Margaret Carr  E. Beverley Lambert
Jennifer Cartmel  Libby Lee
Nicola Chisnall  Will Letts
Trevor Clark  Felicity McArdle
Christine Clarke  Faye McCullogh
Heather Conroy  Agnes Macmillan
Kennece Coome  Glenda MacNaughton
Joy Cullen  Margaret McNaught
Amy Cutter-Mackenzie  Sarah Main
Susan Danby  Laurie Makin
Ian Dempsey  Carmel Maloney
Cheryl Dissanyake  Kay Margettes
Sue Dockett  Jay Martin
Marjory Ebbek  Sara Millenbach
Suzy Edwards  Jayanthi Mistry
Roslyn Elliott  Heather Mohay
Marilyn Fleer  Dennis Moore
Phil Foreman  Peter Moss
Rhonda Forrest  Romana Morda
Anne Glover  Di Nailon
Joy Goodfellow  Linda Newman
Kyle Gray  Berenic Nyland
Sue Grieshaber  Tony Okely
Karen Guo  Jennifer Osmond
Linda Hand  Jane Page

The AJEC Committee and Early Childhood Australia do not necessarily endorse the views expressed by contributors. The publication of an advertisement in this journal does not imply that the goods or services advertised have the endorsement of the AJEC Committee or of Early Childhood Australia Inc.
Transitions

Editorial
Bob Perry and Sue Dockett

Starting school—a Singapore story told by children*
Lay See Yeo and Christine Clarke

Transitions: Third Culture Children*
Marjory Ebbeck and Valerie Reus

Transition problems and play as transitory activity*
Stig Bröstrom

Transition to school for gifted children*
Diana Whitton

What did you do in maths today?*
Bob Perry and Sue Dockett

Developing in a new language-speaking setting*
Karen Guo

Concerns and expectations of Bangladeshi parents as their children start school*
Prathyusha Sanagavarapu and Bob Perry

Romance or reality? : Examining burnout in early childhood teachers
Karen Noble and Kym Macfarlane

* Denotes primary research articles

Founding Editor
Stewart Houston

Edition Editors
Bob Perry and Sue Dockett

AJEC Committee Executive
Marilyn Fleer—Editor
Margaret Sims—Deputy Editor
Lennie Barblett • Pam Winter

Committee Members
Heather Conroy • Lyn Fasoli
Fay Hadley • Susan Grieshaber
Linda Keesing-Styles
Chris Kilham • Tracey Simpson

Inhouse Editor
David Kingwell

Production Supervisor
Sue Wales

Copyright 2005
All rights reserved by Early Childhood Australia Inc. Material herein must not be reproduced in any form without the written permission of Early Childhood Australia Inc. Registered for posting as a publication - PP 232100/00037

ISSN 0312-5033
Printed by Goanna Print Pty Ltd
Design by Delene White
People experience many changes throughout their lives. With some of these changes, it is very difficult—if not impossible—to return from the new state to the previous one. In general, patterns of interactions, and the sites of these interactions, change so dramatically that going back is not possible. It is these changes that we call transitions.

In this edition of AJEC, we consider educational transitions with many different destinations: child care, school and the early childhood education profession. The nature of the transitions at these points can have a significant impact on future development and learning. When we talk about educational transitions in this sense, we are talking about more than change. For example, changing from a group activity to an individual activity during the day is often called a transition. These changes are no doubt important, but they are not the focus of this edition of the journal.

Various aspects of children’s transition to school are featured in six of the eight papers in this edition. As well, many of these papers reflect the burgeoning respect that is being given to children’s, as well as adults’, reflections on these transitions. Yeo and Clarke asked Primary Five children in Singapore to interview Primary One children about starting school, with results that have both differences and similarities with those of previous studies. Also in Singapore, but with a different group of children, Ebbeck and Reus investigate the transition to a new school for a group of eight-year-old children coming from a variety of foreign situations. The extra emotional challenge provided by the new cultural setting, as well as the new school, is highlighted.

Two other particular groups of children starting school are considered in quite different ways by Whitton and Sanagavarapu and Perry. Whitton uses data from both parents and children to investigate the needs and concerns of young 'gifted' children and their families as they start school. Sanagavarapu and Perry use data from parents concerning the transition to school of Bangladeshi children in Sydney. While there are many similarities with data obtained from more general studies, the needs of these particular groups of children are sufficiently diverse to warrant further investigation in their own right and to point to the need to investigate other groups of children as well.

Two other papers dealing with children’s transition to school by Broström and Perry and Dockett consider issues around changes in what happens to children as they move from prior-to-school settings to school. These issues of curriculum continuity are critical in discussions about transition to school but are dismissed too often—in Australia particularly—seemingly because of the hegemonic influences of our monolithic education systems. Broström suggests that an advanced play process may provide continuity across the transition while Perry and Dockett record strong evidence of how the mathematical power of young children might be lost as children move into schools with formal mathematics agenda.

The paper by Guo highlights another aspect of educational transitions by reporting on the challenges facing a Chinese-speaking four-year-old boy entering a New Zealand childcare setting. In particular, Guo considers the effect of the child’s English-language skills on his success in the new setting and shows that, in spite of the many challenges, the child does make progress in interacting with his peers.

In what looks like a completely different topic, Noble and Macfarlane consider the challenges facing early childhood educators as they move from teacher education student to educator and then, all too often, to burn out. They highlight the romanticisation of early childhood education in teacher education courses and the clash between this romantic image and the reality of many early childhood settings. In many ways, this parallels earlier discussions about continuity and change in transitions to school.

The papers in this collection highlight the growing importance of educational transitions and show the international interest in the topic. Papers derive from work in Australia, New Zealand, Denmark and Singapore and consider children and adults from immigrant as well as established cultures. The scope from prior-to-school to beginning educators reinforces the lifelong importance for understanding educational transitions. This collection provides an excellent resource in this search for understanding.

Bob Perry and Sue Dockett
University of Western Sydney
Starting school is a major milestone for children. The transition from preschool to formal schooling involves not only surface shifts in daily routines but also deep emotional adjustments by both children and their parents. Schools have tended to neglect the 'emotional side of transition' (Dockett & Perry, 2003, p. 8). For many parents, entrusting the education of their children to unfamiliar adults is a significant step. Similarly, stepping into a strange, new environment can be overwhelming for young children. Children typically experience preschool as a cosy and caring setting with a high teacher–student ratio; however, at school they must share the teacher with a larger group of children, and adjust to larger buildings, a community of larger and older children, and a more regimented routine (Briggs & Potter, 1995). Hence it is important for educators to be proactive by giving due recognition to children’s views and feelings about this major transition. Primary One transition constitutes a ‘critical period’ (Entwisle & Alexander, 1989, p. 351) for children’s academic and social development, as their ability to meet the challenges at this early stage has serious and long-lasting effects on academic success. In effective transition, therefore, there is a need to determine the factors that matter to children as they begin school and negotiate the pathways of fitting in.

Much of the literature in school readiness has focused on the perspectives of teachers and parents (Harradine & Clifford, 1996; Knudsen-Lindauer & Harris, 1989; Lewit & Barker, 1995; Reaney, West & Denton, 2002). There have been relatively few attempts to investigate transition experiences from the perspective of children. In recent years, however, researchers in Europe, Australia (Clyde, 2001; Dockett & Perry, 1999; Einarsdóttir, 2003; Perry, Dockett & Howard, 2000; Potter & Briggs, 2003), and Asia (Clarke & Sharpe, 2003; Sharpe, 2002) have begun to give children a voice in their early school transition experience.

In the research studies that attended to children’s views about school, it was found that children as young as age five were able to provide cogent and comprehensible accounts of how they felt about school and specifically what they appreciated or did not appreciate about their initial entry into school. There was great clarity in their perception of the distinctions between kindergarten/child care and school. Regardless of where the studies were undertaken, the majority of the children in Primary One or first grade reported being happy in school. Most were concerned about various routes to survival, such as finding their way in the large school buildings and grounds, knowing the school rules, making friends, and pleasing teachers and parents. There are some interesting comparisons between the school entry experiences of children schooled in Singapore and their counterparts in Europe and Australia. For children in Singapore, making new friends constitutes an important aspect of starting school, as it helps them to settle happily into the
Primary One classroom (Clarke & Sharpe, 2003; Sharpe, 2002). Similarly, for children starting school in Australia and Europe, having friends was cited as a feature that made for a positive school experience (Dockett & Perry, 1999; Potter & Briggs, 2003; Pramling & Willams-Graneld, 1993). On the negative aspects of starting school, the Primary One children in Singapore were concerned that ‘some teachers are fierce/scold us/shout’ (Clarke & Sharpe, 2003, p. 21). Some felt unhappy and angry on account of harsh treatment by teachers; for example, being spoken to loudly and angrily, and being reprimanded when books were forgotten or when homework was not done (Sharpe, 2002). The concern about unpleasant encounters with teachers was echoed by some children in Australia who noted that one negative aspect of school was having teachers who yelled or screamed at children (Potter & Briggs, 2003).

The children in the school transition studies reviewed also reported a clear dichotomy between work and play in primary school (Clarke & Sharpe, 2003; Corsaro & Molinari, 2000; Eide & Winger, 1994; Einarsdóttir, 2003; Sharpe, 2002). For example, Italian first grade children saw primary school as more work-focused than play-focused (Corsaro & Molinari, 2000). Primary One children in Singapore seemed to share the same perception. As one of the Primary One Singaporean children put it, ‘You could play more in K2, now we do work’ (Clarke & Sharpe, 2003, p. 21). Perhaps what set the Singaporean children apart from their counterparts in other countries was their highly school- and work-centred view of life, although they also enjoyed school (Sharpe, 2002). When asked about life outside of school, the young children in the Sharpe (2002) study mostly reported watching television, with the remainder of the time taken up by tuition. The Singaporean children’s serious view of school was reflected in their limited range of social experiences, concern with tests and examinations, and the need to please parents by earning high grades (Sharpe, 2002).

Children starting school in Europe and Australia appeared to be preoccupied with school rules (Corsaro & Molinari, 2000; Dockett & Perry, 1999; Eide & Winger, 1994; Einarsdóttir, 2003; Perry et al., 2000). Australian children in the Starting School project, for example, were of the view that knowing and obeying the rules helped them to fit in, function well within the school, and keep out of trouble (Perry et al., 2000). Expressing the same sentiment, one preschool child in Iceland stated that, in school, children also ‘learn to behave well, and many rules and customs’ (Einarsdóttir, 2003, p. 43). In the Singapore research studies on initial school entry there was no explicit mention of school rules as an issue of concern for the children starting school.

Research into the school transition process from the perspective of young children is still relatively sparse. Why is it important to listen to the voice of young children in the school transition process? First, there are indications that children enter Primary One with internalised stereotypical ideas about school based on information from older siblings, peers, parents, other adults and the media, and these expectations can be positive or negative (Clarke & Sharpe, 2003; Renwick, 1984). Unmet or negative expectations can create unnecessary anxiety for children. For example, in a Danish study (Broström, 2002), preschool children expected to encounter an authoritarian culture marked by a scolding teacher who commands children to sit still and be quiet. In other studies conducted in Singapore (Clarke & Sharpe, 2003), Italy (Corsaro & Molinari, 2000), and Sweden (Pramling & Willams-Graneld, 1993), children seemed to think of school as a relatively joyless place where serious learning takes place and there is little or no play. It is not surprising, therefore, that some children start school feeling insecure and nervous.

Second, children are experts on their own lives, with unique stories to tell (Clark & Moss, 2001). No-one can claim to have a more valid account of how school appears to children than the children themselves. Even if the children’s concerns may seem trivial to some adults, they are nonetheless valid perceptions and ought to be treated with respect and taken seriously.

As the interview process in this study involves peer interviewing, some review of the research literature in this area is warranted. To the best of our knowledge, there are presently no research studies involving children as interviewers in the data-gathering process. In an insightful article describing children’s relational rationality when being interviewed by adult researchers, Aronsson and Hundeide (2002) indicated that young children tended to see the adult experimenter as an important other, whom one should try to please, and thus they may provide bizarre or novel responses. In a much earlier study by Aronsson (1978), bilingual children of Finnish origin offered different responses to the question ‘What is your best language?’, based on whether their interviewer was a native Swedish- or Finnish-speaking person. Children tended to align their responses with the adult interviewer’s language rather than to answer
questions honestly. In light of children’s inclination to respond in terms of their sociability, perhaps being interviewed by older peers rather than by adults would promote greater honesty. In addition, children from the same school are well placed to function as interviewers for young children because they share the same school culture. The schoolmates would be able to communicate in a mutually-understood language. The value of using peers as tutors has already been recognised, particularly in the area of reading (Beasley, 1997; Topping & Ehly, 1998). It is considered that using peers as interviewers could be equally beneficial.

This paper reports a pilot study that examines the factors contributing to effective transition from preschool to primary school in Singapore. To ease the transition of children into Primary One, the target primary school where this study was conducted organised an orientation program for the children and their parents, and also implemented a buddy support system for the Primary One children. The orientation took place in November, six weeks before the children were to start school. Parents attended a briefing where they were given information about the school rules and regulations, a broad outline of the curriculum and examination system, and the school programs. The children met their Primary One teachers, who talked about the school, the rules and routines, the need to wear the correct school uniform and have the required books, and what would happen at recess time and on the first day of school. The children drew a picture and wrote their names; children in some classes had stories read to them. The children also had a chance to visit their classrooms and tour the school. In the first week of school, each child was paired with a Primary Five buddy who would be his or her chaperone during recess time. The children were paired by home language as far as possible so that translation from English to home language could be provided when required.

The purpose of the present study is to listen to the voice of a large group of Primary One children as they make the initial entry into formal schooling. The study in Singapore seeks to examine the following questions: (a) How do Primary One children perceive school compared to preschool? (b) What are the best or worst things about school? (c) How do the Primary One children cope with the demands of the transition to Primary One? It is hoped that the insight we gained into their perspective of the transition experience would inform decision-making and planning by teachers and parents to help children settle happily into Primary One and to cope with the demands of school.

**Background**

Singapore is a small island state in South-East Asia where education is highly valued by its multi-racial populace. The highly competitive education system based on meritocracy rewards industry and achievement. Over the years since Singapore gained independence in 1965, the country’s education system has evolved from an initial concern with economic survival and nation-building to a very rigorous system committed to nurturing talent and, of late, encouraging a spirit of enterprise and innovation. In such a system, academic qualifications are highly valued, and the typical school-going child in Singapore is tested regularly with examinations at least twice a year from the age of seven when he or she starts school.

Preschool education in Singapore, established since the 1960s, ranges from full- and half-day childcare centres to two- to four-hour kindergarten programs for children aged two to six. Although preschool education is not mandatory, the majority of children below the age of seven attend some kind of preschool facility. For Singapore children, the first year of formal schooling is known as ‘Primary One’ and begins in the January of the year they turn seven.

Primary education has been made mandatory in Singapore only since January 2003. At the primary level, pupils complete six years of schooling: a four-year foundation stage from Primary One to Four, and a two-year orientation stage from Primary Five to Six. To maximise their potential, pupils are streamed according to their learning ability at the end of Primary Four. At the end of Primary Six, pupils sit for the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE), which assesses their ability for placement in a secondary school course that suits their learning pace and aptitude. Primary school children in Singapore attend school for five-and-a-half hours every day, either in the morning or afternoon session. The morning session begins at 7:30am and ends at 1pm; the afternoon session begins at 1pm and ends at 6:30pm.

**Method**

**Sample**

The sample consisted of 340 Primary One children (mean age of six years, eight months) who had just started school. In the first week of school each Primary One child had a Primary Five buddy (mean age of 10
years, eight months) who acted as his or her chaperone during recess time. Five months into Primary One, the children were each interviewed by their Primary Five buddies, who had previously been trained by the vice-principal and their class teachers. (The interview was originally scheduled to be conducted 10 weeks after school started, but was delayed as schools were closed because of the outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome.) All 340 Primary Five pupils received training as interviewers for this study. During the training, each of the Primary Five pupils was given a copy of the questionnaire to look at while the vice-principal briefed them on how to ask the questions and to record verbatim what their Primary One buddy said. They were instructed to use English but to translate into the buddy’s home language if needed. They were also instructed to ask the question again in the case of non-responses. The actual interviewing, which took place the next day in the school hall, lasted one-and-a-quarter hours. The vice-principal and the Primary One and Primary Five teachers were present throughout to assist and answer any queries.

The questionnaire used in the structured interview consisted of 48 short, open-ended questions. The questions focused on the children’s family demographics, preschool experience, prior visits to school, the first day of school, likes and dislikes about preschool and Primary One, daily routines in Primary One, leisure activities, and support outside school for schoolwork.

Data analysis
The responses to the open-ended questions were categorised by the two researchers individually and any disagreements were discussed until both agreed on the classification. The responses were then organised under main categories reflecting themes and issues raised by the children. Each category was further subdivided and typical comments were noted. For example, under question 11, ‘What do you like best about school?’, the children’s responses were categorised under learning/studying (e.g. ‘study, can learn more things’), friends, (e.g. ‘many friends to play with’), teachers (e.g. ‘teachers are very nice’), buildings/facilities (e.g. ‘school is big and got many classrooms’), recess time (e.g. ‘can play and canteen’s got many things to eat’).

Results
Children were asked 48 short, open-ended questions but some did not respond to every question asked. The following provides examples of the children’s responses to key questions. The percentages cited are based on the total number of children who responded to the questions cited rather than on the total sample. Almost all the children reported having attended preschool, with 91 per cent (285 out of 314) saying that they liked their childcare centre or kindergarten. The reasons most frequently cited for liking preschool were play (60 out of 276, 22%) and friends (49 out of 276, 18%). Of the small number (29) who reported not liking preschool, four mentioned fierce teachers who ‘always scold’ and another four mentioned being bored. Sixty-five per cent (220) said they liked school better than preschool; 31 per cent (104) preferred preschool to school; four per cent (14) were unsure of their preference.

The Primary One children had clear views about how school was different from preschool in terms of the physical surroundings, adjustments in daily routine, and the new demands of school. Twenty-six per cent of the children (87 out of 331) were unsure of the difference between school and preschool, and four per cent (12 out of 331) said there was no difference. Of the 70 per cent (232) who reported differences between school and preschool, nearly half (110, 47%) mentioned the school building, facilities and people, and how much bigger they all seemed compared to preschool. One child noted that ‘school is a building, but kindergarten is below a flat’, a reference made to community kindergartens located at the void deck areas of public housing flats. Other responses included: ‘School is bigger than kindergarten and school has a basketball court’; ‘School has a big hall’; ‘School has big field’; ‘School has lots of pupils’; ‘People are bigger than childcare pupils’.

Mention was made of adjustments to school life. The children reported longer hours in school, e.g. ‘School ends at 5pm but kindergarten at 12pm’ (In actual fact, for children who attend school in the afternoon session, school ends at 6:30pm). They also reported having to forgo their nap time, e.g. ‘Now cannot sleep in the afternoon’, as childcare centres build regular nap times into the school day. Sixty per cent (209 out of 346) of the children said they pack their own school bags, reporting that their school bags were very heavy. They mentioned having to buy their own food at recess as compared to preschool where food was provided; e.g. ‘Kindergarten don’t need to buy food, but school need.’ Four per cent (14 children) noted that school is not a place for play, e.g. ‘Primary school cannot play toys but kindergarten can play toys.’
Another difference between school and preschool that made an impression on the children was the demands posed by school. Forty-seven per cent (142 out of 302) said teachers gave homework three times a week, whereas 32 per cent (98 out of 302) said they had homework everyday. The children noted an increase in the amount of work they were required to do, adding that the work was more difficult than in kindergarten. One child said, ‘They gave us one page of alphabet (writing) in kindergarten, but in school they gave us three pages!’ They noted that life in kindergarten was, by comparison, more relaxing; e.g. ‘Kindergarten can watch TV, school cannot.’

When asked what they liked best about school, 40 per cent (118 out of 292) made reference to learning and specific subjects in the curriculum. Why was learning the best thing about school for some of the children? The typical responses were ‘School can make me clever’ and ‘I like to study, [I] can become clever.’ This suggested that the children at this very young age saw the value of becoming smart as an important outcome of school. Physical Exercise (PE) was most frequently mentioned as the favourite subject, e.g. ‘PE is fun’, ‘PE has games’, probably because it contained elements of play. The second aspect they liked best about school was the building and facilities, with 23 per cent of the children (68 out of 292) alluding to the beautiful school garden, computers in the lab, the air-conditioned library, a large field for play, and a canteen that offers a wide selection of food. Thirteen per cent (38 out of 292) attributed the best of school to making new friends; another five per cent (15 out of 292) to teachers who were ‘very friendly’ or ‘kind and polite’.

When asked about the worst thing about school, 50 per cent of the children who responded (154 out of 302) said they liked school and there was nothing they did not like. For the other half of the students, the modal category (38 out of 310, 12%) said the worst thing about school was certain subjects (e.g. English, Chinese, art and craft, music) and the main reason offered was not knowing how to do work related to the subject mentioned, e.g. ‘I don’t know how to read English.’ Ten per cent (32 out of 310) mentioned getting scolded by fierce teachers. Another 10 per cent (32 out of 310) referred to the demands of school, which included homework, reading, writing, copying, and speaking up in class. Eleven per cent (35 out of 310) disliked certain places in school, such as smelly or dirty toilets, sitting in the hall or under the hot sun in the basketball court. Seven per cent (21 out of 310) mentioned being bullied by peers or friends who ‘disturbed’ them.

The majority of the pupils seemed to have settled quite happily into school. A vast majority (319 out of 336, 95%) had made at least one special friend in school in the short time of settling into Primary One. Sixty-two per cent of the children who responded (202 out of 328) indicated they were not scared of anything at school. For children who expressed some anxiety, the greatest worry (70 out of 101, 69%) was being scolded by teachers, the principal or the vice-principal. Other worries related to bullies (6 out of 101, 6%), insects (7 out of 101, 7%), ghosts (5 out of 101, 5%), and certain places in school (6 out of 101, 6%), such as the pond, toilets, the mango tree, and the yellow door.

Within the first few months in school, the Primary One children had developed an understanding of expectations for behaviour in the classroom and in school. They were able to articulate what they thought made their teachers angry. Inattentiveness (102 out of 341, 30%), misbehaving (60 out of 341, 18%), not completing homework (50 out of 341, 15%), and not bringing or forgetting to bring books to school (50 out of 341, 15%) were cited as behaviours that made teachers angry. The children’s perspectives suggested that teachers were not very tolerant of behaviours that interfered with learning. Like their counterparts in Australia (Dockett & Perry, 1999; Perry et al., 2000), children in Singapore seemed concerned about rules. Sixty-seven per cent (140 out of 208) expressed their knowledge of school rules in terms of what they cannot do. The ‘cannot do’ list included: cannot litter, cannot run along the corridor, cannot talk loudly, cannot eat in class, cannot wear colourful shoes or socks (Singapore school children are expected to wear the standard school uniform). The ‘to do’ list expressed by 33 per cent of the children (68 out of 208) included: be neat and tidy at all times, keep quiet when teacher is talking, pack school bag every day, hand in homework on time, keep the school clean, take the pledge, and sing the national anthem.

It is heartening to note that the Primary One children appeared to have a positive sense of themselves as learners. Eighty-six per cent (289 out of 313) said they could read; 97 per cent (328 out of 338) said they could write; 60 per cent (200 out of 332) said they were good at maths; 72 per cent (243 out of 338) said they were good at drawing. This is despite their views that schoolwork in Primary One is much harder than in
preschool. When asked what they liked to do best when not in school, the main responses were: engaging in play (128 out of 348 children, 37%), which included indoor games, outdoor activities (e.g. cycling), and computer games; reading (68 out of 348 children, 20%); drawing (38 out of 348 children, 11%); and watching TV (35 out of 348 children, 10%). Ten per cent (35 out of 348 children) said they study (i.e. do homework, practice writing) when they were not in school.

Discussion

Overall, the Singaporean school children in this pilot study told a positive, albeit serious, story about their transition into the first year of school life. They had successfully made new friends and they felt competent about their academic ability. Though they seemed a little awed by the large school building and greater number of pupils than in preschool, they expressed delight in the beautiful school grounds and variety of facilities available to them.

The most salient finding is the Primary One children’s perception of school as a very serious place of learning, where learning held centre-stage and play took a back seat. This perspective of school echoed that in another study by Sharpe (2002), where the young children in Singapore shared a highly school- and work-centred view of life. It was significant that children in this transition study equated both the best and worst aspects of school with schoolwork. The best part of school was to learn and to do well in certain subjects; the worst part was not being able to do the work expected in specific subjects. Interestingly, according to the pupils’ observations, teachers too held a very serious view of school. By the children’s reports, their teachers seemed to get upset and scold the children when they failed to display behaviours that were expected to support learning, i.e. attention, promptness in completing homework, and bringing books to school. It appeared that children starting school in Singapore carry with them the weight not just of their school bags but also of the need to perform academically.

Although the majority did not express a fear of school, about 38 per cent (126 out of 328 children) reported various degrees of worry, the greatest being scolded by teachers, the principal, and the vice-principal. However, despite these sobering perspectives, the children reported a positive academic self-concept and felt they were competent in reading, writing and arithmetic. Unlike the Sharpe (2002) study where children were reticent about out-of-school activities, this group of Primary One children spoke of activities they enjoyed outside of school, which included playing a variety of indoor and outdoor games, reading, and watching television.

For preschool children in Australia and Europe, starting school involved getting to know the rules of the school and the classroom (Dockett & Perry, 1999; Eide & Winger, 1994; Einarsdóttir, 2003; Perry et al., 2000). The same is true of the Singaporean children in this study. Sharing the experience of children in the Australian, Norwegian and Icelandic preschool systems, the children in Singapore mentioned the specific rules they had to observe as part and parcel of settling into school. The common rules that applied to children in Australia, Europe and Singapore included observing the routines, following the teacher’s directions, being good/not being naughty, and doing homework. School rules were taken for granted and children did not question them.

What are the implications for school practices? First, all schools in Singapore may wish to consider implementing a buddy support system for Primary One children. One of the proactive steps the primary school in this transition project had taken to help children settle quickly into Primary One was to introduce such a system. During the first week in school, the Primary Five buddies made sure that the Primary One pupils could find their way to the toilets and to the recess area. They showed their Primary One buddies how to queue, select and purchase food and drink, carry it to the table, eat, and return the dirty dishes to the collection area, and then where to line up to return to classes. The Primary Five buddies befriended the Primary One children and guided them, but refrained from doing things for them. The buddy support system successfully helped to cushion the children’s entry into Primary One, as none of the children reported significant difficulties in finding their bearings in school or managing recess time. Although the children were not asked a specific question about the buddy system, several of the children spoke positively about their buddies helping them during recess time. In response to Question 15 about the first day in school, example responses were ‘my buddy helped me to buy food’, ‘the buddy took us on a look around school during recess’, ‘the buddy took me to the canteen to buy food’.

Second, it would be important for schools in Singapore as well as in other countries to pay attention to the ‘emotional side of transition’ as noted in the Australian study by Dockett and Perry (2003). This would include ensuring that the children's first encounter with teachers
in school is kind and supportive. Children should be spared the constant worry of being scolded in school. The quality of the relationship between children and teacher is crucial for the children’s wellbeing and school success (Pianta, 1999). Children respond more positively to the warm and caring personality of experienced teachers (Renwick, 1984). A caring teacher is cognisant of the anxiety experienced by children starting school. A kind word or a smile from a teacher would go a long way. There is a place for discipline in a Primary One classroom; however, teachers who scold contribute to a punitive environment that adds undue stress to an already stressful transition for many preschool children. When there is a need to address misbehaviour, an inductive approach to discipline would be more helpful for shaping behaviour. Induction is a rational form of discipline (Hoffman, 1988) that points out the effects of the child’s behaviour on others, either directly or indirectly by using statements such as ‘If you keep talking loudly while the teacher is teaching, the other children cannot pay attention to the lesson’. That way, children can better understand why certain behaviours are not appropriate in school. Induction, which includes suggestions for making amends, such as apologies or ways of compensating for the wrongs done to others, also helps in conscience formation (Hoffman, 1988). Children would feel more secure and learn more effectively when adults help them understand why certain behaviours are important in a social context.

Third, Singapore schools and society generally are accustomed to orderliness as a way of life, and this is partly made possible by making and keeping rules. Children in this transition study were concerned about obeying the school and classroom rules, and tended to speak of the rules in terms of what they were not permitted to do. The children’s focus on the negative phrasing of rules provided some clues as to how school and the classroom look to them. This is hardly surprising, since obeying rules and procedures was emphasised on Orientation Day. Although it is uncommon in primary (or elementary) schools in Singapore for students to participate in creating rules, teachers could encourage discussion of rules (Santrock, 2004). Emphasis should also be placed on stating rules positively, e.g. ‘walk in school’ rather than ‘don’t run’. The learning environment would be more pleasant if children understood why rules were important. Effective classroom teachers clearly present their rules to students and give explanations and examples of them. Teachers who set reasonable rules, provide understandable rationales for them, and enforce them consistently usually find that the majority of the class will abide by them (Santrock, 2004).

Finally, schools in Singapore would need to emphasise the process and not just the products of learning. The children were clearly anxious about not being able to do the schoolwork. The huge burden of having to perform well academically would be greatly lessened if children were given room to make mistakes and to understand that learning from mistakes is part of the learning process. It would be crucial for teachers to let children know that it is alright not to know how to do certain things in school, it is alright not to get good grades all the time, and it is alright to ask questions when in doubt. Children should be assured that they could get help with tasks that seemed too hard for them to accomplish on their own. That way, they could entertain a new perspective of school as a place where serious learning takes place in a safe and supportive environment.

Some of the limitations of the study and suggestions for future research warrant comment. The questionnaire was long, making the task for the interviewers rather difficult. Although training was provided for the entire Primary Five cohort, the task of interviewing the Primary One children was a new experience for them. Even though they knew their buddies quite well, many reported that they found it difficult to maintain their buddies’ full cooperation. Informal feedback from some of the Primary Five interviewers indicated that they had resorted to offering candy as an incentive to encourage their buddies to continue responding. It was, therefore, unclear how these attempts to elicit cooperation had influenced the interview outcomes. Supporting the interview process of 340 pairs of children simultaneously was challenging for their teachers and it was difficult for them to ensure that all the interviewers were asking the questions or prompting for responses appropriately. These constraints limit the validity and reliability of the data.

In future research involving young students as interviewers, the questionnaire should be kept relatively short without compromising the quality of the data. There should be opportunities for the Primary Five buddies to practice interviewing their peers and to receive feedback from their teachers. In the second phase of this school transition project, focused group discussions and sampling of individual interviews were introduced in order to enhance the reliability and validity of the interview data. Despite the limitations of the study, this paper extends previous research and contributes to the existing
literature on starting school and the transition process. To date, much of the research in this field has been written from the perspectives of teachers and parents, and very few studies have reflected an Asian perspective. The present study allows us to see what school actually looks like from the perspective of young children starting school in Singapore. To summarise, the Primary One children in this study generally settled well into school despite pressures of the academically-oriented education system. Starting school for Singaporean children involved knowing the rules and keeping up with schoolwork/homework. Recommendations were made for all schools in Singapore to implement a buddy support system for Primary One children, particularly during the first few weeks of school. Other recommendations include adopting an inductive approach to discipline, stating rules positively, and creating a safe environment for learning.

Educators need to be sensitive to the physical, mental, and emotional adjustments preschool children have to make as they stand on the threshold of a new school experience. It may be that this serious story told by Primary One children in Singapore is not unique to countries in Asia alone. Regardless of which parts of the world they live in, children have the right to start school confident that they can learn and to do so joyfully.

References
MORE GREAT TRANSITION PUBLICATIONS available from Early Childhood Australia

Beginning school together: Sharing strengths
Sue Dockett and Bob Perry (Eds.)
Starting school is a momentous occasion – it can be exciting and fun but can also be confusing and frightening. Over several years, the Starting School Research Project at the University of Western Sydney established guidelines for effective transition to school programs.
In Beginning school together, early childhood education researchers and practitioners use the guidelines as a basis for discussion about this critical event in the lives of children, their parents and their educators. It also presents real-life scenarios, practical ideas and suggestions on how a transition program can be implemented to make starting school a smooth and easy experience for all.
$25.95 (2002) ECA Code: PUB31

Successful kindergarten transition: Your guide to connecting children, families and schools
Robert C. Pianta and Marcia Kraft-Sayre
A smooth transition to kindergarten is an essential part of a child’s early academic experience – and this guide has the field-tested methods schools need to make this happen. Ideal for preschool and kindergarten teachers, administrators, and family support specialists,
Step by step, this practical book helps professionals:
• develop a solid transition plan for their school;
• implement a plan; and
• stay motivated and inspired.
$78.95 (2003) ECA Code: SUND117

Starting school: How to help your child be prepared
Sue Berne
How do you know your child is ready for school?
How do you choose the right school?
How do you keep your child safe?
How do you help your child become independent, bully-proof and settle in to the new school environment?
What are your rights as a parent at the school?
This is an excellent book for parents on dealing with all these issues.
Berne’s focus is on the social and emotional aspects of school readiness.
$32.95 (2003) ECA Code: SUND104

ALL PRICES INCLUDE POSTAGE & HANDLING AND GST

Order Now
Contact Early Childhood Australia
T: 1800 356 900 (freecall within Australia) F: +61 2 6242 1818
E: eca@earlychildhood.org.au    www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au
Introduction
During the past two decades in Australia and overseas, considerable interest, debate and research activity has focused on the transition process. This has included identification of factors, strategies and practices for implementing effective transition programs for children in a variety of early childhood services and schools (Brewer, 1995; Dockett, Perry & Howard, 1999; Dockett & Perry, 1999; Kitson, 2002; Margetts, 1999; Ramey & Ramey, 1994; Sims & Hutchins, 1999). Although transition is viewed as one of the few universals of childhood, there is a group of children often overlooked in transition discussions. These are Third Culture Children (TCC). They are defined as children who are neither raised entirely in their parents’ home country nor as a member of the country where they now live. Pollock and Van Reken (2001) state that the children build relationships to all cultures, while not having full ownership of any country. These children may be confronted with cultural conflict, especially following a move to a new school, and/or entry to a school culture which is significantly different from what they previously experienced. Some are able to resolve the conflict, while others experience difficulties. Feelings of displacement, rejection and unease can be common when children are experiencing a transition of some impact. The research reported here shows the transition experiences of 11 children during the first eight weeks of their move to an international school in Singapore.

While culture can be thought of as the way of life of a group of people, Third Culture Children are members of several cultural groups: their family (which might be bi-racial), their country of origin, their host country, their school, and their peers.

Pollock and Van Reken (2001, p. 199) state ‘it is vital that highly mobile families learn to deal well with the entire process of transition’, as this process can affect the child’s ability to cope and to make friends. Children have difficulties with visualising themselves in a different environment. They see what they are losing and leaving behind. Roman (2001) states that ‘in addition parents feel helpless because they realize that their decision to relocate has caused the stress their children are experiencing’.

TRANSITIONS: Third Culture Children

Marjory Ebbeck
Valerie Reus
University of South Australia

This paper reports on a small-scale research study conducted in Singapore, where some 16,000 children are enrolled in ‘foreign schools’. Such children, often termed Third Culture Children, are neither raised entirely in their parents’ home country nor as a member of the country where they now live. Pollock and Van Reken (2001) state that the children build relationships to all cultures, while not having full ownership of any country. These children may be confronted with cultural conflict, especially following a move to a new school, and/or entry to a school culture which is significantly different from what they previously experienced. Some are able to resolve the conflict, while others experience difficulties. Feelings of displacement, rejection and unease can be common when children are experiencing a transition of some impact. The research reported here shows the transition experiences of 11 children during the first eight weeks of their move to an international school in Singapore.
Third Culture Children experience a large number of ‘separations’ during their developmental years (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001, p. 166). Therefore, for the emotional stability that comes through sound attachment, they need a strong continuing relationship with their parents. Schaeffer (1996) believes that supportive relationships with parents can assist children to cope with stress and adversity. Feelings of displacement and rejection are normal even among children comfortable with transition. Age has an influence on the way children feel when they are relocated, as do the number and frequency of relocations. It is not always possible for all the members of a family to move from one location to another at the same time. Often one parent has to relocate in advance of the rest of the family. In order to keep the impact of international assignments on children as positive as possible, their socio-emotional needs have to be considered sensitively, especially by their parents. However, ‘always saying goodbye’ can be difficult.

A study by Sharpe and Gan (2000) on aspects of adjustment to school, undertaken in the Singaporean context, drew on the earlier work of Cleave, Jowett and Bate (1982) and found that children’s successful adjustment, including security in a new school setting, was linked to the role that parents play in bridging gaps and being sensitive and responsive to children’s needs.

Most children are resilient and can cope with change and uncertainty, but we cannot take this resilience for granted. According to Leo (2003) ‘we nurture our children’s resilience when we focus on their strengths, spend enough time with them to stay connected to them, and to create safe space for them to work through their fears and feelings’. Werner and Smith’s (2002) significant, long-term study on human development found that emotional closeness with another person appeared very important for the development of resilience in children, again underscoring the importance of secure attachments.

External changes can bring a significant amount of grief and loss unless much-needed relational ties are maintained where possible. ‘Unresolved grief ranks as the second greatest challenge TCC face’ (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001, p. 165) in their journey. There are many reasons Third Culture Children experience loss. Globally mobile children, while acquiring knowledge and experiences in their daily lives, have more to lose than their counterparts. They lose homes, schools, friends and relatives.

The problem is that in these types of losses, no one actually died or was divorced, nothing was physically stolen. Contrary to obvious losses, there are no markers, no rites of passage recognizing them as they occur—no recognized way to mourn (Pollock & Van Reken, 2001, p. 172).

Van Reken (2001, p. 4) identified six emotional stages faced by Third Culture Children when they enter a new environment:

- Feeling vulnerable
- Feeling ambivalent
- Feeling different
- Feeling angry
- Feeling depressed
- Feeling to begin to live again

The study

The research was situated in Singapore, a highly developed country with a relatively wealthy economy. The population, close to five million, is multi-racial, with Chinese, Indian and Malay being the major ethnic groups. A large number of people live in Singapore on what is called an ‘immigration permit’ which has to be applied for and renewed annually. These people work in Singapore because of their particular employment, which has economic or other advantages for Singapore. Many of these families have children who require schooling. In 2001 some 16,414 children were enrolled in approximately 32 private foreign schools (Zoetmulder, 2003). These are Third Culture Children, and a small sample of these children living in Singapore was involved in this research study.

Specifically, the study investigated the question: What are Third Culture Children’s feelings when they enter an international school?

Setting and sample

The research sample comprised a group of 11 eight-year-old children, newly-arrived and beginning their transition to a foreign school system in Singapore. The group was selected because the principal investigator had access and permission to study the children, the children met the criteria of being newcomers to Singapore, and their families believed that the study was relevant. The researchers agreed to use a small sample of children because the model to be implemented was new to them. If successful, a larger sample would be investigated at some future time. The children were
enrolled in an international school in Singapore that implemented an American-based curriculum and had an international group of teachers. The medium of instruction was in English, and all 11 children had English as their first language.

Methodology
A qualitative approach was adopted in order to ‘understand individual’s perception of the world’ (Bell, 2002, p. 7)—in this case to discover the feelings of children during transition to a new foreign school in Singapore. The frequency of the expression of feelings was taken into account and necessitated that a quantitative approach also be included. Interviews of approximately 30–45 minutes, involving participation in two written tasks, were conducted with 11 children in Week 1 of their admission to their new international school and again at Week 8.

The individual interviews were designed to collect information from the children and to offer them a framework and opportunity to express their feelings. The initial interview during the first week of school was designed to suit the children’s comfort level and their ability to answer questions and document how they felt about beginning a new school (Appendix 1). Questions were posed to the children and they were invited to discuss and write down comments about their feelings. This process was designed to help the children to express their ideas. The children were asked about the country they had come from, and questions such as whether their new school was like the one they had attended previously, whether they knew any other children at the new school, and had they visited the school before enrolling, as well as being invited to volunteer any other comments (Hubbard & Power, 1999). This same process was used in a second interview conducted at the end of Week 8 but was designed to document any changes in children’s feelings during the intervening period. There was again an informal discussion on the child’s involvement and whether they had made friends, and also specific questions about how they now felt about the school. This time a different format was used for documenting the children’s feelings (see Appendix 1). The overall activities were structured in keeping with the teaching approaches used in Singapore with children of this age group and were seen by the teachers to be appropriate.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Van Reken’s stages</th>
<th>Study classification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1. Feeling vulnerable | **Aftershock**  
Disappointed – anxious – shocked – tired  
Homesick – nervous – sleepy |
| 2. Feeling ambivalent | **Insecure**  
Insecure – unsure – reluctant – bored – weird  
**Outcast**  
Displaced – shy – lost – uncomfortable  
Bewildered – isolated – lonely – outcast  
Different – behind – unsuccessful |
| 3. Feeling different | **Extreme**  
Horrible – overwhelmed – stressed – mad  
Angry |
| 4. Feeling angry | **Passive**  
**Well Adjusted Passive**  
Happy – positive – good – fine – settled  
| 5. Feeling depressed  
6. Feeling in the present again | **Well Adjusted Active**  
Involved – included – busy – excited  
Ahead – outgoing – confident – curious  
Confident |
| **No stage** | |

Table 1. Comparative table of categorisation of feelings using the Van Reken model (2001), and Pollock and Van Reken (2001)
Analysis of the data
An adaptation of the Van Reken (2001, p. 4) emotional stages was used as a framework to analyse the children’s responses. It was deemed to be one of the few available models suitable to adapt for the purpose of this study.

When both interviews were completed, the researchers categorised the data. A category of Positive and Negative Feelings was used in keeping with the Van Reken (2001) model, as it gave what was deemed to be a suitable range of feelings. The category Negative Feelings was further divided in five sub-categories: Aftershock, Insecure, Outcast, Extreme, and Passive. The category Positive Feelings was divided into two sub-categories: Well Adjusted Passive and Well Adjusted Active. This sub-categorisation was in agreement with Van Reken’s Stages, except for the addition of the Well Adjusted Passive sub-category.

Results and implications
There was a rich source of data gathered from the children. The following are some examples of the children’s documented responses. These are grouped into themes as follows:

Children’s expressions—Week 1
Common themes were: scared, bored, nervous, shy, different.
- ‘I feel scared, because I don’t know anybody. I feel bored in the bus ride.’
- ‘I feel nervous; it’s such a big school. I thought I would get lost. I felt scared because I got lost on the first day.’
- ‘I felt shy; I did not know anybody, and I did not think I would meet my teacher.’
- ‘I felt scared: I thought I would not have fun at recess because I did not know anyone.’
- ‘I felt nervous; I have never been in a big school and I felt shy; I never met the people here.’
- ‘I felt shy. I am always that way. I was scared; I did not know who my teacher was.’
- ‘I felt nervous; I did not know anything about the school.’
- ‘I felt different, everybody else was not new.’

At the end of eight weeks the qualitative responses were grouped into themes of positive and negative.

Children’s expressions—Week 8

Positive
However, positive feelings also emerged and countered some of the negative ones. Common themes (positive feelings) were feeling happy, relaxed, excited.
- ‘I feel happy; my teacher is a great teacher.’
- ‘I feel excited, I like to go to recess and play.’
- ‘I feel relaxed; I can find my way to the bathroom without getting lost. I feel excited; I have been in school for so long now.’
- ‘I feel excited; I find new surprises.’
- ‘I am happy; my friends can be nice and helpful.’
- ‘I feel good; I have made a lot of good friends.’
- ‘I feel happy; I have made new friends.’
- ‘I am surprised how smart I am and I learn so fast.’
- ‘I feel excited; I have a science test soon. I feel happy; I have never been to a school this big.’
- ‘I am happy, I am learning cursive writing.’
- ‘I feel ahead; I am very good at math. I am smart. I have a photographic memory.’

Negative
Common themes (negative feelings) were: feeling stressed, tired, scared, different, behind in academic work.
- ‘I feel stressed; school day needs to be shorter. I have lots of homework and after school activities to do. I get tired of school sometimes. I am anxious to end school and have a long break.’
- ‘I am tired.’
- ‘I feel tired. I have to get up soooo early!’
- ‘I feel very tired; we are busy all the time.’
- ‘I feel scared. I am new so I still don’t know well the teachers and when they talk to me I am scared.’
- ‘I feel different; each day different things happen and it affects how I feel.’
- ‘I feel behind; I messed up on my spelling words.’
- ‘I feel bored; they give out too much tests, homework and projects. I am stressed because too much work.’
- ‘I am bored; I always play the same game.’

Some of the above comments made by children in Week 8 were more negative than those in Week 1, indicating tiredness, boredom, too much work, and anxiety about tests. Inferences drawn from this include the fact that some of the excitement of starting a new school had worn off. But even after making allowances for this, the emotional toll involved in the transition affected some children physically and emotionally in that they expressed feelings of tiredness and enduring long days.
These positive feelings showed that the transitional stage was beginning to end and children were more settled. The experience of making friends and acceptance by teachers showed the importance of the social elements of transition. In addition, being able to achieve academically was viewed very positively by four of the children.

Table 2 shows in a quantitative way how the children’s feelings were categorised when questioned and how they documented them. The responses were analysed using the Van Reken (2001) modified framework. It was interesting to note that by Week 8 all of the 11 children had positive feelings about the new school environment, some more so than others. One child, however, felt outcast and three had extreme negative feelings. But the emotions of feeling shy, scared, nervous and different had diminished and been replaced with feelings such as belonging to the school, having acceptance, and achieving at academic tasks.

Although many negative feelings were expressed in Week 8, nine out of a possible 11 children were categorised as Adjusted Passive, which showed growth from Week 1.

**Implications**

The results in this small sample showed that children did indeed feel vulnerable, different and nervous when starting a new school in a foreign country. What emerged in the children’s initial responses was that the sense of belonging was not there. The loss of their friends and loss of belonging to a group in their new cultural context created emotional challenges and anxieties (Allan, 2002). This loss was expressed in the children’s verbal and written comments. The forging of new friendships, the gaining of acceptance by understanding teachers, and achieving academic success were important for many of the 11 children. All the children were able and willing to document in their written responses how they felt at the end of eight weeks.

The number of negative feelings existing still at Week 8 when compared with Week 1 was interesting. The children’s expressions of boredom, too much work presented to them, and nervousness when it came to tests are directed at the teaching/learning situation and should be noted by teachers. The comments about social–emotional feelings were generally positive, as by Week 8 all 11 children had acquired new friends and had adapted to the routines of the school. These comments suggest that teachers might spend more time during this interim, transitional period with matters of a social–emotional nature rather than concentrating on ‘academic’ learning. As Lambert and Clyde (2000) point out, there is a need for teachers to provide emotional scaffolding to children, and attachment is not limited to toddlers. Schaeffer (1996) likewise makes a similar point that attachment is a life-long issue.

Kuebli (1999) proposes that teachers can ask children to talk about how events made them feel, and what they would do differently next time. In this way teachers can help children to manage their feelings rather than suppress or deny them, and this may enhance children’s abilities to develop emotional understandings and relationships. Teachers may find that, when the social–emotional needs of children in an international school have been met, the academic work may be less onerous for them. In writing on school transitions, Berk states (2000, p. 629) that as ‘children...
forge new bases of social support, they seem to integrate themselves into the environment in ways that foster academic competence’.

The emotional needs of Third Culture Children should not be underestimated; they have additional barriers to overcome, such as the need to belong and become part of their new culture both at school and in their new home location. Children who relocate bring (and take) with them the attributes of their own and other cultures, and so the process of acculturation goes on. The understanding and support of parents in assisting the transition is part of the process too. If children are successful in overcoming these challenges, then the resilience they have shown should help them to continue to accept change and ultimately become part of their new cultural context. As Schaeffer (1996) explains, children who cope successfully with adverse or challenging situations will often be more confident in tackling new stresses. Successful outcomes for Third Culture Children may increase their confidence in their ability to cope with the transitions which are a part of life for them and for many other children today and in the future. As one Third Culture Child confidently responded when pressed for an answer as to which country he came from: ‘I’m from the world’.

References


Appendix 1. Documenting children’s stories

After an initial discussion about how children felt, they were invited to write a story.

Now, I would like you to write a story about yourself. Please write about the feelings you had when you started school here in Singapore.

You can write more than one feeling, and it would be better if you could tell me why you had such feelings.

Do not worry about spelling mistakes. This is not a test.

What counts here is that you write about your feelings.

There will be no right or wrong answers.

Are there any questions?

This is my story

My name is ………………………………………………………………………..I am …………………years old.
I was born in …………………………………………, but I have a ………………………………..…….passport.
I lived in …………………………………….…………………………………………before I came to Singapore.
My father is from …………….………………………..and my mother is from …………………………………….
I live with ………………………………………………………………………………………...………...…………
……………………………………………………………………………………………………………………….
and at home we speak ……………………………………………………………….………...…………………….

When I first came to this school I felt:
1. ………………………………………………………………………………………………………………….….
2. …………………………………………………………………………………………………………………….
3. …………………………………………………………………………………………………………………….
4. …………………………………………………………………………………………………………………….

My feelings after eight weeks in school

My name is ………………………………………………………………………………………………………….

After being in school for eight weeks I feel:
1. …………………………………………………………………………………………………………………….
because …………………………………………………………………………………………………………………
………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………….
2. …………………………………………………………………………………………………………………….
because …………………………………………………………………………………………………………………
………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………….
3. …………………………………………………………………………………………………………………….
because …………………………………………………………………………………………………………………
………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………….

My friends’ names are ……………………………………………………………………………………………….
………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………….

In class I would love to sit with …………………………………………………………………………………………………….
and ………………………………………………………………………………………………………………………….
This article focuses on children’s transition from preschool to school (kindergarten, kindergarten class, preparation class, reception class or Grade 1). ‘The word transition is referred to as the process of change that is experienced when children (and their families) move from one setting to another. It includes the length of time it takes to make such a change, spanning the time between any pre-entry visit(s) and settling-in, to when the child is more fully established as a member of the new setting’ (Fabian & Dunlop, 2002a, p. 3). The growing interest on this focus is based on the idea that transition may cause social and emotional turmoil as well as discontinuities in learning (Griebel & Niesel, 2003). Thus a successful transition is important both for children’s wellbeing and their cognitive achievements. Parents and teachers cooperate in order to support children’s transition to school, and they make use of many different tools and activities, which together are called transition activities. Among these, one might mention continuity and progression between preschool and school curricula, mutual visits by and orientation between preschool teachers and school teachers, plus cooperation with the families.

Problems in transition
International research shows that too many children experience the transition to school as a culture shock, and each day brings too many challenges or wrong kinds of challenges. There are several reasons for this, such as strong educational differences between preschool and school; a lack of communication between preschool and school; children’s diffuse or outdated picture of school; and parents, preschool teachers and teachers having different definitions of the concept of school readiness (Broström, 2002a; Pianta & McCoy, 1997). Preschool teachers seem to emphasise personal development, action competence and general skills, whereas school teachers emphasise children’s abilities to adjust to school, to fit in with other children, and to function in class (Perry, Dockett & Howard, 2000).

A smooth and successful transition from preschool to school requires attention to several related elements (Broström, 2002a):

1. extent of the child’s school readiness;
2. support from parents, family and community;
3. a system of high-quality kindergartens for children aged three to five;
4. a school teacher who is able to take the child’s perspectives, interests and needs into account; and
5. continuity in curricula, home-school communication, and a welcoming environment for family and children.

Furthermore, investigations show that well-developed relationships and ongoing communication are crucial for...
a good start in school (Pianta & Walsh, 1996; Epstein, 1996). Taken together, these elements provide directions for the development of transition activities. Through the interaction and connections between the abovementioned areas, the adults strive to help the child to experience continuity and see his or her life as a unified whole. Related to Bronfenbrenner’s (1986; 1992) ecological system theory, transition activities can be described at four interconnected levels (macro-, exo-, meso- and micro-level) Examples of such ecological models in the American context are described in Pianta and Walsh (1996), and in a European perspective by Fabian and Dunlop (2002b).

However, although preschool teachers and school teachers during recent years have implemented so-called transition activities such as, for example, mutual visits before school starts and sharing information about children’s life and development (Broström, 2002a; Einarsdóttir, 2003; Pianta, Cox, Taylor & Early, 1999), still too many children experience problems when they proceed from preschool to school.

**Transition activities**

There is, then, a call for more coherent transitions, which can be achieved in part through a shared overall curriculum and coordination of teaching practices. Preschool and school should develop and implement at least a few shared methods and ways of organising time, space and materials in their environments. It is important to create similarities between preschool and school to make it easier for children to recognise activities and feel confident in tackling challenges as they arise. It might support children considerably if teachers were to use similar strategies and methods for planning and implementing a project on a related topic. For example, in relation to choosing meaningful topics and problems, the children could bring photographs, drawings, and favourite stories from their life into school. The teacher could then use these artefacts to learn about the new pupils and also to build upon their previous shared experiences as a starting point for curriculum development. These materials could be displayed to help the newcomers feel ‘at home’ in their new school environment. Or, inspired by the Italian idea (Canevaro, 1988) of using a suitcase to hold children’s products and other ‘tracks’ from their preschool life, each child could present his or her suitcase—containing, for example, stories, photos, objects from their childhood—for the entire group in school. This would give the teacher an opportunity to use children’s ‘tracks’ as a starting point for the new school year. Thus the children could quickly engage in already-familiar themes and activities they can manage and enjoy themselves.

When teachers plan and implement such transition activities, they have a logical hope that the children involved will experience a successful transition. Oddly enough, some children who have had lots of transition experiences do not manage the transition very well, and they do not feel comfortable in school. Many preschool teachers and school teachers report that a number of well-functioning preschool children actually seem to lose competencies during their transition to school. A case study (Broström, 2003) focused on this illogical phenomenon. Preschool teachers described some children about to start school as independent, active, inquisitive and exploring people, who also functioned well with peers. However, the case study showed that during the first weeks in school these children changed attitudes and become less active, expressing a form of insecurity. Although most of these children had obtained the necessary level of school readiness, especially personal and social competence, they did not feel comfortable in school, which impacted on their wellbeing and was a hindrance to them being active learners in the new environment. Another concern is that this (temporary) loss of competence might pave the way for poor self-esteem and insecurity in the new setting.

Here is a paradox. How can active and independent children be transformed into people dominated by reserve and insecurity? Elsewhere (Broström, 2003) I have said that situated learning theory (Lave & Wenger, 1991) provides a useful framework for understanding the paradox of the above-mentioned group of competent and ‘ready’ preschoolers who seemed neither competent nor well-adjusted during the first weeks of school. Situated learning theorists argue that learning is social and contextual. Learning happens within specific, shared social practices or situations. It is situated in the specific environment in which it takes place. Therefore it seems appropriate to strengthen some of the most promising transition practices, such as having a familiar adult follow the children on their transition journey, and helping children themselves to become more aware of and better able to participate as agents in their own transitions. Here children’s own documentation of their learning can be a useful tool; for example, through ‘learning stories’ described by Margaret Carr (2001).
From external transition activities to interior transition system

The aforementioned case study seems to show that it is not enough to make use of practical organisational transition activities such as mutual visits and information, which help the child to become more familiar with the setting he/she will move to in the future. Although it is important to extend the range and intensity of such external and organisational transition activities, we also need to reflect more on developing the child’s thinking and conscious reflection. If the child has more knowledge about why, how and what he/she has learned in preschool, this might help him/her to act more independently and consciously in the new environment. This refers to the scope of the children’s self-awareness and understanding of their learning. In other words, to the need for a development of children’s metacognition or, according to Leont’ev (1978; 1981), the scope of their motivation to learn (learning motive).

From a cultural–historical understanding, play seems to be a form of activity that reflects the aforementioned qualities (Elkonin, 1980). Through play, new knowledge, skills and actions often emerge, so it can be assumed that play can serve as a transition tool which contributes to children’s thinking. In this way, play is seen as an activity which leads the development of higher mental functions such as language, thinking and memory (see an analysis of play in Broström, 1999).

Because play has the potential to contribute to children’s metacognitive development, it seems to hold double benefits. On the one hand, play enables children to achieve new competences which help them to make a successful transition; on the other hand, play can be a bridging tool to school.

Using play in preschool and school serves several purposes. It can become a shared educational method for both preschool and school. It can function as a bridging tool, transmitting and using children’s ‘tracks’ in the teaching process, in order to give the children a feeling of meaningfulness. Finally, it is generally understood that play has a developmental function.

In addition, I suppose it is not very difficult to introduce and make use of play as method for children’s learning and development. In a review, Lillemyr (2003) demonstrates that the curricula in many countries emphasise play and connect play and learning.

Play as transitory activity

Seen from activity theory (Leont’ev, 1981), transition to formal education entails crossing boundaries from the activity system of play to the activity system of learning. Leont’ev defines play as the preschool child’s leading activity, and learning as the school child’s leading activity. However, this does not mean that preschool children do not learn via play. They do learn through play, but their learning is not conscious. Conversely, in general the school child’s learning is conscious. He/she knows what to learn, how to learn, and what he/she is learning; in other words the learning motive has developed.

From a cultural–historical understanding of play it is assumed that important changes take place in the preschool child’s psyche through play. They pave the way for the child’s transition to a new level of development (Leont’ev, 1981, p. 369). Play activity has a number of benefits. Through interaction with peers and adults the child deals with signs and symbols in order to represent the culture. Signs and symbols also influence the development of higher mental functions (Leont’ev, 1978, p. 59; Vygotsky, 1978, pp. 54-57).

In play, children are able to master ideas and to take more advanced actions than is possible for them in non-play situations. The child raises the demand on itself and brings itself into the zone of proximal development, which Vygotsky defined as:

the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86).

This starts new processes of development. According to Vygotsky, not only will the independent actions in the zone of proximal development support new developments, but the child’s imitations also have a similar effect. The child is able to imitate actions which go beyond his or her possibilities, but not without limits.

In play a child always behaves beyond his average age, above his daily behavior; in play it is as though he were a head taller than himself. As in the focus of a magnifying glass, play contains all developmental tendencies in a condensed form and is itself a major source of development (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 102).

However, the optimistic idea that play has a leading and developmental function (Leont’ev, 1978) has been
over-interpreted, and the (often misunderstood) phrases ‘in play a child always behaves beyond his average age’ and ‘play always leads to a more advanced level of development’ have been discussed and criticised. For example, van der Veer and Valsiner (1991) argue that play does not in itself contribute to the child’s development. From their point of view, play has a development potential only when the play environment has the potential to challenge children to cross their zone of proximal development. Furthermore, Wood and Attifeld (1996) define such an environment as interaction of high quality in relation to the task, the playmates, and relations between children and adults.

It may be beneficial to differentiate between two kinds of play. On the one hand, there is a ‘romantic’ understanding—free flow play (Bruce, 1991)—suggesting that any play has a developing potential: just let children play and they will learn and develop automatically. On the other hand, there is play as a social interaction where the child is challenged and forced to create new meanings and understandings. Here the teacher plays an active role rather than just observing with a wait-and-see attitude. This form of play goes beyond the traditional role-play and is called border play (Leont’ev, 1981).

Vygotsky can be interpreted as arguing for a challenging and supporting function in play as represented in border play. Through this the teacher can create a relational community and the possibility of developing the children’s zone of proximate development (Vygotsky, 1978; Newman & Holzman, 1993). However, this is not an automatic process. Learning and development through play demands what Holzman (1997) calls interaction of creative imitations and the implementation. We see a creative imitation when a less competent child is doing something beyond its actual development, based on information from a more competent child. This can be seen in play where, for example, the teacher, in the role of a baby, assumes a baby’s voice, and a less competent child imitates this action to reinforce its own role in the play: it adopts an ‘angry father’s’ voice. The implementation is expressed when a less competent child gets a response to its creative imitation from a more competent person. In the aforementioned play with assumed voices, the implementation is established when the less competent child gets a positive feedback to its ‘angry father’ voice.

When children are involved in dynamic and challenging interactions which give opportunities for creative imitations and implementations, and not merely reproduction of roles and actions, it is possible for them to create quite new dimensions—and, with that, new moments of learning can appear. In such interactions children not only play according to a certain theme, but they also expand on that theme. According to Engeström (1987), new knowledge, skills and actions often emerge through such activities. Engeström names this kind of learning activity ‘learning by expanding’. However, for this kind of learning to occur, children need to be provided with the raw materials; for example, participating in field trips, reading quality literature, and engaging in interesting dialogues with adults.

Using different kinds of ‘border play’ or ‘expansive play’ (frame-play, aesthetic theme play, drama-play) the boundaries of traditional role-play will be crossed. Such kinds of play can be seen as an activity situated between play and learning. Thus it can be described as a transitory activity which may have the potential to enrich the individual child, to support the development towards a learning motive (Leont’ev, 1981). However, at the same time it can also be seen as a bridge between preschool and school.

The child’s transition between the two systems can be facilitated by developing a ‘transitory activity system’ which mediates between the two systems, ensuring that the result of one system serves as tool in the next (Baumer, 2003).

Such a transitory activity system contains different elements, and I propose different kinds of ‘border play’. Driven by the use of children’s storytelling (Broström, 2002b), the concept of frame-play (Broström, 1999), play-drama (Baumer, Nilsson & Ferhold, in preparation) and aesthetic theme play (Lindqvist, 1995) form the basis for the development of a new play concept that combines reading, literature dialogues, writing, play, drama and philosophical dialogues.

Introduction of such kinds of play bring children to a type of activity which crosses or at least challenges their activity system (Leont’ev, 1981) and, with that, one might suppose, the development of the learning motive (Leont’ev, 1981). Thus the activity system of school learning will come into existence.

**Frame-play, aesthetic theme play and drama-play**

Any role-play entails the exercise of shared imagination and shared development of the theme (Garvey, 1976).
For that reason, older children become more conscious of the imaginary play situation (Elkonin, 1980), the concrete situation they imagine. This makes it possible to introduce more advanced forms of play which go beyond children’s free flow play (Bruce, 1991). In frame-play, aesthetic theme play and drama-play, children and the teacher plan and play together, and the teacher takes an active and challenging role called ‘teacher in role’ (Lindqvist, 1995). On the basis of common experiences—for example, a field trip or a story—they decide a general theme (e.g. ‘What happens in the witch’s forest?’) or they invite loved characters from children’s literature into their play; for example, Pippi Longstocking (Lindqvist, 1995).

The concept frame is used with reference to the importance of the imaginary play situation (Elkonin, 1980). In role-play, the imaginary play situation often refers to a situation with only narrow limits. But creating a frame-play with older preschool children makes it possible to generate an extended and common imaginary play situation—a shared frame the children can use for a long time. When the children make plans for the play, and also during the play, the content is expressed, or, in Bateson’s (1972) words, the text. Simultaneously, the children give signals about how to interpret the message, the context. These signals help the play participants to understand each other. According to Bateson (1972), the establishment of the context is a psychological frame. In play with older preschool children the psychological frame is usually clear. Its function is to include certain messages and actions and to exclude others. A psychological frame has the same function as a picture frame: it tells the viewer what he or she should notice. The frame defines the context.

In this new form of play, the children’s consciousness of the psychological frame is strengthened through the establishment of a real frame. They construct the frame together: for example, they turn the classroom into a hospital with a casualty ward and operating theatre. Supported by this physical frame, children and adults imagine themes, roles and actions. In other words: ‘they share a fantasy, which they collectively construct and modify’ (Fine, 1983, p. 12).

The frame-play contains several elements decided in advance by the children and the adults. Because of the time interval between the formulation of the plan and realisation of the play, the roles, rules and actions are prepared thoroughly. Often children produce lots of accessories for the play. For instance, in a frame-play involving ships, the children created an engine, a bridge, a wheel and an anchor, and also money for shopping in the store and restaurant. In this way, the frame-play is more organised and more purposeful than role-play. As well, the motives of the two kinds of play are different.

In a form similar to frame-play, Gunilla Lindqvist has created ‘aesthetic theme play’. With reference to Vygotsky’s book The Psychology of Art (1971), Lindqvist (1995) argues for an open and dynamic approach to play, where children’s imagination and creativity are stressed. She quotes Vygotsky, saying: ‘Art is the organization of our future behaviour. Without art there can be no new man’ (Vygotsky, 1971, pp. 253, 259). The art dimension is expressed through an aesthetic attitude and also by combining play and drama. Referring to Vygotsky, Lindqvist argues that drama is linked to play more directly than is any other form of art. ‘Children can compose the text, improvise the roles and prepare the scenic accessories: scenery and costumes, which they can paint, stick on, cut out and join together’ (Lindqvist, 1995, p. 53).

Together with a group of children, Lindqvist creates a playworld. She introduces children to specific child literature and sets up a theme; for example, ‘Alone in the big, wide world’. Loneliness is one of the most important existential questions, especially for small children who have to leave their parents to go to preschool every day (Lindqvist, 1995, p. 73). In another story taken from Nordic literature, The Dangerous Journey by Finnish author Tove Jansson, the children cope with the concept ‘fear’. One dark chilly morning in February, Fear is lying under the bed. The teacher Karin has put on her pyjamas and a night cap. She is now Rasmus, a boy about to go to bed. ‘What if there is something under my bed? I am scared. Why is it so dark’, Rasmus asked. The children huddle closely together. Rasmus whispers: ‘Who are you? What are you doing under my bed?’. ‘I am Fear and I am frightened’, says a thin voice (Lindqvist, 1995, p. 78).

From this starting point, children and the teachers create a playworld which can last for weeks and months. The idea is to move between reality and imagination and to establish a creative and playful atmosphere and at the same time become familiar with the chosen theme ‘fear’, which they express through monsters, ghosts, spiders and snakes.

Such play not only deals with children’s daily experiences but also supports the production of aesthetic quality.
Very close to Lindqvist’s aesthetic theme play, Baumer, Nilsson and Ferhold (in preparation) describe a form of play named drama-play. Here three elements are integrated:

1. Explorative play experimenting with roles, actions and dressing-up.
2. Dramatisation involving the preschool teachers and focused on creating a product, a story.
3. ‘Reflection via dialogue’, a kind of philosophical conversation with children.

An example of how these elements of drama-play can be integrated is when the Russian folktale Baba Yaga was read aloud by the teacher and children were shown scenes of the film based upon the tale. Inspired by class discussion of the story, the children re-create the witch’s house and are visited by the character of Baba Yaga, who shows them how to perform a conjuring trick.

When children are involved in the above forms of play, they not only have fun, but are also challenged to reflect on their play and to discuss what and how they play. Such play might pave the way to the development of a learning motive. Achieving a learning motive enables the child to go beyond passive learning and to become an active learner in school.

A new kind of play

The aforementioned kinds of play—frame-play, aesthetic theme play, and drama-play—have the potential to create an educational play model which is an alternative (but not a replacement) to free flow play (Bruce, 1991) and also to traditional teaching.

Such a play system was implemented in a class with 25 six-year-old students, over a three-month period. Two teachers and the researcher worked weekly with the children, divided in three groups, with different forms of play. The project experimented with activities combining literature, play, drama and dialogues. The aim was to devise a new educational method which could support children’s consciousness of their own activity and their ability to reflect on their actions, and, with that, reach an awareness of why, what and how to learn. The project was not designed to demonstrate whether these children actually achieved this.

The following points characterise play which could serve as a transitory activity system:

1. Reading aloud a short story of high literary quality.
2. Based on the story, teacher and children carry engage in a structured conversation (Chambers, 1994) called a literature dialogue.
3. After the dialogue they make drawings to illustrate their understanding of the text.
4. Then the children, in formal groups, are challenged to turn their literature experiences into play. The teacher has an observer role and also participates as ‘teacher-in-role’.
5. Sometimes the teacher asks the children to present their version of the play/story for their classmates and teachers.
6. After the presentation, the teachers and each play group hold a structured conversation called a learning dialogue.
7. During all phases, the teacher and the children have philosophical dialogues reflecting their ideas.

The following aspects of the developmental project illustrate some of the elements.

1. Reading aloud

With the children in small groups, the teacher read aloud five short books in the series *Miss Ignora in the Water Tower*. All five books display strong emotions which all children experience—friendship, anger, happiness, sorrow, shyness, disappointment and love—and inspire children to participate in philosophical dialogues which may support the development of children’s metacognitive thinking.

The books make up a series with a recognisable structure and a permanent gallery of characters. The series differs from most traditional series for young children in that the main character develops during the books. Each book has 21 pages dominated by vigorous and expressive illustrations which support and expand on the text.

The *Miss Ignora* books are of a high literary quality. The stories are told in simple, rhythmical and unsentimental language, and the reader can identify with Ignora. The titles reflect Miss Ignora’s development:

- *Miss Ignora Explodes*
- *Miss Ignora in the Schoolyard*
- *Miss Ignora and the Starry Sky*
- *Miss Ignora Falls in Love*
- *Miss Ignora and George Influence their World*
In the first two books, Miss Ignora and her universe are presented. When she loses her temper in front of her teacher, her best friend Nina becomes afraid and Ignora is sorry. Ignora sometimes speaks with her neighbour, a fish dealer, from whom she also occasionally steals fish.

In the third book Ignora is alone: her mother has left her, and her father has died in a traffic accident. However, during the night, sitting on the top of the water tower, she speaks with him. The book also contains an episode in the schoolyard where a boy, George, scolds her. However, the fourth book focuses on the friendship with George, and the fifth book tells how Ignora and George come to the assistance of a dog in distress, and they reflect on the theme of being a person who makes a difference in the world.

2. Literature dialogue

In order to influence and enrich children’s play we first introduced the Miss Ignora stories in class, and then arranged a structured conversation around the stories. Some changes to the literary conversation method used with older children (Chambers, 1994) made it a useful tool to help young children appreciate complex children’s literature and also to observe and document children’s reactions. The following four fundamental questions were included in our literature dialogue:

1. Did you find elements in the story which you liked?
2. Did you find something which you disliked?
3. Did you find something which concerned you?
4. Did you find patterns in the story which you recognised, and which remind you of other stories?

The first story we read aloud was Miss Ignora Explodes, in which Ignora loses her temper—becoming ‘crazy’ and ‘exploding’—which upsets her friend Nina. The children were also introduced to Miss Ignora’s neighbour, the fish dealer. Many cats live around his shop.

After the reading session the children were invited to discuss the book. They were asked the four questions mentioned earlier. In answer to the first question, Did you find elements in the story which you liked?, a lot of the boys said they thought it ‘was cool when Miss Ignora exploded’, while the girls liked ‘when Miss Ignora apologised to the teacher’ (because of her explosion), and ‘she was nice to the cats’. In answer to the second question, Did you find something which you disliked?, many girls mentioned the explosion as a problem. A few other girls also disliked Ignora stealing from the fish dealer. Some boys also expressed reservations about stealing fish and also about Miss Ignora’s explosion. But a number of boys said: ‘There was nothing we disliked’.

3. Children make drawings

After the reading session and the dialogues, the children were invited to write and draw their answers to the two questions. When they had finished, the teachers displayed the results on two bulletin boards, placing similar ideas side-by-side. This enabled the children to view their own answers in line with similar answers.

This session led to a new dialogue, and the third question was asked: Did you find something which concerned you? Common concerns were:

• Why does she not have a mother?
• Why does she come to the point where she explodes?
• Why does she live in that strange house?
• Why does she not ask for help from the fish dealer?
• Why Miss Ignora’s father died in a traffic accident: ‘They do not use to die in books’, one girl said.

The children’s comments formed a basis for rich conversations.

Most of the children had reached a high level of attention by the time they replied to the fourth question: Did you find patterns in the story which you recognised and which remind you of other stories?

Some children were able to compare the stories of Miss Ignora with other well-known books for children. For example, one boy said: ‘Pippi Longstocking, both Pippi and Miss Ignora do not have a father and mother’. Another boy said: ‘It reminds me of Superman. That story starts with he has no father and mother’. A number of boys and girls referred to the story of Sleeping Beauty.

4. Play

In continuation of the children’s interest in the first three books, the teacher read the last Miss Ignora story: Miss Ignora and George Influence their World. The plot deals with Ignora and George becoming friends and freeing a dog which is wedged in a door. Then they talk about how, in doing so, they had influenced their world.

After the reading session the children were invited to establish their own play events, and they quickly set up different groups to discuss the play theme, roles and
actions. One group of boys and girls was inspired by the incident involving the wedged dog, and they spent some time planning a play with many details.

The characters were Ignora, George, a sour man, Ignora’s friend Nina, a dog and some cats. An extract from a transcript follows:

Miss Ignora said: ‘Hey, do you like to be my boyfriend?’

George answered: ‘Yes.’

Miss Ignora said: ‘Then we take a promenade in the park.’ Miss Ignora and George danced around.

George: ‘Oh, see that old shack, it’s ugly,’ and then he continued: ‘Something is whining.’

Miss Ignora: ‘Yes, it is from over there, inside.’

George looked around and then he said: ‘Oh, it is a nice little dog.’

‘Come here,’ Miss Ignora said and then she kissed the dog at the nose.

Suddenly a man showed up from the old shack. He scolded the children and cried: ‘Get out, now!’

Miss Ignora said: ‘Sorry, we will …’. And then she whispered to George: ‘What a sour man.’

The sour man cried: ‘This is my place; buzz off, stupid children!’

The two children disappeared quickly, and went away from the place.

Then George said: ‘Oh, I am so hungry; let’s eat.’

George and Miss Ignora established a place to eat. They set up a table and some chairs, illustrating a restaurant, where they placed themselves.

They sat in front of each other and ate their food. Suddenly Miss Ignora burst out: ‘Oh, I forgot an appointment with Nina.’

She left the table and ran over to her best friend Nina who was loudly snuffling. Then she sobbed: ‘You forgot our appointment.’

‘Sorry Nina,’ Miss Ignora said, ‘I was out eating with George. Sorry, should we not play all together?’

Then they started to skip. George and Nina swung the jump rope.

A bit later Nina said: ‘I do not like this any more,’ and Miss Ignora said: ‘I agree.’

‘Hey,’ George said, ‘look at that nice dog.’

Miss Ignora said: ‘It is the sour man’s dog. Let’s return the dog to him.’

George said: ‘I really don’t like to do it, but we have to.’

The three children went to the sour man’s house and they knocked at his door. Then he opened and snapped: ‘Pooh … you again, toddlers.’

Nina timidly said: ‘We just want to return …’, but here the sour man interrupted her with an angry ‘Buzz off.’

He closed the door, and when the three children were alone with the dog, Nina said: ‘Ugh how sour he was.’

‘Right,’ Miss Ignora commented, ‘he was old, big and fat.’

While the children talked together the sour man arrived and said: ‘I just want to apologise because I was so sour. I would like to give you my dog as a present.’

With this remark the children decided to return to their house with the dog and eat soft rolls and drink cocoa.

The above extract seems to show that the children had established a relation with the characters, the action and some of the themes in the five Miss Ignora books. They managed to set up a story-line, or what Markova and Zaporozhetz (1983) calls plot: Children’s ‘reflections of certain actions, events, and interrelationships from surrounding life.’ In other words, they made up a script.

They focused on some specific existential themes—those mentioned in the books and those they created themselves.

Thus their play displayed productive and creative dimensions close to the concept of expanding learning (Engström, 1987) and expanding play (Broström, 1999).

Conclusion

Analysis of the observed play sessions seems to show that, in both form and content, they reach a more advanced level than that resulting from free-flow play. Many of the observed play sessions displayed creative imitations rather than mere reproduction of roles and actions. It is possible to argue that the children involved had achieved a new level of consciousness of their own activity—in other words, a learning motive. Through the play sessions, the outline of a transitory activity system was established and the children had a chance to become agents in their own transition. Thus one might assume that the involved children are able to face the transition to school as active agents using their competences from preschool. The project neither measured children’s metacognitive development nor
their transition competence, but it might result in the
development of a new form of school readiness,
personal and social competence, and a learning motive—
thereby helping children in their transition to school.

References


**SCHOLARSHIP**

JEAN DENTON & LILLIAN DE LISSA SCHOLARSHIPS COMMITTEE

THE JEAN DENTON MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIP

(up to a maximum of $16,000: tax exempt)

This scholarship fund was established by the Kindergarten Union of South Australia in 1977 and is now administered by the Jean Denton & Lillian de Lissa Scholarships Committee and the Public Trustee.

Applications are invited for the Jean Denton Memorial Scholarship. The purpose of the scholarship is to advance knowledge in early childhood education. The scholarship is available to any person or persons working in Australia.

The scholarship is for postgraduate studies or advanced research either within or outside Australia, the purpose or the benefit of which will be applied in the early childhood area within Australia. The scholarship is granted for a one year period.

APPLICATIONS MUST BE MADE ON THE APPLICATION FORM

Enquiries and application form requests can be directed to:
Carol Thompson
Email: carolt@senet.com.au
Telephone: 08 8337 7195

Closing date: Close of Business 7 October, 2005
No extensions will be given.

---

**Over 40 Years**

of covering the latest developments in early childhood

**AUSTRALIAN JOURNAL OF EARLY CHILDHOOD**

The most recent issue of Early Childhood Australia’s scholarly journal, AJEC, is a must-read for anyone interested in the latest theories and developments in the early childhood field.

The ‘Controversy, innovation and other alternatives’ issue promises to be more than a read and a think: the AJEC Committee is hoping that you will read, think and respond.

The exciting range of articles covers many topics facing contemporary early childhood professionals:

• challenging the notion of ‘Child Development’—the bedrock of early childhood practice;
• examining the issue of sexuality in early childhood;
• proffering views on ‘deviancy’ in young children;
• and much more!

Full-text articles and abstracts are available online at www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au

$18.95 (inc. p&h)
ECA Code: AJEC0502

Subscribe to the next four issues of the Australian Journal of Early Childhood for only $70.

To order your copy or to subscribe, contact
Early Childhood Australia
T: 1800 356 900 (freecall within Australia)
F: +61 2 6242 1818
E: eca@earlychildhood.org.au
www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au

We welcome your feedback

Early Childhood Australia invites its readers to respond to the issues raised in its publications. Comments and submissions can be made to publishing@earlychildhood.org.au or PO Box 7105, Watson ACT 2602.
Background: The Starting School Research Project

Children experience the transition to school in different ways (Rimm-Kaufmann, Cox & Pianta, 2000) and bring with them a wide array of experiences and understandings. There is a growing recognition that in the transition to school the experiences of children will differ and there is a need to investigate these experiences from the perspectives of children (Broström, 2000; Christensen, 1998; Dockett, Clyde & Perry, 1998). This investigation focuses on children's voices concerning the transition to school, with particular reference to children who are gifted and their families.

Over the past eight years, The Starting School Research Project has examined the perceptions and expectations of all involved with children's transition to school. The first phase of the data collection involved interviewing children, parents and educators to determine what was important to each group as children start school. From the information collected and a detailed literature review, an extensive questionnaire was developed. Between 1988 and 2000 the questionnaire was distributed to parents and educators throughout New South Wales (Perry, Dockett & Howard, 2000; Perry, Dockett & Tracey, 1998). From this data the project team identified eight response categories using grounded theory. At the time of writing, data from more than 600 adults and 300 children (Dockett & Perry, 2004) have been analysed. Table 1 defines the eight categories identified.

Table 1. The categories and definitions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>Ideas, facts or concepts that are needed to be known in order to enter school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjustment</td>
<td>Social adjustment to the school context, including interpersonal and organisational adjustment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>Small units of action that could be observed or inferred from observable behaviour.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispositions</td>
<td>Children's attitudes, or feelings, about school or learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules</td>
<td>Fitting in with the school and school expectations.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Physical attributes, needs or characteristics of children. Also relates to issues about safety, age and health.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family issues</td>
<td>Related to family functioning or involvement with the school.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational environment</td>
<td>The nature of the school educational environment and the changes the child will experience.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

While the pooled data has yielded consistent results, interviews with parents and children indicated that different groups regarded some aspects of the transition as more important, or more problematic,
than others. Given the theoretical assumption underlying the research—that we should expect children and families to experience transition in different ways and that we should respond to these differences—it was decided to investigate the perceptions, experiences and expectations of gifted children and their families regarding transition to school. For an extended period ‘the emphasis in research on young children has been on central trends rather than on individual differences, so that “outliers” whose development is significantly advanced are “troublesome noise” rather than objects of interest in themselves’ (Robinson, 1993, p. 507). Gifted children do exhibit different characteristics from those of their mainstream peers; hence they require different learning experiences and curriculum (Tomlinson et al., 2002) and so may have different perceptions and expectations in relation to starting school.

**Method**

The Starting School Questionnaire was used to gather data from the parents of gifted children who were about to start school. Parents were also asked to indicate on the survey whether they would like to participate in an interview to discuss their particular issues about their child’s starting school. The Starting School Questionnaire comprised five sections relating to the background of the respondents and their perceptions and expectations of the families’ involvement in starting school, activities undertaken and skills that have been attained by the child.

The focus for this research was the parents’ response to listing ‘The five things that come into your mind when you think about your child starting school’.

The interviews with parents were one-to-one with the researcher and used questions that expanded on the survey responses given. Children who agreed to be involved were interviewed individually at their prior-to-school setting. Each interview lasted for approximately 20 minutes.

**Sample**

The sample comprised 20 parents and 20 children. The parents were all mothers, while the children were a mix of boys and girls. The participants were either self-nominated or nominated by prior-to-school educators in a number of preschools. Each parent completed a survey and permission was sought to talk to their child about starting school. The determination of the child’s giftedness was based upon the teachers’ and parents’ perception of giftedness. These included the ability to read, hold in-depth conversations with peers and adults, extensive concentration span, and a depth of interest in particular topics. No formal method of identification was used or proof required of the child’s ability. All children interviewed were about to start school.

**Discussion**

The information gained from the participants in this research will be discussed with reference to the eight categories listed in Table 1.

Table 2 combines the results from Dockett and Perry’s (2001) original survey and those of the 20 parents with gifted children in the present study. The ranking of each category, from the most to the least mentioned for both studies, is given.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. Ranking of response categories by parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Parents (Dockett &amp; Perry, 2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social adjustment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disposition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A marked difference between the two groups was the identification of the knowledge issues relating to starting school. For parents of gifted children the ‘ideas, facts or concepts that are needed to be known in order to enter school’ were the most important concern.

Parents were cognisant of their child’s ability, and their concerns were totally focused on their child’s development in particular academic areas. The issue of having a gifted child who had already mastered school academic content was highlighted. Parents were particularly concerned about what would happen to their child’s continual development of knowledge and skills at school. Questions such as ‘Will his gifts be valued and nurtured?’ and ‘Will the school be able to stimulate and challenge him enough?’ were asked. As
well, parents were concerned that there would be continued development of their child’s ability to read.

The second area of concern for parents in the present study was about their children’s social adjustment to school life. The social adjustment involved being able to work in a group and undertake tasks independently, carefully following instructions given by the classroom teacher. For the parents, the social adjustment issues still related closely to the academic side of adjustment to schoolwork. They focused on their child working with the teacher and the learning. Parents of gifted children were not as concerned with the adjustment of their children to working and playing with other children in the class.

The selection of an appropriate educational environment—that is, the choice of school that would suit their child—was an issue discussed in all parent interviews. Parents acknowledged that the local school would not meet their child’s educational needs and they were prepared to investigate what different schools had to offer. A number of parents had visited a range of local schools, making an appointment with the principal to discuss the school policy on teaching gifted children. They were very quick to identify their school preferences, being one that would try to differentiate the curriculum for gifted children. One issue highlighted related to how parents could access additional information about schools; that is, how they can find out what schools offer and how they differ, and whether they can believe that schools would do what they say they do. The parents wished to develop their skills so they would be able to judge the information available. One was concerned about what parents could do if they did not feel comfortable with what the school principal told them. Parents were wanting to ensure that the school would be an environment for optimal learning conditions for their child.

As most of the children attended a prior-to-school setting only a couple of days a week, many parents were worried about missing their child. There were comments such as ‘I’ll miss her company dreadfully’, and some mothers had the desire to keep their child home occasionally so they could do some things together as they had when the child was at preschool.

Table 3 gives an overview of comments and concerns of the parents of gifted children.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Parental comments about their gifted child</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>‘Ability to already be able to read’; ‘plus the speed that the curriculum would be taught’; ‘will he be “dumbed” down to fit in with everyone else?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjustment</td>
<td>‘Level of social contact of the children’; ‘making new friends’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skills</td>
<td>‘He can cope with organising his lunch’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dispositions</td>
<td>‘Coping with being away from home’; ‘will he be happy to go?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules</td>
<td>‘Will it be okay to keep him home when he doesn’t want to go?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>‘Will he get tired by Friday?’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family issues</td>
<td>‘I will miss him’; ‘the family tradition of scholarship’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational environment</td>
<td>‘Happy and safe environment for learning’; ‘what school to send my child to?’; ‘will he cope with a structured routine?’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The responses of the children from the present study have been compared with those reported by Dockett and Perry (2001) to illustrate the two groups’ different perceptions of starting school. Table 4 highlights the responses from the two different groups of children with the ranking of each category. The gifted children were aware that they were going to school to learn new things—that is, the knowledge category—and to continue developing their reading and writing skills. For the mainstream children, knowledge was the fourth area addressed, and they identified that school was a place to gain knowledge. However, the major differences between the prior-to-school setting and school cited by the gifted children related to homework. Gifted children indicated that this meant you would be given ‘real work at school’ that ‘you had to do’ and that ‘you would not be allowed to choose’ which activities you would like to undertake. The focus for the gifted children was on learning, working and developing more knowledge.
All children were aware of the school they were attending and what it looked like. Many recounted easily where it was and who would be attending with them, including friends from preschool and from the local neighbourhood. Different children identified friends who already attended the same school and the classes they were in. Thus the gifted children had a reasonably detailed understanding of what school was like and the structure of the classes and the school day.

The family was important to the gifted children, not so much with the worry of missing Mum, Dad or younger siblings; rather, they were excited that other family members were at school and they were looking forward to joining them there. The gifted children did not mirror the parental concerns of missing home and the interactions they had at home.

The gifted children mentioned rules, but much less so than other groups of children interviewed as part of the Starting School Research Project. Rather than presenting a concern, rules were reported as something that gifted children would be told about when there was a need to know. Several children commented that the principal would tell them about the rules if the teachers did not. The changes in rules from the prior-to-school setting did not seem to be a concern to these children. Rather, starting school was regarded as another life adventure ‘with loads to do and see’. Children were particularly aware of the need to wear uniforms, but regarded this not as a rule but rather as an exciting part of the change to formal schooling, and they discussed the colours and styles with interest.

When discussing the transition to school, both gifted children and their parents identified the issue of knowledge as the most important category. However, the difference was that the children were keen to have the opportunity to learn more and different things, while parents were wanting assurance that the curriculum would meet their child’s academic needs.

**Conclusion**

Educators and other stakeholders in the process need to determine what transition to school will involve for gifted children to ensure that their needs are met as they move from one educational environment to another. Parents seek guidance about the right choice for educating their gifted child, and the transition period is the most suitable time to ease the anxiety between prior-to-school settings and school. As the transition programs are planned for a whole group of children, they will need to discuss particular information about gifted children. The issues gifted children are concerned with included knowledge to be learned and the opportunities for them to learn. For parents the concerns about the appropriateness of the school curriculum should be discussed, giving examples of how gifted children’s needs are met in a mainstream classroom. Parents also need assurance that the knowledge and information they have about their child’s abilities can be shared with the teachers, and that they will be listened to and acknowledged as a reliable source of information.

The opportunity to speak with many gifted children and their parents has raised several issues about the transition to school. Clearly, gifted children and their families have particular expectations about school and about the purpose and function of school. Analysis of this data suggests that these concerns are somewhat different from those of more general groups who are starting school. These differences need to be addressed in transition programs for gifted children.

Parents of gifted children starting school are concerned with a number of key questions about the changes that will occur as their children make the transition to school. These questions need to be examined by transition programs because it is well known that there are strong links between the effectiveness of such programs and positive school trajectories (Alexander & Entwisle, 1988; Ramey & Campbell, 1991; Tizard et al., 1988).

**Acknowledgements**

This research was made possible through a University of Western Sydney Research Seeding Grant.
References


WHAT DID YOU DO IN MATHS TODAY?

Bob Perry
Sue Dockett
University of Western Sydney

As children make the transition to school, many things may change for them. Among these are the ways they interact with curriculum areas such as mathematics. This paper explores some of these changes by considering examples of children’s mathematical experiences in prior-to-school and school settings and analysing them in terms of the mathematical power displayed by the children and the opportunities they have to display this power.

Continuity and change in mathematics learning

Both ‘continuity’ and ‘change’ are important aspects of children’s transition to school. Dockett and Perry (2001) have advocated the inclusion of familiar routines, objects and people in children’s lives as they move to school. On the other hand, change during the transition period is important, especially to the children making the change who see it as a clear sign of their growing up (Dockett & Perry, 2004). Children want their schools to be different from their prior-to-school settings.

One of the areas in which there seems to be a marked change as children move from prior-to-school settings to school is that of mathematics learning (Aubrey, 1993; 2004; Doig, McCrae & Rowe, 2003; Perry & Dockett, 2002b). There are different syllabuses or other curriculum documents for teachers to use, a greater emphasis on whole class approaches to learning, less choice for children as to the activities in which they might involve themselves, less child control over these activities and their outcomes, and less support from adults because of higher student-to-staff ratios. As well, there is a much greater emphasis on comparison of one child with another. Pianta (2004) has summarised these changes:

• there is a shift upwards in formal academic demands;
• the social environment becomes radically more complex for the children;
• there are many more peers at school than in prior-to-school settings;
• there is less parent support for both children and teachers; and
• children spend much less time interacting individually with their teacher.

In short, then, demands go up and support goes down.

Mathematical power of young children

Many authors (Aubrey, 1993; Burton, 2003; Doig, et al., 2003; Ginsburg, Inoue & Seo, 1999; Perry & Dockett, 2002a; 2002b) have written about the mathematical power young children bring with them when they start formal schooling. For example, Ginsburg et al. (1999) analysed the play activities of children aged between four years, eight months and five years, seven months in a day care centre in New York and found that almost 45 per cent of the observed play activities could be said to be mathematical.

In their survey chapter, Perry and Dockett (2002b) introduced a categorisation of powerful mathematical ideas to which young children may have access: mathematisation, connections, argumentation, number sense and mental computation, algebraic reasoning, spatial and geometrical thinking, and data and probability sense. The final four of these categories are clearly oriented towards approaches in particular areas of mathematical content. However, the first three categories may be less familiar.

• Mathematisation: the process of generating mathematical problems, concepts and ideas from real world situations and using mathematics to attempt a solution to the problems so derived.
• Connections: mathematics learning is related to learning in other areas; learning in one area of mathematics can be relevant to learning in another area of mathematics; and the relevance of mathematics to the contexts in which the child is experiencing it.
• Argumentation: the process that allows children to justify their own mathematical thinking and to understand that of other people.

(derived from Perry & Dockett, 2002b, pp. 88-89)
The study

The study reported here considers examples of children’s mathematical experiences in prior-to-school and school settings and analyses them in terms of the mathematical power displayed by the children and the opportunities they have to display this power. The study derives its data from a number of separate sources: observation of children in prior-to-school settings, including preschools and homes; observations of children in schools; examples from the literature; and school curricula, textbooks or programs. In each case, the source of the data piece is given and it is analysed using the Perry and Dockett (2002b) categories listed above.

It is important to note that the data chosen for this paper is not claimed to be representative of either children or mathematical teaching and learning practices in prior-to-school or school settings. The pieces are chosen to illustrate that mathematics curricula in both settings need to take account of what the children already know and do. It is recognised that other examples may illustrate different practices in both school and prior-to-school settings. However, the data illustrates children’s experiences and activities that are not unusual in their respective settings (Aubrey, 1993; Burton, 2003; Doig et al., 2003; Ginsburg et al., 1999).

Mathematics in the preschool years

Children have many experiences with mathematics and with the language of mathematics before they start school. These experiences may occur in early childhood settings such as preschools or day care centres, in family contexts, or in any of the other contexts in which young children live. Each of the examples provided is analysed in terms of the Perry and Dockett (2002b) categorisation.

Example 1 (Observation of preschool free play: Educator record)

Matthew (3.10) and Claire (3.6) are trying to make a tower the size of Claire.

Claire: ‘We need some more bricks, I reckon.’
Matthew: ‘We must put some more of those on.’
Claire: ‘It is too tall—now take some off.’
Matthew: ‘That is just the right size now’ (Matthews et al., 1990, p. 110).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Analysis of Example 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Category</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argumentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number sense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spatial thinking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example 2 (Home setting: Parental observation)

It is said that Australia stops on the first Tuesday of November for the running of the Melbourne Cup—a horse race. Schools interrupt lessons, industry halts, and households are riveted to their television sets. At home, Will (3.3), his mother and a friend shared the field of 24 horses among themselves, each receiving eight numbers which were written onto sheets of paper. Will read his numbers and watched for them as the race progressed. He became excited when it was announced that the winner of the 2001 Melbourne Cup was number 13—one of his numbers. He recorded this as shown in Figure 1.

Mathematics in the preschool years

Children have many experiences with mathematics and with the language of mathematics before they start school. These experiences may occur in early childhood settings such as preschools or day care centres, in family contexts, or in any of the other contexts in which young children live. Each of the examples provided is analysed in terms of the Perry and Dockett (2002b) categorisation.

Example 1 (Observation of preschool free play: Educator record)

Matthew (3.10) and Claire (3.6) are trying to make a tower the size of Claire.

Claire: ‘We need some more bricks, I reckon.’
Matthew: ‘We must put some more of those on.’
Claire: ‘It is too tall—now take some off.’
Matthew: ‘That is just the right size now’ (Matthews et al., 1990, p. 110).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Analysis of Example 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Category</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argumentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number sense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spatial thinking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example 2 (Home setting: Parental observation)

It is said that Australia stops on the first Tuesday of November for the running of the Melbourne Cup—a horse race. Schools interrupt lessons, industry halts, and households are riveted to their television sets. At home, Will (3.3), his mother and a friend shared the field of 24 horses among themselves, each receiving eight numbers which were written onto sheets of paper. Will read his numbers and watched for them as the race progressed. He became excited when it was announced that the winner of the 2001 Melbourne Cup was number 13—one of his numbers. He recorded this as shown in Figure 1.

Mathematics in the preschool years

Children have many experiences with mathematics and with the language of mathematics before they start school. These experiences may occur in early childhood settings such as preschools or day care centres, in family contexts, or in any of the other contexts in which young children live. Each of the examples provided is analysed in terms of the Perry and Dockett (2002b) categorisation.

Example 1 (Observation of preschool free play: Educator record)

Matthew (3.10) and Claire (3.6) are trying to make a tower the size of Claire.

Claire: ‘We need some more bricks, I reckon.’
Matthew: ‘We must put some more of those on.’
Claire: ‘It is too tall—now take some off.’
Matthew: ‘That is just the right size now’ (Matthews et al., 1990, p. 110).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Analysis of Example 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Category</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argumentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number sense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spatial thinking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example 2 (Home setting: Parental observation)

It is said that Australia stops on the first Tuesday of November for the running of the Melbourne Cup—a horse race. Schools interrupt lessons, industry halts, and households are riveted to their television sets. At home, Will (3.3), his mother and a friend shared the field of 24 horses among themselves, each receiving eight numbers which were written onto sheets of paper. Will read his numbers and watched for them as the race progressed. He became excited when it was announced that the winner of the 2001 Melbourne Cup was number 13—one of his numbers. He recorded this as shown in Figure 1.

Mathematics in the preschool years

Children have many experiences with mathematics and with the language of mathematics before they start school. These experiences may occur in early childhood settings such as preschools or day care centres, in family contexts, or in any of the other contexts in which young children live. Each of the examples provided is analysed in terms of the Perry and Dockett (2002b) categorisation.

Example 1 (Observation of preschool free play: Educator record)

Matthew (3.10) and Claire (3.6) are trying to make a tower the size of Claire.

Claire: ‘We need some more bricks, I reckon.’
Matthew: ‘We must put some more of those on.’
Claire: ‘It is too tall—now take some off.’
Matthew: ‘That is just the right size now’ (Matthews et al., 1990, p. 110).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Analysis of Example 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Category</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argumentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number sense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spatial thinking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example 2 (Home setting: Parental observation)

It is said that Australia stops on the first Tuesday of November for the running of the Melbourne Cup—a horse race. Schools interrupt lessons, industry halts, and households are riveted to their television sets. At home, Will (3.3), his mother and a friend shared the field of 24 horses among themselves, each receiving eight numbers which were written onto sheets of paper. Will read his numbers and watched for them as the race progressed. He became excited when it was announced that the winner of the 2001 Melbourne Cup was number 13—one of his numbers. He recorded this as shown in Figure 1.

Mathematics in the preschool years

Children have many experiences with mathematics and with the language of mathematics before they start school. These experiences may occur in early childhood settings such as preschools or day care centres, in family contexts, or in any of the other contexts in which young children live. Each of the examples provided is analysed in terms of the Perry and Dockett (2002b) categorisation.

Example 1 (Observation of preschool free play: Educator record)

Matthew (3.10) and Claire (3.6) are trying to make a tower the size of Claire.

Claire: ‘We need some more bricks, I reckon.’
Matthew: ‘We must put some more of those on.’
Claire: ‘It is too tall—now take some off.’
Matthew: ‘That is just the right size now’ (Matthews et al., 1990, p. 110).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1. Analysis of Example 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Category</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connections</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argumentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number sense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spatial thinking</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example 2 (Home setting: Parental observation)

It is said that Australia stops on the first Tuesday of November for the running of the Melbourne Cup—a horse race. Schools interrupt lessons, industry halts, and households are riveted to their television sets. At home, Will (3.3), his mother and a friend shared the field of 24 horses among themselves, each receiving eight numbers which were written onto sheets of paper. Will read his numbers and watched for them as the race progressed. He became excited when it was announced that the winner of the 2001 Melbourne Cup was number 13—one of his numbers. He recorded this as shown in Figure 1.

Mathematics in the preschool years

Children have many experiences with mathematics and with the language of mathematics before they start school. These experiences may occur in early childhood settings such as preschools or day care centres, in family contexts, or in any of the other contexts in which young children live. Each of the examples provided is analysed in terms of the Perry and Dockett (2002b) categorisation.
Example 3 (Observation of preschool free play: Videotape and transcription)

Bruce (4.10) and Giselle (4.11) are in the sand pit near a water trough.

Bruce: [Tips water from a bucket into the trough. The water trough is about one-third full.] ‘We’ve got enough water, now let’s get back to some more sand.’

[Both children shovel sand into the water trough, counting as they go.]

Bruce: ‘That turns it to mud, doesn’t it?’

[More shovelling of sand into the trough and counting.]

Giselle: ‘Yeah.’

[Boy proceeds to mix the sand and water with his shovel.]

Giselle: ‘Don’t mix it up now. We’re still getting sand here. We’re still getting sand.’

[The children continue adding sand and water until the trough is almost full of a mixture of a consistency appropriate to make ‘mud balls’.]
what has been traditionally accepted as appropriate standards of mathematics instruction in the first year of school; most have some form of individual diagnostic testing to ascertain the current level of each student on the corresponding framework; most aim to develop thinking strategies in the students rather than take the rote learning approach; and most aim to deal with differences in knowledge and abilities among students through innovative activities and grouping strategies. All of this augurs well for some pedagogical continuity as children start school. However, the evidence suggests that, in at least some cases, the continued use of textbooks, traditional rote learning approaches, and rigidity in the application of the systemic numeracy programs tends to blunt the potential of these programs. The following examples illustrate the potential presented by many young children and the ways in which the Perry and Dockett (2002b) categories can be discerned in the first year of school.

Example 4 (First year of school class: Researcher observation)

Teacher: ‘What is 2 + 4?’
Guillaume (5.6): ‘I know it’s 6.’
Teacher: ‘How did you know that?’
Guillaume: ‘Cause I know that 3 + 3 equals 6.’
Teacher: ‘How is 3 + 3 the same as 2 + 4?’
Guillaume: ‘Well, 2 is in 3, and 4 is in the rest.’

Example 5 (Home setting: Parental observation)

Emily (5.0) had brought home her kindergarten mathematics textbook. She was very interested in it and in sharing it with her mother. While flicking through the textbook set for mathematics she found a page filled with two-dimensional shapes. Emily asked what she had ‘to do on the page’. I read the instructions aloud: ‘Decorate all the oblongs. Tick all the circles.’ Emily replied, ‘That’s easy. What do I do with the parallelogram?’ It was not until Term 3 of her first year at school that Emily finally got to complete that page in the textbook (Bobis, 2002, p. 6).

Table 4. Analysis of Example 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mathematisation</td>
<td>Relates one mathematical idea to a known fact</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argumentation</td>
<td>Provides a logical argument justifying his approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Number sense</td>
<td>Treats numbers as composites that can be decomposed in many ways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algebraic reasoning</td>
<td>Manipulates patterns of number in ways that allow the argument to be established</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Example 6 (Document analysis: First year of school mathematics textbook)

Children about halfway through their first year of school were asked to complete a page in their textbook that asked five questions like this:

Table 5. Analysis of Example 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Connections</td>
<td>Links the formal mathematical language to her experience of shapes in the real world</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spatial and geometrical thinking</td>
<td>Emily is aware of the different shapes and their names</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 2. Example of a textbook question

Colour ‘equal’ or ‘not equal’ for the following:

Some children knew how to do this and finished very quickly. Others did not know what to do and simply replicated what was on the pages of the children who had finished.

Table 6. Analysis of Example 6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number sense</td>
<td>Counting, subitising</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Algebraic reasoning</td>
<td>Introduces the notion of equality</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Whereas some of the Perry and Dockett (2002b) categories can be discerned in each of these examples, it is clear that the coverage of categories is more focused than was the case in the examples of children’s mathematical thinking before they started school. This would seem to be a direct consequence of school children being expected to concentrate their mathematics learning within the confines of the particular programs being used. One does wonder just what some of children from the prior-to-school years examples would learn from having to undertake exercises such as those in Examples 5 and 6. However, these are commonplace in our schools and even in some of our prior-to-school settings that include them as part of their ‘school readiness’ programs.

Conclusion
When children start school, they bring with them immense knowledge about all manner of subjects, including mathematics. This paper calls on early childhood educators in both prior-to-school and school settings to recognise the mathematical power of young children and to nurture this power to the full. Some of the systemic numeracy programs in Australia and New Zealand aim to do this (see, for example, Bobis et al., 2002). This is commonplace in our schools and even in some of our prior-to-school settings that include them as part of their ‘school readiness’ programs.

References
Keynote Speakers

Joe Tobin, Professor Early Childhood Education, Arizona State University, USA
Children, their families and cultures are a total package. Joe Tobin’s presentation will help us tackle what this means for our everyday work. He will draw on his innovative international project that looks at children of immigrant families from the perspective of the parents and preschool staff.

Dr Jackie Marsh, University of Sheffield, UK
Marsh advocates the incorporation of cultural icons, such as the Teletubbies, into the curriculum so that children can make the link more easily between their home and school environments. She undertook a study to explore the potential that popular culture has for motivating literacy and oracy practices.

Associate Professor Margaret Carr, University of Waikato, NZ
Carr describes a way of assessment that stays close to the children’s real experiences and provides an alternative to mechanistic and fragmented approaches.

Associate Professor Ann Sanson, University of Melbourne,
Sanson has played a central role in the Australian Temperament Project that has involved detailed observation of the interaction between child temperament, parenting and social context with social and emotional outcomes for young children.

Professor Andrew Hills, Queensland University of Technology,
Childhood obesity is one of the major health problems of the 21st century. Hills will challenge us to tackle this issue in our day to day work with young children.

Dr Rosemary Stanton,
One of Australia’s best-known nutritionists, Stanton has been awarded an OAM for her services to the community. She says that, in relation to the increase in childhood obesity, ‘it is tempting to focus on the positive as it doesn’t offend anyone. (C)learly) physical activity is important but we must also address food issues.’
**DEVELOPING IN A NEW LANGUAGE-SPEAKING SETTING**

Karen Guo  
Christchurch College of Education, New Zealand

This study investigated the effect of English-language acquisition on the learning experiences of a four-year-old Taiwanese immigrant child in a state kindergarten in New Zealand. Data was collected through child observations and parents’ and teachers’ interviews. The child’s learning experience was analysed based on five behaviours—‘taking an interest’, ‘being involved’, ‘persisting with difficulty’, ‘expressing a point of view’ and ‘taking responsibility’—adopted from the child assessment technique of ‘Learning Stories’ utilised in many childcare services in New Zealand. Results suggested that, regardless of his English-language incompetence, the child demonstrated learning dispositions under two circumstances: first, there was little interaction required between him and the English-speaking children; second, there was a teacher participating in what he was doing. It is suggested that the child’s learning outcomes were contingent on the situations in which he found himself.

**Introduction**  
Many children from non-English-speaking backgrounds (NESB) are attending English-speaking early childhood services in New Zealand. At a time when educational practices with young children are premised on a holistic developmental view, the English-language incompetence of NESB children is likely to constrain these practices.

The aim of this preliminary study is to provide an empirical basis on which to formulate an enquiry into whether NESB young children have difficulties developing holistically in English-speaking childcare settings. The study describes the learning experiences of a four-year-old Taiwanese immigrant boy, through child observations and parents’ and teachers’ interviews. The ‘Learning Stories’ approach introduced by Margaret Carr will be applied to assess his learning experiences (Carr, 2001). This approach is derived from *Te Whāriki*, the national early childhood curriculum of New Zealand, a document that reflects a focus on children’s holistic development (Ministry of Education, 1996).

**The study background**  
Research tells us that, in English-speaking settings, NESB children encounter a variety of learning barriers when acquiring the English language (Barnard, 2000; Okagaki & Diamond, 2000; Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke, 2000). These authors indicate that, in respect of the children themselves, these barriers are usually generated by their personalities, social skills and communication strategies. An inadequately-structured learning environment poses another challenge. Researchers claim that, unless NESB children are provided with a friendly and enjoyable learning setting, comprehensible learning activities, developmentally appropriate language input and helpful people, learning in a new language environment is very challenging (Arnberg, 1987; Baker & Jones, 1998; Brown, 2000; Rosenberg, 1996; Tabors, 1998). In Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke’s opinion, this is because NESB young children need to deal with dual tasks, ‘to practise language while trying out a range of activities’ (2000, p. 34).

In Tabors’ study (1998), the most identifiable stumbling block in the NESB learning environment was set by NESB children’s interactions with other people. A common phenomenon, as Tabors observed, is that young second-language learners displayed difficulties in interacting with others. The lack of mutual language often ‘results in the [NESB] child being treated as invisible, or like a baby, by other children, leading to frustration or withdrawal’ (p. 22). This phenomenon leads to a ‘double bind of second-language learning’ (p. 22). NESB children, being socially isolated, are obliged to face linguistic constraints. Linguistic inability, in turn, further reinforces their social isolation.

NESB children may also face barriers at certain stages of English-language acquisition. Initially, young NESB learners often demonstrate a ‘continued use of the
home language in the new language context’ (Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke, 2000, p. 47) because ‘they have not yet discovered that there is a new language being used in this new setting’ (Tabors, 1998, p. 22). Gradually, some children begin to use nonverbal responses or single words and progressively learn to use new words. Others, however, may go through ‘a period of silence’ (Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke, 2000, p. 47). The silent period occurs after young learners become aware of the impossibility of using the first language to make sense to the second-language speakers. ‘During this period, [NESB young] children refuse to speak in English’ (Clarke, 2003, p. 193). They silently internalise a second language before attempting to articulate it (Fillmore, 1976, cited in Grosjean, 1982; Quiñones-Eatman, 2001; Mitakidou-Kokonis, 1995). The length of the silent period for young NESB learners varies from a few days to a few months (Quiñones-Eatman, 2001) and they will all gradually speak in English. Given the particular characteristics of young NESB learners, especially at the stage of home language use and the silent period, they are seen as subject to some challenges, particularly in terms of socialisation.

The study

Why this study?

This study was a response to the learning needs of young NESB children. Given that the discourses surrounding this topic in New Zealand have mostly, if not all, focused on children in schools (Barnard, 2000; Brooker, 2000; Thorpe, 1988), it was necessary that this study be based in an New Zealand early childhood educational context.

The study approach

A case study was used. Following this approach, it was decided to use child observation, and parent and teacher interviews to collect data.

This preliminary study did not aim at a definitive conclusion but was intended to discover specific issues to provide some insights into similar future studies. Since a case study approach helps researchers understand the particular, but not what is generally true of many (Merriam, 1988), I believe it is appropriate for this study.

In an attempt to substantiate the descriptive nature of the case, I gathered data by directly observing the child and requesting information from his parents and teachers. The considerations which led to the adoption of observations were based on their usefulness to generate ideas, to answer specific questions, to provide realistic pictures of behaviour or events, and to more profoundly understand children’s development (Irwin & Bushnell, 1980). The use of interviews was intended to clarify any uncertainty and to alert me to any other important factors which had not been considered (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000). By using these two data collection techniques, an overall description of the learning experiences of the studied child was expected to be achieved.

The participants

This study, conducted in a state kindergarten in New Zealand, involved the participation of a four-year-old Taiwanese boy, Sam, his parents and his teacher. When the study commenced, Sam had been in New Zealand for six months and in the kindergarten for three months. Sam spoke fluent Mandarin.

The reason for the selection of a child of this age is that his first language was already established. Since the study subject is a NESB child, only one who has some linguistic foundations in their first language can be classified into this group. My choice of studying a Taiwanese child was based on consideration of our common first language. Knowing the child’s language would be likely to facilitate the research work.

Sam’s parents came to New Zealand with him. They were both educated professionals in Taiwan, and were looking for jobs when I was doing the study.

The teacher involved in this study was the head teacher of the kindergarten. She had a degree in early childhood education and had been working in this field for 30 years at the time I conducted the study.

The procedure

Observations in the study were made over four weeks, three days a week and three hours a day, during Sam’s entire kindergarten stay. Field notes were taken in the form of running records, using pen and paper. Sam and all the things that affected him in his environment were noted, including other people, objects, language, events and activities. I aimed to see how Sam managed individual learning activities and how he played with others. The time taken for different episodes was also recorded.

Semi-structured interviews with the teachers and Sam’s parents were held at the beginning and conclusion of the study and were supplemented by informal interviews throughout the data collection period. Each interview lasted for about one hour. The parent
interview was conducted in Mandarin. The aim of these interviews was to obtain relevant information about Sam, Sam’s learning experience at the centre, and his learning experiences at home. Upon completion of the data collection, there were further interviews to have the data cross-checked.

### Data Analysis

Observational notes about Sam’s learning experiences were transcribed into three categories: ‘playing alone’, ‘playing with other children’, and ‘playing with teachers’. Interview transcripts were collated on information about Sam’s personality, social experiences, and learning needs. The information gained through the interviews provided a background picture of Sam and were utilised to support the interpretation of the observed data.

Once the data was organised, it was further analysed using ‘Learning Stories’, an assessment framework based on the learning dispositions introduced in Te Whāriki.

Te Whāriki sets out the principles, strands, goals and learning outcomes for children’s holistic learning and development in the early childhood years (Ministry of Education, 1996). In this document, learning outcomes are developed for each goal in each strand. But, unlike the strands and goals, learning outcomes are not definitive but described as the combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes. According to Te Whāriki, learning dispositions—‘habits of mind’ or ‘patterns of learning’—are one of the ways these three factors combine (Ministry of Education, 1996, p. 44). Carr (1998) explains learning dispositions as learners’ response to an activity by taking action and implementing their knowledge and strategies.

Considering their benefits for children’s learning, a framework of learning dispositions is developed in connection with the five strands of Te Whāriki in the form of ‘Learning Stories’ (Carr, 2001). ‘Learning Stories’ translates these strands into five corresponding learning dispositions which then are converted to five observable behaviours. Learning dispositions as ‘worthwhile outcomes for early childhood education’ (Carr, 2001, p. 47) are thus crystallised in application to assessing children’s learning experiences. The following table frames the ‘Learning Stories’.

In Table 2, a learning behaviour is defined in each strand to reflect a learning disposition. Unlike dispositions, which are descriptive and complex, these behaviours can be observed, noted, and further used to assess the learner’s learning dispositions in each strand. According to Carr (2001), the behaviours within a particular activity often appear in sequence: taking an interest—being involved—persisting with difficulty, challenge and uncertainty—expressing a point of view or feeling—taking responsibility. My observations on Sam’s particular activities follow this sequence (see Table 3).

### Table 1: The semi-structured interview questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview questions for the parent</th>
<th>Interview questions for the teachers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Can you describe your child, such as his interests, personality?</td>
<td>1. Can you tell me the child’s personality and interests?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How many members are in your family?</td>
<td>2. Do you know anything about how children learn a second language?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Does he have any friends here or out of centre?</td>
<td>3. Have you ever worked with NESB young children before?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. in what way does he tend to make friends?</td>
<td>a. what is your general impression of NESB young children’s learning?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. how do you know he keeps friendships?</td>
<td>b. do you have any special techniques in place for these children?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c. how important do you know friends are for him?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Did he know any English before coming here? Has he learnt some English after coming here?</td>
<td>4. In what areas did you see the child had progressed the most after coming here?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What language do you use at home?</td>
<td>5. Does he have any friends here?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. What was his first week like here?</td>
<td>6. How does he play?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a. mostly alone</td>
<td>a. with a peer (cooperatively, in parallel, or otherwise)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b. with a teacher</td>
<td>c. with teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d. in groups (cooperatively, in parallel, or otherwise)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Have you ever communicated with the teachers about what you wanted?</td>
<td>7. Have you ever attempted to request his parent’s expectations and needs? How?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Have you ever communicated with the teachers about what particular needs you think that your child has at this time?</td>
<td>8. What particular needs do you think he has now?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In New Zealand early childhood settings, ‘Learning Stories’ is regularly used in recognition of its nature as a credit assessment model (Carr, 2001) and its emphasis on the learners feeling comfortable with their learning environments (Reid, 2002).

My use of this framework to assess Sam’s learning experiences was similarly premised on its focus on the relationship between learners and their learning environment. There was a degree of congruence between this focus and the emphasis placed on NESB children’s learning. Using this approach, the purpose of this study—to see whether the English-language incompetence impacted upon Sam’s display of the behaviours that other children learned to display in New Zealand and, if so, under what circumstances it happened—would be accomplished.

Findings and discussion
The study found that in some cases Sam followed his interests with persistence but rarely took on responsibilities or communicated with others. How he behaved, to a large extent, was influenced by whether he could get involved in what he did or wanted to do.

Succeeding in displaying the learning behaviors
At single play, Sam could follow his interests in the areas which were usually played in by few children. At popular play areas, he waited until a place was vacated. To a certain extent, Sam’s attempts to get involved in an activity were determined by the nature of that activity. It seemed that the less demanding the activity, the more easily Sam could show his interest in it (McClothlin, 1997).

Once he became involved in an activity, Sam demonstrated persistence with the difficulties associated with it. Getting involved in some activities was the most crucial point at which Sam substantiated his interests and took responsibility for his own learning, even if most of the time he ended up completing a task himself without communicating with others. The following example illustrates this.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 2. Framework of ‘Learning Stories’ technique</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The strands of curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belonging</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wellbeing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contribution</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3. Data analysis based on the five learning behaviours (Carr, 1998)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The behaviour I look for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking an interest (take an interest in an activity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Being involved (become involved in it over a sustained period)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persisting with difficulty (use a range of strategies to solve problems associated with the activity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicating with others (express ideas and feeling with others in a range of ways)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking responsibility (help others and contribute to the program)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Example of playing alone
Sam saw three children building a block bridge. He watched for six minutes until these children left. Sam went to the area. He first sorted out some blocks. Then he placed some big square blocks on the bottom and continued to pile. Sam used up all the squares and had to use some triangle blocks to carry on. His first attempt to pile some triangle blocks on top of other triangle blocks failed. The new piles fell. Sam changed these blocks to many different angles and finally made them stay firmly. ‘Da Lou’ (meaning ‘a big house’), Sam said to himself. He smiled at his ‘Da Lou’.

On nearly all occasions, a teacher’s purposeful participation in an activity involving Sam enabled him to develop the five learning behaviours. Sam responded to the teachers’ queries and acted enthusiastically in teacher-organised activities. Every time a teacher made an attempt to interact with Sam, he responded in some form of language. Sam seemed much more reactive to the teachers than to his English-speaking peers. This supports Freeman and Freeman’s notion (1994, cited in Quiñones-Eatman, 2001) that preschoolers are multifaceted individuals who need knowledgeable and sensitive teachers to usher them into the new language of the school.

Example of playing with teachers
Sam was standing by a table, watching two children digging in the sandpit. A teacher went over to him. ‘Come on, Sam,’ she gestured. Sam moved to the teacher. They walked to the sandpit. The teacher picked up a water hose from the sandpit and handed it to Sam. ‘Sam, hold it.’ Sam took it. The teacher turned the water on and said to Sam, ‘Let’s give them some water.’ ‘Yes, water,’ answered Sam. The teacher picked up a spade and dug a hole with other children. She pointed to the hole. ‘Sam, this is a hole.’ ‘A hole,’ Sam repeated. He continued to fill the hole with water and later went to adjust the tap when seeing the water flow too quickly. Sam dropped the hose and picked up a spade, joining the others to dig the hole. The hole got deeper. Sam turned up the water. ‘Water,’ he said to the teacher. ‘Yes, Sam. Good boy.’ Sam smiled.

Example of playing with other children
Sam walked to the water tank. He found a space and picked up a plastic cup from the tank. He first filled the cup with water. Sam then tipped the water into a bottle and poured the bottle water into a funnel. After that Sam picked up another cup, a plate, a spoon and a bucket, filled each of them with water and tipped all the water into the tank. A few minutes later, an English-speaking girl came. Then a boy joined her. Sam dropped his playing toys and watched them. The boy said to the girl, ‘You hold the funnel. I tip the water.’ The girl nodded. They did it and later picked up other toys. Sam silently took off his apron and left the tank.

Showing difficulties in displaying the learning behaviours
The key barrier that hindered Sam in displaying the learning behaviours was his difficulties in making friends with others and his acknowledgement of his incompetence in the English language. These two obstacles influenced each other in his case. Many times I saw Sam watching other children playing. He looked interested but made no attempt to join in the play. He waited and watched for a while and then left after waiting too long. I saw very few interactions between Sam and other children, and his oral exchanges with them were hardly noticeable. Sam spent more than half of the time during my observation playing alone, although, according to his mother, he had a passionate desire to play with friends. Sam’s success in following his interests in quiet places once again suggests that becoming part of a group challenged him. Another cause of Sam’s behaviour was his awareness of his English-language incompetence. His mother said that, after starting child care, he asked her to teach him English so that he could play with others.

Teaching implications
The teachers played a crucial role in supporting Sam. This finding supports the conclusions of many previous researchers, who state that early childhood teachers can provide young NESB children with the language
learning sources that enable them to interact with people and with expressive learning materials (Okagaki & Diamond, 2000; Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke, 2000; Tabors, 1998). The teaching implications, as drawn from Sam’s case and some literature, fall into the following categories.

1. Teacher attention

It is seen from this study that Sam appears to be a shy child, who lacks strategies for making friends. NESB children like Sam, as suggested by Quiñones-Eatman (2001), cannot be left alone for long periods, nor be left to initiate contact on their own. They need to participate in language exchanges with friends in playful contexts. To this end, teachers are advised to ‘intervene’ by arranging for them to play with other children (Fraser & Wakefield, 1986, cited in Siraj-Blatchford & Clarke, 2000, p. 80). Some social activities with friendly children should be purposefully set up for NESB children. Teachers need to make other children aware that NESB children want to be their friend but, because they are learning English, they need some assistance. Tabors’ (1998) suggestions of engineering the seating arrangement at big group activities for NESB children and other children are valuable here.

2. Learning setting

The fact that Sam could follow his interests in quiet places points out a need to provide him with some activities which demand little or no verbal communication from him (Quiñones-Eatman, 2001). It is not so much the nature of the activities that is important, but the setting of the learning environment.

3. Working with NESB parents

An important aspect of young NESB children’s learning is NESB parents’ involvement in their experiences in English-speaking childcare settings. In Sam’s case, his parents stayed with him as much as they could. Their presence, according to his mother, although not looking like making much difference to Sam’s development, would have eased some of the difficulties he encountered. His mother said Sam was frightened of the teachers and other children initially, but during my observations he was comfortable working with the teachers and some children. Therefore it is assumed that his parents’ stay provided Sam with a sense of security which enabled him to interact with others. This implies that, if possible, teachers should encourage parents to stay with their children, especially when they first come to the childcare centre. When parents stay, they can acquire better knowledge about the centre, thereby gaining confidence in leaving their children there. With their parents around, children can also be familiarised with the new place in a secure way (Dalli, 2001).

Conclusion

Despite the fact that the small scale of this study generated the findings which reflected only what happened to Sam during my observations, it provided some interesting insights that might inform further studies. The study shows that English-language acquisition has an effect on the learning experiences of NESB children. Although the English-language incompetence appears to be the most visible cause of Sam’s inability to follow his interests, the insights gained from this study point to his difficulty in being a group member as the major problem.

As my study progressed, Sam displayed more confidence in socialising with other children, although his language ability was still limited. He played alongside those children who were happy to use nonverbal language with him. Although I never recorded an example of Sam cooperating with other children, his integration into the group germinated through his familiarity with the environment. This should help ease parents’ and teachers’ worries about whether NESB children’s English limitation will cause a substantial delay in their development as a social member. Even if NESB young children cannot quickly become an active social member of the new group and use the English language competently, it is likely that they will develop confidence and competence in English-language settings if they know there are people who can be their friends.

References


CONCERNS AND EXPECTATIONS OF BANGLADESHI PARENTS AS THEIR CHILDREN START SCHOOL

Prathyusha Sanagavarapu
Bob Perry
University of Western Sydney

This study aimed to examine views, concerns and expectations of immigrant Bangladeshi parents and children in Sydney concerning transition to kindergarten (the first year of school). This study builds on the previous work of the Starting School Research Project at the University of Western Sydney by:

• deriving data from families and children for whom English is not the first language; and

• exploring the transitional experiences of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) children from prior-to-school to school settings.

Ten parents and four children were interviewed on the topic of transition to school. In particular, parents were asked to indicate their concerns and expectations that would assist schools in meeting the needs of Bangladeshi children and would make transition to school a positive experience for all concerned. The results revealed issues specific to families and children of non-English-speaking background regarding transition to school.

Background
Transition to school is an important event in the lives of children and the adults caring for them (Pianta & Cox, 1999; Ramey & Ramey, 1998). Some of the common feelings associated with this key experience for children, families and educators are excitement, anxiety and fear (Dockett & Perry, 2001). Many situational and psychological factors impact on the transition processes (Briggs & Potter, 1999). Children’s first experiences with transition and formal schooling can influence their attitudes and achievement throughout their academic life and have implications for their academic success (Alexander & Entwisle, 1988; Hamre & Pianta, 2001; McClelland, Morrison & Holmes, 2000). Consequently, it is a vital topic of investigation in early childhood educational research.

Parental concerns and expectations regarding children’s transition to school relate to children’s social adjustment, their dispositions toward school and learning, skills, knowledge, rules and physical issues (Dockett & Perry, 2004; Perry, Dockett & Howard, 2000). There are both differences and similarities in the expectations and concerns of parents from various backgrounds regarding transition to school (Greenfield, Quiroz, & Raeff, 2000; Pelletier, 2002). For example, parents from non-English-speaking backgrounds often emphasise academic goals more than English-speaking parents do (Perry, Dockett & Nicolson, 2002; Pelletier, 2002). Given the cultural and linguistic diversity of Australian school children and their families, it seems appropriate to consider different cultural groups within the broader Australian context. In this study one such group is highlighted.

Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory (1978) exemplifies the significance of various sociocultural contexts and the need to explore the perceptions of diverse families in relation to matters concerning children, such as transition to school. As school classes become more diverse, educators need to devise individualised and positive transition programs for promoting academic success in all students. To this end, it is imperative that educators are aware of, and take into account, the needs and expectations of CALD children and parents.

Further, the theoretical constructs of Bronfenbrenner (1979) emphasise the need to understand transition in the context of home, school and community, as well as considering both continuities and changes across contexts such as home, child care and school (Peters, 2000). ‘One dimension of context is defined by the language and cultural backgrounds of the participants’ (Perry et al., 2002, p. 1). The transitional experiences...
of children whose cultural and language experiences are different from the majority could present significant challenges to both the children and their families because of incompatibilities between home and school cultural contexts. Based on the ecological and sociocultural perspectives, this study aimed to explore CALD families’ attitudes towards transition to school. Specifically, it aimed to explore the views, issues and expectations of Bangladeshi families and children in relation to this transition.

**Method**

**Participants**

Participants in the study were 10 parents and four children from Bengali-speaking Bangladeshi families living in suburban Sydney. Bengali is one of the languages spoken in India and other countries in the Indian subcontinent such as Bangladesh. Bengali-speaking families are a newly-emerging minority language group in NSW (The People of New South Wales, 1996) whose cultural or language needs in relation to transition to school have not been extensively studied.

Children were also included in this study to explore their perspectives and expectations in regard to transition. The importance of including children’s perspectives is now well-established (Broström, 2000; Dockett & Perry, 1999a).

**Sample description**

Bangladeshi children who have just started school and who had attended child care previously were included in this study, as were their parents. Four children (three boys and one girl), aged between four-and-a-half to six years, and 10 Bangladeshi parents (seven mothers and three fathers) living in suburban Sydney participated. A majority of parents have been living in Sydney for more than five years, with the length of residency for selected families ranging from two-and-a-half years to 12 years. All the children were born in Australia, had attended child care in Sydney, and started school in 2003.

Potential participants who met the criteria for selection were recruited with the help of staff from a Migrant Resource Centre (MRC) (purposive sampling) and the research assistant, who is also a community development worker. The people recruited in this way were then used as sources to identify other participants and to refer them to the researcher (snowball sampling) (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000).

**Data collection**

Translated information about the project, together with consent forms, was mailed to potential participants. Arrangements for child and parent interviews were made over the telephone after receiving written consent for their participation in the study. Assent was also obtained orally from children on the day of the interview. Data was collected, using note-taking in most cases as only four of the 10 adult participants consented to having their interviews audio-taped.

Individual interviews with parents and their children were conducted in their choice of language (English or Bengali). Interviews are considered valuable for collecting first-hand information from participants (Gay, 1992) and enable discussion of the participants’ points of view (Cohen et al., 2000). The interviews took place in participants’ homes in April/May 2003, not long after the children started school.

The interviews were conducted by the chief investigator with the support of a research assistant recruited through the MRC, using a semi-structured interview schedule with open-ended questions. Where permission was obtained, these interviews were audio-taped and transcribed in preparation for analysis. The broad topics for the parents’ interview included aspirations, expectations, and perceptions on transition to school; the needs and issues relating to transitions between prior-to-school and school settings; and the role of various adult stakeholders in making transition to school positive for children.

The topics for the children’s interviews included views and expectations regarding transition between prior-to-school and school settings. In each interview, emphasis was placed on the observance of cultural practices and values, including using traditional greetings such as ‘salam alekum’ and holding conversations while sitting.

The language of the parent interviews was decided by the parents according to their preferences. A Bengali-speaking community development worker from MRC was recruited to provide an interpreter service if the parents preferred to speak their home language. In such cases, the pattern of interview was a question in English from the chief investigator, interpreted by the Bengali community worker, answered by parents in Bengali or English, and then, if the former, translated into English. This process was repeated for follow-up probes or the next question. Interviews concluded by thanking parents for their participation and by explaining the next steps in the research.
Child interviews followed parent interviews so as to enable children to become familiar with the chief investigator and the research support person. The pattern of child interviews was similar to that for their parents. Each child interview took about 5-10 minutes. Children did not show a lot of enthusiasm in talking to the researchers, and only four children participated in the study. The lack of enthusiasm could perhaps have been because of the age differences between the participants in the conversations. In addition, children would have regarded these conversations as interruptions to their play/home routine. Alternative methods of data collection such as drawings would have been useful in collecting data from children (Dockett & Perry, 2004).

**Data analysis**

The interview data was translated into English (where needed), transcribed, and analysed qualitatively. The analysis began with the identification of broad constructs or topics. The categories of adjustment, skill, rules, disposition, knowledge, and physical—used in the previous studies—were considered (Perry, Dockett & Howard, 2000). Other categories that emerged from this study were cultural and linguistic issues. The data was coded into the selected categories or constructs (Vierra, Pollock & Golez, 1998). As the interviews with children were brief and yielded few details, child interviews were not considered for further analysis in this study. Therefore the results presented in this paper relate only to parents’ views, concerns and expectations regarding transition to school.

**Results and discussion**

**Transition to school: Parental views and concerns**

Children’s entry into school is a phase of major social and emotional adjustments (Broström, 2000; Fabian & Dunlop, 2002; Griebel & Neisel, 2003). The literature on transition to school investigated so far with English-speaking parents has highlighted many concerns and issues such as children’s adjustments, dispositions, knowledge, and physical issues (Brooker, 2002; Dockett & Perry, 2004; Dockett, Perry & Tracey, 1997; Perry, Dockett & Tracey, 1998). The current study extended this work and explored the views of selected CALD parents to see whether they have the same concerns and expectations as English-speaking parents. Bangladeshi parents highlighted the issues of children’s adjustment, physical aspects, rules, etc. raised by English-speaking parents in other studies (Dockett & Perry, 2001). In addition, they raised specific concerns underpinned by linguistic, cultural and/or religious factors (see Table 1). Overall, parents described transition to school as a big event for children. One parent suggested that ‘it [transition to school] is very pressuring for children at those ages’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Number of responses (n=10)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic factors</td>
<td>Lack of proficiency in English conversational skills</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural/religious factors</td>
<td>Loss of cultural and religious values; no time for prayer</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Concerns about eating certain foods prohibited by religion</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Acceptance by peers/teachers because of differences in skin colour and accent</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adjustments</td>
<td>Lack of adjustment in school as a result of not understanding English</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>General adjustment to new environment</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coping with the school demands</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Isolation, bullying and loneliness due to limited conversational skills in English</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skill</td>
<td>Not able to feed on his/her own</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge</td>
<td>Academically not prepared</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rules</td>
<td>Following school rules</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Worried about getting sick</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Shy and quiet nature</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Youngest in the class</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational environment</td>
<td>Lack of individual attention at school</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disposition</td>
<td>Losing friends from child care</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Fear of unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Parents in this study were all concerned with their children’s limited or lack of proficiency in English conversational skills and its concomitant impact on their social or emotional adjustments, learning at
Anglo-Australian parents do not worry about the English conversational skills of their children, whereas we do. If children can’t communicate in English, they may lack confidence, cannot adjust to school, and may not be accepted by peers and teacher as well.

Parents were also concerned about the possibility of their children being isolated, bullied and victimised because of their skin colour, accent and limited English conversational skills (see Table 1). The following quote is an example of their concerns:

Our children speak differently, accent is different; but they [Anglo-Australians] don’t need to worry about accent, language. Everything is same at school for them; same language, culture …

The children’s cultural or linguistic capital can be influenced by their skin colour, accent, and proficiency in English (Alexander, 2000; Bourdieu, 1993). Obviously, CALD parents were concerned about their children’s emotional wellbeing in school, as children can perceive themselves to be different because of their accent and skin colour and this can lead them to feel less powerful in contexts where English is the dominant language.

In addition, parents were also concerned about the loss of cultural and religious values after being exposed to Western cultural values in school settings.

We would worry about the religious preferences for food and time for prayers; others may not.

It is difficult to maintain our own culture as the cultural atmosphere is different in school. School might affect these values. We don’t encourage free mixing of boys with girls.

The concerns expressed by Bangladeshi parents in this study seem to be similar to those reported by parents in Crozier, Davies, Booth and Khatun’s study (2003), which expressed concerns about the impact of Western cultural values and Bangladeshi parents’ lack of faith that their own cultural values can be maintained in Western school settings.

A few of the Bangladeshi parents highlighted children’s personal characteristics as possible issues in their transitions to school. They believed that their children, because of their shy and quiet nature, would lack confidence and be unassertive. Their concerns seem to be undeniable, given the role of children’s personal characteristics in adjustment to a new school. When children enter school they are faced with new challenges such as developing a new identity and meeting the school’s expectations and demands (Dockett & Perry, 1999b; Fabian & Dunlop, 2002; Margetts, 2000). Margetts (2000) indicates the significance of confidence or assertion in children’s adjustments to school. She indicates further that children from particular subgroups of the Australian population could be at risk of not making smooth transitions to school because of a complex interaction of personal characteristics, childcare attendance, and family demographics.

Some parents also mentioned diversity in child-rearing practices as a concern when their children enter kindergarten. For instance, parents commented that they adopt an indulgent approach to child-rearing—which can encourage children’s dependency on adult caregivers.

We love our children blindly. In our culture, children depend on adults for everything. We do everything for them. Whereas teachers here expect children to be independent. We don’t believe that it is necessary.

Separating from parents, not a problem for Anglo children. They learn to sleep separately from parents from the time they were born. My children sleep in our bed still. Children are with us all the time!

Despite the high value Bangladeshi parents generally place on children’s education (Crozier, 2000), parents in this study did not emphasise academic readiness as a major concern. Nor did they mention school rules as a significant issue. This finding is consistent with those of the Starting School Research Project (Dockett & Perry, 2004; Perry et al., 2000) where school rules were seen by parents as having less importance than that given by their children.

A small number of parents mentioned loss of friendships and lack of individual attention in school as matters of concern in children’s transitions (see Table 1).

Proficiency in English language before children start school is a matter of concern to many of the Bangladeshi parents. Although children had opportunities to learn English at child care, parents said they did not encourage their children to speak English at home. A lack of cultural or linguistic capital can limit non-English-speaking background children’s and parents’ confidence and knowledge, as well as their understandings about school and its expectations. As
indicated by Bourdieu and Passerson (1990, cited in Carrington & Luke, 2002), children’s ability to succeed in social contexts is influenced by the compatibility or incompatibility between home and school cultural and linguistic practices. Cairney and Munsey (1992), in the context of family literacy, noted that NSW schools reflect middle-class, culturally-defined views about literacy learning which can be incongruent with the views of CALD families and children.

Hence, CALD children’s transition into a culturally dominating classroom can be a concern. Linguistically and culturally diverse children can find themselves in a vulnerable situation where school contexts are not tailored to meet their specific needs. Effective instructional practices are significant, particularly for students coming from homes where English is not the primary language of communication (Garcia, 1991). For instance, functional communication between the teacher and CALD children and between CALD children and peers is of great importance in school contexts (Garcia, 1991).

From the data collected in this study it appears that the transitional experiences of Bangladeshi—and, perhaps, more generally, CALD—children and families can have greater complexity than might be found for more mainstream cultural groups. There is a need for schools to identify the needs and concerns of CALD children and families as they enter school and to provide them with culturally and linguistically accessible information that addresses these needs and concerns.

Views on what is important for children to know/have before they start school

‘Starting school represents a major change in the lives of young children’ (Dockett, Perry, Howard & Meckley, 1999, p. 1). Parents and caregivers will have a variety of views and expectations regarding the knowledge and skills children need in order to make good adjustments to their new school. The sources for these beliefs are people’s experiences of school and schooling, media and other, perhaps more vicarious, experiences (Dockett & Perry, 2002). The ecological model of starting school (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 1998) focuses on the entire context in which child operates rather than on the child alone. Hence this study also aimed to ascertain what Bangladeshi parents see as important for their children to have or know before they start school and whether they share these expectations with English-speaking parents.

Of great importance to the Bangladeshi parents interviewed was that English language is one of the essential components of their children being ‘ready for school’ (see Table 2). This finding corresponds with their concerns relating to children’s proficiency in English conversational skills, as reported in Table 1.

English is the dominant language in NSW schools and overrides the other languages spoken by children or families. This can result in CALD children lacking opportunities for social participation (Bourdieu, 1993). Along with English language, parents also rated self-help skills as important for children as they start school. The specific skills mentioned were feeding and going to the toilet independently, looking after themselves and their belongings, and communicating their needs and difficulties, etc. For example, one parent suggested ‘to have food on his own is important, especially when his mother feeds him at home’. This finding is similar to those in other studies, where parents placed some emphasis on self-help skills as an important step towards successful adjustment to school (Perry et al., 2002; Margetts, 1999).
The parents interviewed rated numeracy and literacy knowledge as important for children to have as they started school. Nonetheless, this result lacks strength compared with the emphasis parents placed on the English language and self-help skills. This is an unexpected finding, given the high value Bangladeshi parents place on children’s education (Crozier, 2000).

Age is often used as an important criterion in judging children’s likely adjustments and achievements in school (Dockett & Perry, 2002; Meisels, 1999). However, few of the Bangladeshi parents interviewed emphasised age as being important. Those who did recognise it as important agreed that children should be five years or more at the time of starting school. This finding corresponds with the results reported elsewhere with English-speaking parents and teachers (Dockett & Perry, 2002).

School rules and children’s ability to adjust to school are generally seen to be significant aspects in children’s starting school (Dockett & Perry, 2004). But few of the Bangladeshi parents in this study rated them as significant, except in terms of the effect that linguistic skills might have on adjustment.

In summary, the child’s English conversational and self-help skills are the matters of most importance to these Bangladeshi parents as their children start school. Interestingly, these findings did not seem to correspond with the socialisation practices adopted by the parents. For instance, parents admitted to promoting dependency in their children through indulgent parenting. Yet they also rated self-help skills as vital in children’s transitions to school. This disparity could have been because they knew what the schools and teachers expected. For example, Dockett and Perry (1999b) indicated that teachers tend to emphasise self-help skills as important for children starting school more than parents do. There is also other evidence to indicate differences in teachers’ and parents’ views of school readiness (Piotrkowski, Botsko & Matthews, 2000). The present findings thus typify the cultural dilemmas immigrant Asian families might face in the socialisation of children, as well as some of the expectations immigrant parents might place on their children as they begin their schooling.

Conclusion
Bangladeshi parents mentioned a range of issues and expectations concerning their children’s transition to school. This study showed those concerns and expectations of transition to be influenced by their cultural and linguistic contexts. For immigrant families, language and culture are significant aspects of their context. Yet, with English becoming a globalised and powerful language that is perceived to provide social and cultural capital and the means to gain social and economic power (Singh, 2002), it is not surprising that CALD families will be concerned about their children’s transition to contexts where English is the dominant language.

Australian schools are increasingly culturally and linguistically diverse. Pianta and Cox (1999, pp. 1-2), suggest that:

*The challenges of culture, language family background and processes, and differences in the way families view schools, all of which are formidable even for children entering school today, will be exacerbated by these demographic shifts. These shifts raise issues of how schools will face the challenges of educating a diverse population, how communities will work to support families and schools working collaboratively, and how the teacher workforce will need to respond to student and family diversity.*

This study has highlighted the needs, concerns and expectations of one group of CALD families, which need to be taken into account in developing sensitive transition to school programs for children and families of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

References


Engaging Children’s Minds: The Project Approach

26–29 January, 2006 at The University of New England

The internationally renowned instructor
Dr Sylvia C. Chard, author of Engaging Children’s Minds: The Project Approach, will teach this summer institute along with Dr Margaret Brooks.

Sylvia C. Chard, professor of early childhood, has conducted workshops and institutes on the Project Approach overseas and has written two practical guides for teachers.

Margaret Brooks, lecturer at The University of New England, has conducted workshops on the Project Approach and has many years of experience in teaching.

For more information, contact Margaret Brooks
T: (02) 6773 2654  E: mbrooks3@une.edu.au

Engaging families:
Building strong communication
Roslyn Elliott

Children learn and develop best with the cooperation of the adults in their lives, so effective adult communication is a must.

The latest issue in Early Childhood Australia’s Research in Practice Series outlines the five simple stages which will engage families and strengthen the links between children’s services and home—uncovering valuable knowledge for all parties along the way.

Enhancing staff–parent communication involves going beyond merely reassuring parents about the basics of child care. Engaging families brings services closer to providing the ideal environment needed to support children—leading to positive outcomes for both the children and the community.

$14.95 (inc. p&h)
ISBN: 0-9751935-9-7
ECA Code: RIP0502

Subscribe to the next four issues of the Research in Practice Series for only $42.40 (4 issues)

To order your copy or to subscribe, contact Early Childhood Australia
T: 1800 356 900 (freecall within Australia)
F: +61 2 6242 1818
E: eca@earlychildhood.org.au
www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au
Introduction
Most beginning teachers look forward to their initial experience as the facilitators of learning in a classroom. Such teachers can acquire a confidence during their training that they believe prepares them for the experiences of managing and working with children and their families (Brennan, 1998; Corrie & Maloney, 1996; Gore, 1995; Maloney & Barblett, 2001). However, current research indicates that a vast majority of these teachers actually ‘burnout’ very quickly once they begin to practise (Goddard & O’Brien, 2004). That is, primary teachers begin to burn out from the start, whereas early childhood education and care (ECEC) teachers have demonstrated a quite stable first year before the burnout process becomes evident (Noble, Goddard & O’Brien, 2003). Clearly, this rate of burnout of both primary and ECEC teachers needs to be addressed if the teaching profession is to maintain some kind of stability.

Noble, Goddard and O’Brien (2003) argue that the beginning phase of the teaching career unquestionably influences one’s abilities and expertise as a professional practitioner. Conditions experienced at this time can substantially influence the level of effectiveness the teacher is able to achieve and maintain throughout her/his career, and also influence the decision on whether or not to continue in the teaching profession. Therefore it is imperative that the experiences of beginning teachers tend to be positive. Additionally, Noble, Goddard and O’Brien (2003) present findings of a longitudinal study that pinpoints the burnout of beginning teachers and highlights significant differences between primary, secondary and early childhood sectors.

What is of interest in our own paper is the initially slower rate of burnout for ECEC teachers in the study. While Noble, Goddard and O’Brien (2003) present only initial findings, the different rates of burnout between beginning primary and ECEC teachers highlighted an interesting anomaly. It can be argued that the above paper presents only one perspective. However, additional literature regarding burnout is used in our own paper to affirm the importance of further investigation (Fuller, 1969; Ryan, 1986; Sumsion, 2003; Williams, 1995). Moreover, our paper concerns itself with questioning how it is possible for ECEC teachers to achieve and maintain a high level of effectiveness throughout the beginning phase of their career, i.e. in the first 12 months. We argue that the different rates of burnout in beginning primary teachers and beginning ECEC teachers require examination, as it is possible that they are indicative of different philosophies and preparation in preservice training that affect how beginning teachers cope.

Furthermore, an argument is presented to explore
how certain differences in preservice preparation might inform mutually beneficial reflection and improvement on the preparation of teachers for the field.

The main argument presented in our paper is that ECEC teachers participate in preparation programs that sometimes support highly romanticised images of childhood. These images produce notions of ‘ideal’ or ‘better’ children, in terms of psychologised constitutions of propriety (Tyler, 1993). We argue that these psychologised images and romanticised ideals (Jenks, 1996a; 1996b; Sumsion, 2003) contribute to early burnout of ECEC teachers, rather than assisting them to deal with ECEC as it occurs in the current societal context. Additionally, it is argued that other issues also contribute to the burnout rates. Issues such as demographic positioning, individual and systemic support networks and workplace environments all play a role in undermining the idealism of the beginning ECEC teacher. A thorough examination of all of these issues must be undertaken.

Idealised approaches

Historically, traditional grand narratives strongly positioned in psychological theory, in particular that of developmentally appropriate practice (DAP), have governed the field of ECEC (Australian Early Childhood Association, 1992; Brennan, 1998; Fleer, 2000; Grieshaber & Cannella, 2003; James, Jenks & Prout, 1998; Moss, 2002). Researchers have argued that such an approach limits the way teachers interact with young children and their families (Noble, 2003; Grieshaber & Canella, 2003). However, more recent innovative research by Jennifer Sumsion (2003) has highlighted specifically how idealised and romanticised images of children and their families impact upon the way ECEC teachers engage in practice. Sumsion (2003) argues that romantic notions of practice do not withstand the complexity, uncertainty and insecurity of working with young children and their families in the current context (Hultqvist & Dahlberg, 2001; Jenks, 1996a; 1996b; Lyotard, 1984). Adherence to such romanticised approaches must be addressed, so that these notions do not delimit how ECEC teachers might practise. Multiple perspectives and understandings are preferable, particularly in the early career phase, to inform the practice of new teachers. Sumsion uses Phelan’s argument, which contends that preservice teachers should ‘be exposed to a wider range of discourses than are traditionally sanctioned by teacher education programs’ (cited in Sumsion, 2003, p. 83). Furthermore, Phelan states that:

... [practitioner] education needs to become a discursive project. There is no escaping discourse. There is no escaping that language/discourse constitutes experience generally, and our experience of place specifically. [Teacher] educators may need to consider how we can help prospective practitioners to recognize the multiple discourses that shape and often restrict their thinking about experience and place (cited in Sumsion, 2003 p. 19).

Thus, if discourse constitutes the experience of preservice ECEC teachers, then traditional grand narratives have the power to produce a ‘regime of truth’ (Foucault, 1980) about proper ECEC practice which beginning teachers could adhere to. Therefore, it is possible for this discursive organisation to idealise work with young children and their families, in such a way as to inhibit practitioner understanding that multiple realities for young children and their families are possible (Popkewitz, 2000). Consequently, beginning teachers may struggle to reconcile ideal notions of how practice should be conceptualised within the complex reality of work with young children and their families. Stringent adherence to romanticised notions of children, families and childhood could contribute to beginning ECEC teachers’ disillusionment.

Demographics

The placement of beginning teachers in Queensland, in the government system, tends to be an arbitrary process, and such demographic constraints can contribute to burnout (Schools Council, National Board of Employment, Education and Training, 1990; Wideen & Grimmett, 1995). It is not uncommon for beginning teachers to be placed in positions many kilometres from their family home. Additionally, many positions for beginning teachers are in rural or isolated locations, further compounding the teacher’s adjustment to the work environment (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2003). This demographic isolation can be problematic, since personal support networks are no longer present.

In the early stages of a teacher’s career, strong professional networks are vital to ensure that the teacher remains confident undertaking a role in the pedagogical process. Furthermore, both personal and professional networks are necessary, so that teachers have the opportunity to critically reflect and debrief on issues that arise. In recent times there has been a growing emphasis on reflective practice as a means of assisting professionals to respond to the complex nature of the workplace (Brookfield, 1995; Moss, 2000;
Patterson & Sumsion, 1996; Schon, 1991). Many researchers cite reflection or reflexivity as a means of objectively examining methods of practice and policy formation in order to instigate positive change (Ebbeck & Waniganayake, 2003; Johansson, 2003; Mayall, 1994, 1999; Sumsion, 2003). Thus positive change is less likely to occur within a framework where collegial support is lacking. The isolation teachers experience effectively limits opportunities for dialogue pertaining to practice. As practitioners’ knowledge ‘is constructed out of a dialogic relationship that exerts a dynamic and reciprocal influence between theory and practice’ (Corrie & Maloney, 1996 p. 71), this isolation can compound existing problems of adjustment.

Moreover, isolation adds to emotional and social insecurities that can have an impact upon the beginning teachers’ sense of wellbeing (Noble, 2003). Social and emotional adjustment can be a time-consuming process and, in the early stages of one’s teaching career, time is of the essence. As the workload of beginning teachers is substantial, there is often very little time to promote and re-establish the professional networks important to maintaining innovative and quality practice (Martin, 2001). Beginning teachers’ substantial workload may also inhibit their ability to establish and reconnect with important personal contacts. Thus demographic isolation can impact on both professional and personal wellbeing of newly established teachers and contribute to early burnout of all beginning teachers.

In relation to ECEC teachers, these issues become more problematic. Romantic notions of what practice should look like do not sit easily within the confines of demographic isolation. Further, while the organisation of primary and secondary classrooms allows for greater networking opportunities, because of increased numbers of personnel, this is not true for the ECEC sector. Subsequently, while beginning primary and secondary teachers may have a greater opportunity to share specialised knowledge, ECEC teachers may not have the same opportunity. ECEC teachers’ understanding of proper practice could well be affected by an inability to frequently network with colleagues who share similar philosophies. Adherence to romanticised grand narratives is difficult to maintain without a shared vision and dialogue being promoted. These grand narratives do not necessarily inform the practice of primary and secondary teachers, and so support may not be found from these colleagues. Thus, ECEC teachers may experience feelings of frustration and inadequacy as they struggle to maintain ideal practices in varied settings.

**Systemic support networks**

Within the literature describing the experiences of beginning teachers (Dempster, Sim, Beere & Logan, 2000; Elkerton, 1984; Fimian & Blanton, 1987; Fuller, 1969; Ryan, 1986; Williams, 1995) themes of initial overwhelm are common in the early stages. In fact, research (e.g. New South Wales Department of School Education, 1992) undertaken with beginning teachers has consistently reinforced the need for ongoing professional support. Ongoing professional support, quite apart from supervision, is needed for constructive reflection and learning about the teaching and socialisation processes. Although the initial preparation and induction of beginning teachers is a well-researched area (Corrie & Maloney, 1996; Fleer, 2000; Maloney & Barblett, 2001; Martin, 2001), there is a frustration evident concerning the lack of constructive and comprehensive change.

Preservice training programs and their agents are merely the first, yet potentially the most important, support structure a prospective teacher needs. From this point of view, preservice training could realistically be considered as a comprehensive program of preservice induction. If university preparation were to be viewed not separate from, but as the initial step in, a staged/progressive induction program, research into beginning ECEC teacher perceptions of their preservice training would be more integrated with research on beginning teacher experiences at the workplace. The authors suggest that what is currently available for all beginning teachers in the area of preservice and post-service induction might well be inadequate.

In Queensland particularly, existing induction and support programs for beginning ECEC teachers are usually administered in conjunction with those for teachers beginning their careers in the primary education sector (Corrie & Maloney, 1996; Maloney & Barblett, 2000; Noble, Goddard & O’Brien, 2003). As the way most primary classrooms generally operate is very different from those of ECEC, it can be assumed that the philosophical approaches also differ. However, because of the smaller numbers of ECEC teachers, the focus of these programs is generally orientated more towards the primary classroom (Noble, Goddard & O’Brien, 2003). Yet, in the secondary sector, the beginning secondary teachers receive separate induction from their primary colleagues in most cases, delineating an accepted difference in approach between secondary and primary classrooms. Thus, the way the induction program operates, there is no accepted
distinction between primary and ECEC teachers even though there is a philosophical difference. The identity of ECEC teachers is blurred from the outset, meaning that they are more isolated in the beginning phase of their career and lack a distinct identity, making it difficult for them to maintain professional direction in their work. This lack of identity may well contribute to the different rates of burnout. Romanticised notions of children, families and childhood that contribute to discourses producing particular methods as ‘the right way to teach’ could possibly sustain ECEC teachers more than pragmatic approaches would. Such romanticised notions explicit to the strong philosophies of ECEC tend to produce commitment to the ideal, rather than simply dealing with the reality. Therefore, such commitment to an ‘always possible’ ideal may sustain ECEC teachers for a longer period.

Workplace environments
Moreover, the difference in philosophical approach affects the positioning of the ECEC teacher in the workplace. Eighty per cent of principals in the Queensland state education system are male (ABS, 2003). Given that only a small percentage of ECEC teachers are male (ABS, 2003), the likelihood of the leader of the school curriculum having a strong background in ECEC philosophy is very small. While gender is not an issue being raised here, it is useful to highlight that, statistically, there is likely to be very few principals of primary schools who are able to act in a supportive mentoring role that reinforces the ECEC philosophy. This issue, coupled with pressure from government policy directives (Queensland Government, 2002), administrators and parents for a more formal approach to ECEC, presupposes disharmony and fragmentation in the way programs for children are delivered. Thus the ECEC teacher may well be powerless to instigate effective and, in the teacher’s view, ideal environments for young children. In this way, the ECEC teacher may suffer both isolation and powerlessness. Again, romanticised ideals that produce ‘truth’ about effective ECEC teaching may allow the ECEC teacher to persevere for longer periods, as these tend to identify an ‘alternative’ approach to practice.

Transition from university to the ECEC field
The conditions of the initial teaching experience substantially influence the level of effectiveness a teacher is able to achieve and maintain throughout their career. Initial teaching experiences also influence the decision as to whether or not to continue in the profession (Corrie & Maloney, 1996; Noble, Goddard & O’Brien, 2003). This initial experience may well be negative and not pleasurable. Although these beginning practitioners have undertaken substantial study, usually in the form of a four-year undergraduate degree program, the issues mentioned above and the literature state resoundingly that beginning practitioners are ill-prepared for their chosen career as teachers (Dempster, Sim, Beere & Logan, 2000; Elkerton, 1984; Fimian & Blanton, 1987; Fuller, 1969; Ryan, 1986; Williams, 1995).

Patterns of burnout
The issues highlighted in this paper demonstrate the importance of examining the reasons for early burnout of beginning teachers. What has not yet been fully explored, however, are the reasons for the difference in patterns of burnout between ECEC teachers and other beginning teachers. It is well established that early burnout is a significant problem for beginning teachers (Dempster, Sim, Beere & Logan, 2000; Elkerton, 1984; Fimian & Blanton, 1987; Fuller, 1969; Ryan, 1986; Williams, 1995). However, the difference in patterns of burnout between primary teachers and ECEC teachers must be further researched, in order to understand why ECEC teachers suffer burnout during their second year of practice and what impact this has. Although it can be argued that some of these aspects relating to burnout may represent generalisations, they are nonetheless illuminating. In reality, the divisions between beginning ECEC and primary teachers are likely to exist on a continuum, rather than being clearly defined. For example, it is possible that some primary teachers have romanticised notions and visions of childhood and that some ECEC teachers do not. What can be argued, however, is that romanticised notions of childhood and psychologically-based practice that form part of the discourse of ECEC (Fleer, 2000; Grieshaber & Canella, 2001; Sumsion, 2003) produce ECEC teachers in particular ways, privileging such notions of practice as proper. Thus it is likely that these notions are more a part of ECEC practice than that of primary teachers. As such, they represent the most prominent differences between beginning ECEC teachers and their primary counterparts. This fact is supported by Sumsion’s (2003) research, which highlights romanticised and idealistic approaches as possible reasons for ECEC teachers deserting the field.
Further research
What can be established is that further examination of the reasons pertaining to early burnout of beginning ECEC teachers is necessary. Moreover, it would be useful to understand more completely what sustains ECEC teachers in their first year as a way of redressing burnout in the sector. It is evident that mitigating factors occur during the first years of practice, and these factors require identification and examination.

Conclusion
This paper has highlighted the difference between ECEC teachers and primary teachers in relation to patterns and rates of burnout. It is suggested that the discursive organisation of ECEC, which privileges romanticised notions of childhood and practice, may well be a contributing factor in relation to burnout and wellbeing. Further research is recommended in order to determine how significant these notions are to ECEC teachers and what other factors contribute to burnout in their early career phase. This research may lead to a reconceptualisation of existing preparation and induction for beginning ECEC teachers, or the implementation of a separate ECEC induction. And further of issues pertaining to other groups of beginning teachers may well be uncovered.

References


Have you joined Early Childhood Australia?

Membership enables you to:

- be a voice for young children
- receive discounted access to our subscriptions and conferences
- be kept abreast of early childhood news and happenings
- network with others in the field through your local branch
- receive all of this and it’s tax deductible for early childhood professionals!

Become a member now!
Standard annual memberships from $85. Discounts are available for students and health care cardholders.

Subscribe to our great publications & SAVE!

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research in Practice Series</th>
<th>Every Child magazine</th>
<th>Australian Journal of Early Childhood</th>
<th>and for the parents that you know: Everyday Learning Series</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Practical approaches for those challenging issues that arise in the care and education of young children</td>
<td>Full of informative articles on diverse issues and engaging interviews with respected experts and practitioners</td>
<td>All the essential research and debates in contemporary early childhood education</td>
<td>Simple, creative ideas to enhance children’s interactions with the world around them</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$42.40 (4 issues)</td>
<td>$47.20 (4 issues)</td>
<td>$70.00 (4 issues)</td>
<td>$40.00 (4 issues)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To subscribe or become a member call toll free 1800 356 900
Email: eca@earlychildhood.org.au
Visit: www.earlychildhoodaustralia.org.au