

Topic: Transitional barriers between early childhood and the primary sector and why successful, positive transition has long term effects on a child's disposition on learning.

The programmes being offered to children moving from early childhood into primary school need to be clarified more, are they a transitional process or an orientation programme of the school? There is difference between these two concepts. Orientation takes place over a short period of time where parents and children may visit the school for an hour or two over a couple of sessions during the term that the child will start school. Where as a transition programme involves the child and parents over a longer period of time, sometimes up to a year before the child is officially due to start school. This may involve three or four sessions a week of one or two hour duration (Glazier, 2001).

A transition programme according to Glazier (2001) may include such activities as: school routines, play ground use, play experiences with other groups of children in the school, reading and listening to stories, fine motor activities that scaffold into writing, speaking and listen in a group, taking turns and sharing, regular conversations between parents and teachers.

The transition to school marks a significant change in the way a child participates in the family and community. As children start school, their roles, identities and expectations change. So do the expectations of others, the patterns of interaction and the relationships around and including children.

(Dockett & Perry, 2007, p.5)

Transition is not just about the effect on the child as an individual, it relates to all aspects of the child's life. To understand the complexity of the situation, we can examine it through the concept of the ecological model used by Bronfenbrenner (1979). This model consists of interrelating dimensions often represented in the format of intersecting circles; the child at the center with the adults the child interacts with, family, friends, siblings, the community, the environment, and cultural aspects surrounding the child at various levels. (Dockett & Perry, 2007).

Dockett and Perry (2007), also discuss how Rogoff (2003) believes that the ecological theory can “constrain concepts by separating person and culture into stand-alone entities”. Rogoff's suggestion is to “consider development as a process of changing participation in sociocultural activities of (individuals') communities...where individuals develop as they participate in and contribute to cultural activities and those cultural activities have themselves developed through the involvement of people over time” (Dockett & Perry, 2007, p.9).

The sociocultural perspective of transition places importance on the social process, the individual as part of the group, where children will develop preparedness for school by being part of school-like experiences. *Te Whāriki : He Whāriki Mātauranga mō ngā Mokopuna o Aotearoa* (Ministry of Education, 1996) gives very clear examples within each strand of the curriculum, under the heading, *Continuity Between Early Childhood Education and School*. Connections can be made between Te Whāriki and the *New Zealand Curriculum for English-medium teaching and learning in years 1-13* (Ministry of Education, 2007) through the *Key Competencies* and level one of the content learning areas. These connections are not overtly obvious and do take time for teachers to cross match to make these important connections. Peters (2010) cites the

work of Mawson (2003) on linking the curriculums through the learning areas of the school curriculum. “He recommended focusing on literacy and numeracy in the mornings at school, and basing that afternoon programme on Te Whāriki for the first six months of school” (Peters, 2010, p.48).

Hartley, Rogers, Smith, Peters & Carr (2012) discuss how the dispositional outcomes of Te Whāriki and the New Zealand Curriculum have been aligned.

Te Whāriki (Strands)	New Zealand Curriculum (Key competencies)
Exploration	Thinking
Communication	Using language, symbols & text
Well-being	Managing self
Contribution	Relating to others
Belonging	Participating and contributing

Table 1: Curriculum links

Hartley *et al.* (2012) describe this as an exciting development with in our education system. “ It clearly sign-posted a learning pathway from early childhood to school, one that is consistent with Te Whāriki strands and learning dispositions and was not defined entirely in terms of subject-based knowledge and skill, and the bridge between early childhood and school was not only paved with literacy and numeracy markers” (Hartley *et al.* 2012, p.76).

The notion of a preschool curriculum was never the intent of Te Whāriki, it was viewed as an early childhood document that could be implemented in settings that catered for children from birth to five year olds. “The sector wanted an early childhood document, not a ‘preschool’ or preparation for school document, and their responses to the draft indicated they also wanted a uniquely New Zealand document” (Carr, 2003).

Dent (2010), discusses Renwick's (1984) research that some children are "not ready for school" and in particular the readiness of boys over girls, and that it appears to be boys who are still having difficulties in adjustment to school and that maybe as a consequence of this, delaying the entry of more immature boys could be a possible recommendation. This does however, come with the stigma of staying with in the early childhood setting. It needs to be recognized that it is 'OK' for these more immature boys to spend another year in the 'sandpit'.

Peters (2010) reminds us that an early childhood curriculum 'should not be predetermined by a school curriculum' as the school curriculum is not intended for under five year olds. Perhaps here we can examine the age at which children enter school, as this varies between countries and so when examining issues and data from overseas research there are possible variances due to the maturity of the child. Peters (2010) gives data from the PISA study (*Programme for International Student Assessment*) where New Zealand is one of only four countries out of 56 in the study where children enter school from five or under. In New Zealand children can enter school on their fifth birthday where in other countries children enter in small groups at the same time, for example the beginning of the school term. "Although it has been proposed that starting on the child's birthday provides a more individualised and personal event for the children (Neuman, 2002), the reality is that children often find themselves involved in bewildering large group activities during their first days, with no particular arrangements made to support their transition" (Peters, 2010, p.7).

Does this earlier start to school benefit a child academically? Not according to this report. Suggate (2009) is quoted in Peters (2010) "...analysis of reading achievement indicated no benefit from early entry to formal schooling and some potentially negative consequences for some children's long-term success." (Peters, 2010, p.7).

In Sally Peters (2010) *Literature Review: Transition from Early Childhood to School report to the Ministry of Education*: she identified some key issues for children as they transition which carry on throughout their lives as people make a multitude of transitions. “Research shows that no matter how academically capable a child is, unhappiness over lack of friends, problems in the playground or toilets, a poor relationship with the teacher, inappropriate challenges, low expectations and so on, have negative consequences from their learning” (Peters, 2010, p.1).

Transpose these into the positive and they become the context for a successful transition process. “Children who start school feeling happy and eager to be there, who feel comfortable in a school setting, who believe their teacher like and is interested in them, and whose family also reflects a positive attitude, have a good chance of succeeding at school” (Docket & Perry, 2001, p.iii).

Successful transition can be implemented through the establishment of relationships. Relationships are discussed in a number research articles and text as being pivotal to successful transition. The child’s relationships with other children, adults, teachers, parents and in any combination are important but in particular for Māori children. “For Māori and Pasfika children, responsive relationships between children, teachers and families and culturally responsive teaching and assessment are strong themes in ensuring success.” (Peters, 2010, p.2).

The Ministry of Education in *Ka Hikitia – Managing for Success: The Māori Education Strategy 2008-2012*, reinforces Peters research. “The focus on foundation years acknowledges that an effective transition to school for Māori students and their whānau, and gaining early literacy and numeracy skills, are essential for engagement

and achievement throughout schooling, further education and life” (Ministry of Education 2008, p. 21).

So what strategies can teachers from both early childhood and primary use? Peters (2010) suggests that breaking down barriers is important, work with the child and their families, share information. “Here the personal qualities of the teacher are vital in these relationships and breaking down any barriers that occur. So teachers need to ensure that they make time to find out about where children come from, families and cultures.”(Peters, 2010, p.3)

Government needs to be challenged on current practice, is it time to review, as society changes and new demands are placed on the education system?

“As governments re-conceptualise educational borders, insights from research into the experience of various stakeholders in transition to school lead us to question once again whether it is the interests of children that are at the heart of the educational reform, or whether it is accountability and the mirage of educational outcome, which entices governments to look more closely at the relationships between early and later stages of education.” (Dunlop, 2007, p.155).

Positive, successful transition to school for a child can be accomplish with good communication between all the stake holders; the child, the parents (caregiver) of the child, teachers within the two sectors. Teachers gaining an understanding the setting and curriculum from each sector can make connections that support the child’s learning. “Rather than learning readiness, an understanding of each other’s settings

would be more beneficial. This might promote a seamless pathway rather than disconnected thinking.” (Fabian, 2002, p.61)

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