

What are the researchers saying?

Around the world, there is a strong research focus on *Transition to School*. Much of the research regards transition as a process, experienced by children, families, and schools and communities in different ways.

International research

Internationally there has been significant interest in the importance of early childhood experiences and their effect on *Transition to School*. McCain and Mustard in their *Early Years Study* (1999) stated a child's capacity to learn on entry to school is strongly influenced by the neural wiring that takes place in the early years of life.

There are certain everyday experiences that can help a child achieve optimal cognitive development and acquire a healthy attitude towards learning (Halfon et al 2001). Professor James Heckman (2006) Nobel Laureate in Economic Sciences stated that learning starts before formal education begins, and sets the foundation for success or failure at school and life beyond.

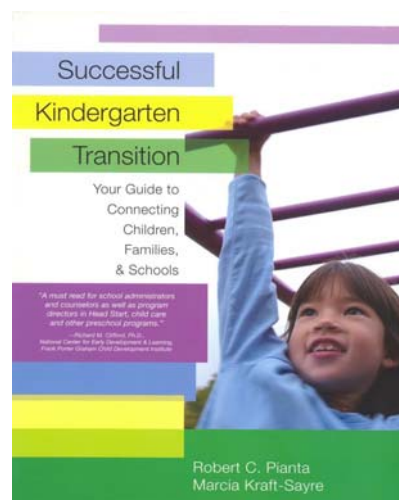
Robert Pianta (2003) developed five guiding principles for *Transition to School*. Pianta promotes a developmental model of transition. His model features transition plans that help schools reach out to families before school starts, help communities foster links between preschools and kindergartens and promote personal connections before a child's first day of school.

Pianta emphasises the importance of children starting school ready to learn and schools being ready to receive their new children.

Pianta's five guidelines for effective transition programs are:

1. Foster relationships as resources
2. Promote continuity from preschool to Kindergarten
3. Focus on family strengths
4. Tailor practices to individual needs
5. Form collaborative relationships

If you would like more information about Pianta's research and his five guidelines go to: Pianta, R. & Kraft-Sayre M., (2003) *Successful Kindergarten Transition* Brookes Maryland.



What do Pianta's five principles for effective *Transition to School* mean?

1. *Foster relationships as resources*

The development of positive, supportive relationships between schools and families enables the transition to Kindergarten to occur more smoothly.

2. *Promote continuity from preschool to Kindergarten*

When parents and /or teachers from children's services and Kindergarten teachers talk to each other and work collaboratively, they are more likely to develop programs that are consistent and build the strengths and abilities of children.

3. *Focus on family strengths*

Families feel encouraged when the school acknowledges their strengths and values their role as parent and first teacher.

4. *Tailor practices to individual needs*

Schools tailor their transition to school programs and initiatives to suit the specific needs of the local community.

5. *Form collaborative relationships*

Collaboration among stakeholders in the transition process is fundamental in developing and implementing successful transition practices. Stakeholders may include school staff, children's services' staff, support workers and families.

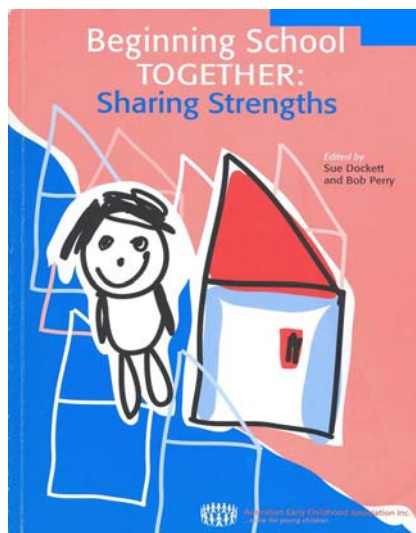
National research

Leading researchers and academics in Australia have noted that readiness for learning at school is not just an attribute of the child alone or the responsibility of the family. Rather, *readiness for learning at school* involves multi-contextual factors that impact on a child during their early years. This means *ready children, ready schools* and *ready communities*. There is a need for all parties involved in children's transition to school to develop better and shared understandings of what successful transition to school involves and how each party can support children as they move into their first year of formal schooling.

Sue Dockett and Bob Perry's *Starting School Research Project* found that it is important to identify transition as a process where the focus is on relationship-building including a range of stakeholders. This led to the development of ten *Guidelines for Effective Transition to School Programs*.

Sue Dockett and Bob Perry (2001) developed these guidelines which underpin effective transition to school programs:

1. Establish positive relationships between the children, parents and educators
2. Facilitate each child's development as a capable learner
3. Differentiate between 'orientation to school' and 'transition to school' programs
4. Draw upon dedicated funding and resources
5. Involve a range of stakeholders
6. Are well planned and effectively evaluated
7. Are flexible and responsive
8. Are based on mutual trust and respect
9. Rely on reciprocal communication among participants
10. Take into account contextual aspects of community, and of individual families and children within that community.



If you would like more information about Dockett and Perry's ten guidelines go to: Dockett, S. & Perry, B. (Eds.) (2001). *Beginning School Together: Sharing Strengths*. Watson, ACT: Australian Early Childhood Association

What do these 10 guidelines for effective *Transition to School* mean?

1. Establish positive relationships between the children, parents and educators

Effective programs are based on the establishment and maintenance of relationships between all parties: teachers, parents and children. While transition programs may focus on developing children's knowledge, understanding and skills, they have as their key function, a commitment to facilitating positive social interactions and relationships. Effective transition programs encourage all participants to regard themselves, and their co-participants, as valued members of the school community.

2. Facilitate each child's development as a capable learner

Effective transition programs recognise the growth, development and learning that have occurred before the child starts school as well as the impact of the child's environment on these. Effective transition programs recognise the role of the family and teachers to collaborate in ways which build upon the child's experiences. Children are recognised as capable learners who bring with them a vast array of learning experiences and expectations which may, or may not, reflect the knowledge, skills and understandings reflected in the school environment.

3. Differentiate between 'orientation to school' and '*Transition to School*' programs

An *orientation to school* is designed to help children and parents become familiar with the school setting. They may involve a tour of the school, meeting relevant people in the school and spending some time in a classroom. Orientation programs are characterised by presentations by the school to the parents and children.

Transition programs may include orientation activities but usually run for a longer period (for example, one-two hours per week in the term before school entry) and are responsive to the local community. Transition programs may be planned and implemented by a team of people representing all key stakeholders.

4. Draw upon dedicated funding and resources

A range of resources is required for transition programs to function effectively. These include people, time, materials and space in which to operate the program. Often, creative and collaborative approaches are used by staff in schools and preschool settings to identify ways in which resources can be used to support transition programs.

When transition to school is a whole school priority it is identified in the school management plan. Creative and collaborative approaches to transition ensure the most efficient use of resources. This may include involving a range of teachers and parents in the transition program. Some schools utilise the expertise of support staff such as English as a Second Language and learning assistance teachers.

5. Involve a range of stakeholders

A range of key players may be involved in the transition program. These may include: teachers from the range of children's services and schools, parents, Aboriginal Education Assistants, Community Language teachers, librarians, out-of-school-hours staff and administrative support staff. In addition Schools as Community Centres facilitators and /or special education support teachers may be a valuable resource.

Parents know their children well and can provide a great deal of valuable input to a transition program. Young children too, can make a significant contribution as they show areas of interest or concern for example, some children are eagerly looking forward to playing in the playground while other children can find this overwhelming. Programs may need to be modified and/or adapted to take account of children's interests or concerns.

Collaboration with staff in children's services is critical as teachers in these settings know their young children well. Generally they have comprehensive records and have gained the confidence of parents/carers and the child in the years before school. Further, in some contexts, members of the broader community may be involved with the program.

6. Are well planned and effectively evaluated

Effective transition programs are based on detailed planning and have clearly defined goals/outcomes which have been developed in collaboration with all of the stakeholders. The effectiveness of the program is assessed in relation to these goals/outcomes. It is important that stakeholders have opportunities to be involved at all levels of planning, implementation and evaluation and that their perspectives are considered.

7. Are flexible and responsive

Open and reciprocal communication among children, parents and teachers is an important element of effective programs. Open communication recognises that parents, as well as teachers, know a great deal about the children they teach and care for. Children too, know a lot about themselves and how they learn, and how they respond in certain situations. Transition programs are most effective where schools are responsive to the local community context and the needs of children who will be enrolling in Kindergarten in the following year.

8. Are based on mutual trust and respect

A climate of trust and respect enables all involved to feel valued within the school community. Just as children function best in situations where they feel psychologically, as well as physically safe, adults who feel their ideas and views will be listened to, are likely to contribute to the program and school life.

9. Rely on reciprocal communication among participants

Collaboration based on open communication can set the scene for a positive relationship between the school and families. It facilitates a context where the educational needs of the child are uppermost in the minds of all involved. Avenues for two-way communication in many communities will be enhanced through the involvement of bilingual teachers, parents and children.

10. Take into account the contextual aspects of community, and of individual families and children within that community

The responsibility to become 'ready' for school rests not with the individual child, but with a community. The contexts in which children live are influenced by: socio-economic circumstance, geographical isolation, cultural diversity, family work patterns, language backgrounds, disability and other special needs.

Transition programs should ensure that children and families feel included and that their cultural attributes are recognised, reflected and celebrated for the richness and diversity they bring to the school community.

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NSW Department of Education and Training (2007) *Time to Start School*

This guide provides assistance for parents and carers as they prepare their children and themselves for starting school. It is available from:

<http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/gotoschool/primary/newschstartguide.php>

NSW Department of Education and Training (2007) *Transition to School Support*

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Ten Tips for Parents of Children Starting Kindergarten

These are brief pointers to assist parents as their children start school. Available from:

<http://www.schools.nsw.edu.au/gotoschool/primary/tentips.php>

The following quality-assured links from Early Childhood Australia's Supporting Best Practice web directory connect to sites that discuss the growth, learning and support of preschool-age children.

[BBC parenting: Starting school](#)

Practical tips to make the transition to school less stressful for both parents and children.

School Readiness (2003) An initiative of NSW Department of Community Services

http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/docswr/assets/main/documents/school_readiness.pdf

[Going to school: Starting school](#)

Handy step-by-step advice for parents, from preparation to the first days of school, to settling in and dealing with parental separation pangs.

Kids and Traffic

Information about road safety issues and young children can be found at

<http://www.kidsandtraffic.mq.edu.au/>

Links to other state education departments

All state and territory education departments in Australia have websites that contain information about starting school in that state or territory.

The relevant website addresses are:

Australian Capital Territory:

http://www.det.act.gov.au/school_education/starting_at_school

Northern Territory: <http://www.education.nt.gov.au>

Queensland: <http://education.qld.gov.au>

South Australia:

<http://www.decs.sa.gov.au/portal/community.asp?group=matters&id=startingschool>

Tasmania: <http://www.education.tas.gov.au/school/parents/starting/checklist#yearbefore>

Victoria: [http://www.office-for-](http://www.office-for-children.vic.gov.au/)

[_data/assets/pdf_file/0014/16610/ecs_starting_kindergarten.pdf](http://www.office-for-children.vic.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0014/16610/ecs_starting_kindergarten.pdf)

Western Australia: <http://www.det.wa.edu.au/education/ece/docs/681L%20DET-Pre-Primary-DL-A.pdf>