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Transition from long day care to kindergarten: Continuity or not?

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TRANSITION PRACTICES THAT ENSURE continuity between early childhood settings have been shown to be important in assisting children's short-term and long-term growth and development (Vogler, Cravello & Woodhead, 2008). In Western Australia many young children move from and between long day care (LDC) settings to kindergarten. In that state, kindergarten is a non-compulsory sessional program for four-year-olds, conducted on school grounds and administered by the school principal. This paper describes the perceptions and practices of kindergarten teachers concerning transition processes and continuity of experience for the children who had attended long day care centres prior to kindergarten entry. Evidence from the study suggests that, although the majority of teachers considered transition to be important, in practice continuity appeared to range from fragmented to non-existent. Factors that appeared to inhibit effective transition and continuity are identified and a number of questions are raised about ways of ensuring continuity of experience.

Introduction

In 2007 the new Australian Labor Government committed to significant reforms in early childhood education; this placed increased attention on the provision of quality services for the nation's young children. The resulting National Quality Agenda for children from birth to five years promised increased access to quality early learning for four-year-olds, to be delivered by qualified early childhood teachers, and emphasised outcomes related to investment, productivity and participation (*Labor's Plan for Early Childhood 2007*). In addition, the national *Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF) (DEEWR, 2009) for children from birth to five years was endorsed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and has been implemented since 2009. The EYLF aims to lay the foundation for children's learning that will ensure effective transition and later school success. These reforms imply increased responsibility for educators to support and build strong foundations and smooth transitions across and between early childhood education and care settings.

Recent government trends and current practices highlight the importance of understanding the transitions children make, as well as the need for continuity of learning and development across settings and sectors. Young children in developed countries

are being cared for in a range of settings other than by their parents in the family home. In Western Australia (WA), statistics support this trend: up to 23 per cent of children from birth to three years and 69 per cent of three- to four-year-olds spend some of their week days in formal childcare settings (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2005).

The term 'transition' in the early childhood literature has been used to describe the movement of children from one institutionalised setting to another (Lombardi, 1992). Lam and Pollard (2006, pp.124–125) point out that many researchers over time have used the term to denote a move across cultural contexts from one institutional setting or phase to another in the educational continuum. Kagan and Neuman (1998) describe two types of transition. They refer to the first type as vertical transition, which is an upward shift from one institution to another. For example, transition from home to long day care (a centre-based child care provision for children from birth to five years which operates extended hours to support families), or from long day care to school. The second type is horizontal transition, which happens as children move to and from different settings daily. For example, children may attend a long day care centre for part of the day or week, and attend a kindergarten for the remainder of

the week. These multiple models support the concept that 'one point transitions' (such as starting school) are not the only significant points of transition in young children's lives.

In addition, Vogler and colleagues (2008, pp. 1–2) suggest that transition cannot be captured in a single definition. They argue that it often involves significant psychological modifications on the part of the child and is dependent on the nature and causes of the transition, the degree of change and continuity, and the vulnerability and resilience of those affected. Lam and Pollard (2006) refer to continuity as the compatibility or similarity of two environments in which there is continuous experience, whereas discontinuity means two incompatible environments between which children experience inconsistency.

The early childhood literature abounds with reports and papers that describe the discontinuous experiences children negotiate on entering formal schooling and the difficulties in children's transitions from the kindergarten or home setting to school (for example: Woodhead & Moss, 2007; Arnold, Bartlett, Gowani & Merali, 2007). Factors that contribute to a difficult transition for children and discontinuity of experience include changes in physical environment, differences in classroom organisation, discontinuities in curriculum content and teaching strategies, and differing ideologies and relationships between early childhood and primary teachers (Ledger et al., 1998, cited in Lam & Pollard, 2006; Margetts, 2002).

The more similarity children experience between settings and the less discontinuity around learning and relationships, the more likely it is that children will move confidently from one setting to another (Dockett & Perry, 2007). Attitudes to school and future learning can be greatly influenced by the degree of ease children experience as they move from one setting to another and into their new roles.

Such literature identifies the need for the involvement of stakeholders across all sectors in transition planning and implementation to ensure thoughtful deliberation of beliefs and practices to build strong links, support systems and relationships through transitional programs (for example: Dockett & Perry, 2007; Woodhead & Moss, 2007; Arnold et al., 2007).

Thus, since the 1990s, researchers have come to understand that transition for young children is a 'multi-layered and multi-year process involving multiple continuities and discontinuities of experience' (Petriwskj, Thorpe & Tayler, 2005, p. 63). Consequently, much has been written about the importance of a smooth transition between home and pre-school settings (Rimm-Kaufman, Pianta & Cox, 2000; Pianta, Rimm-Kaufman & Cox, 1999) and between pre-school settings and school (Fabian & Dunlop, 2007; Woodhead

& Moss, 2007; Dockett & Perry, 2003; Yeboah, 2002). However, there is a dearth of research on the transition of children from long day care settings to pre-school settings.

In WA long day care centres are one of the main providers of long day care. Long day care centres are generally open 10 hours a day, five days a week, 48 weeks of the year, and cater for children between birth and age five.

They have a staff-child ratio of 1:10 for children 36 months to school age and are required to have at least one diploma-qualified staff member. Children turning age four can access a non-compulsory kindergarten program for four half-day sessions each week, staffed by qualified teachers and educational assistants, with a staff-child ratio of 1:10. Kindergarten programs are often conducted on school grounds and administered by the school principal. In order to attend a kindergarten program, many children in WA move between long day care centres and kindergartens, within a day and/or across a week. Thus, in this study we explored kindergarten teachers' beliefs, knowledge and transitional practices, in order to develop a deeper understanding of the nature of transition and the continuity that currently exists between long day care centres and kindergartens in WA.

Method

Based on the belief that individuals hold differing perceptions of their experiences (Schwandt, 1998), we adopted a mixed methods framework to examine kindergarten teachers' perceptions and practices of the transition process for young children moving from long day care to kindergarten. Using quantitative and qualitative methods, we sought to explore the following research questions:

1. What do kindergarten teachers believe about the importance of transition and continuity?
2. What are the current transition and continuity practices used by kindergarten teachers?
3. To what extent do kindergarten teachers have a professional relationship with long day care professionals?

In the first phase of the research, early childhood teachers from a convenience sample of 200 kindergartens located in the metropolitan regions of Perth, Western Australia were invited to complete a survey about transition. The kindergartens were chosen because of their close proximity to day care centres their students had attended prior to starting at the kindergarten. The first section of the survey was designed to elicit information about the participants' professional qualifications, work experience, and

professional development. The second part of the survey focused on participants' perceptions of transition and continuity, the practices they employed, and their professional relationships with long day care centres. Where appropriate, participants were asked to elaborate on their responses. Their written comments gave us further insights and enabled us to identify key factors that appeared to impact on continuity between the two settings. Altogether, 38 kindergarten teachers completed the survey. Although this is a relatively small sample, we see this as the basis for a larger study.

In the second phase of the study we conducted telephone interviews with a random sample of 14 of the original 38 participants who returned their survey. The phone interviews built on the survey data and were developed to provide further in-depth information about participants':

- definition of continuity and how they created continuity
- knowledge of, and professional relationships with long day care professionals
- key factors that impacted on continuity between the two settings.

Findings

The findings from both the survey data and phone interview data are presented in the following section. Information about the participants is presented first, followed by findings under each research question.

To begin with, survey participants were asked about their professional qualifications, work experience and professional development. All participants were female, aged between 41 and 50 years, and had taught at their present location for an average 5.36 years. Participating kindergarten teachers had either a Bachelor of Education degree in Early Childhood (37%), a Graduate Diploma in Early Childhood (16%), a Diploma in Teaching in Early Childhood Education (11%), a Bachelor of Education degree (Primary 5%), or a related qualification such as a degree in Social Science or Nursing with an additional early childhood qualification (31%).

In response to a question about professional development (PD) in the past five years, participants stated they had attended a variety of PD courses. However, although these PD courses may have referred to transition and continuity, only one participant had attended a PD session specifically related to transition.

Research question 1: What do kindergarten teachers believe about the importance of transition and continuity?

In this section of the survey participants were asked: 'Do you think continuity of experience from long day care to kindergarten is important?' Please give reasons for

your answers. The majority of teachers (87%) thought continuity between LDC centres and kindergartens was important. Reasons given for the importance placed on continuity of experiences included facilitating children's transition between settings (37%), facilitating ongoing learning and development of the child (18%), facilitating social and emotional development through consistency in the context, understanding roles and expectations of the two settings (26%), recognising prior learning experiences and attainment through the transfer of information (16%), and the increased attendance of children at LDC centres (8%).

The following comments capture the beliefs of many of the teachers who wrote at length about why they thought transition is important. For example, 'Previous experiences of children are building blocks. We aim to find out where children are at developmentally—what they know and what they are interested in. It is our role to build on what children have learned previously in day care' (KS68), and 'I hope that the children can continue to build upon and strengthen their foundations of learning' (KS70). Others emphasised the importance of emotional and social security: 'Young children need continuity and support to progress and develop. They need familiar experiences and settings to feel secure and safe' (KS125). Another commented, 'Children need to feel comfortable in settings and that it helps with separation anxiety and social interactions' (KS27). Others wrote about transfer of records and knowledge of prior experiences: 'A flow-on of records on child progress will ensure better continuity' (KS19), and 'It would be helpful to know what experiences day care children have had from a planning point of view' (KS127).

Five of the surveyed kindergarten teachers (13%) indicated that continuity from LDC centres to kindergarten was not important. They believed that the different roles the two settings played in children's lives and the parents' expectations of these settings for their children, minimised the importance of continuity. One teacher argued, 'Parents have different expectations. Day care cannot give the same quality of experiences compared to kindergarten due to number of children, physical setting and teaching' (KS74). Another teacher wrote, 'Day care should be a more family-oriented setting whilst kindy is beginning to focus on educational experiences within a school-type setting/environment' (KS202).

In a study of this kind it is important to identify how teachers define continuity, as different meanings may lead to different practices. The phone interview participants were asked about their definition of the term 'continuity'. The 14 teachers provided various definitions, all associated with the provision of a similar program or having similar routines and expectations. Many referred to continuity as being 'Similar routines and expectations—always pack away. Also having a

sense of similar boundaries' (KT11). Continuity was also defined as exchanging information about the children's development, consistency in staff, and knowledge of children's time and frequency at the LDC centre. One teacher commented that continuity was about 'children being able to go from one place to another with as little stress as possible' (KT8), and another defined continuity as 'building on what they have done in the LDC centre' (KT7).

Research question 2: What are the current transition and continuity practices used by kindergarten teachers?

In this section of the survey participants were asked several questions about their transition practices, starting with 'What types of things do you do to ensure your children have a smooth transition to their kindergarten setting?'

Survey participants identified a range of practices they implemented in kindergarten settings to ease the transition. Responses included the involvement of parents (47%) and children (31%), modifications to their teaching program (40%), specific teaching strategies (16%), and collaborating with LDC centres (11%). Parental involvement included meeting with parents, distributing an information booklet, and encouraging parents to stay on the first day. Several participants indicated that children were encouraged to visit the kindergarten prior to the start of its new year, or were greeted individually on the first day, particularly when they came from a LDC centre and did not have a parent/carer present. A strategy widely practised by participating kindergarten teachers (40%) was to conduct orientation days whereby prospective students visited the kindergarten centre and school for short periods, followed by a staggered start at the commencement of the school year. Others revealed that they provided clear expectations, taught rules and boundaries, and fostered a welcoming environment to assist the transition process. Only four of the 38 survey participants reported that they liaised with LDC centres, either talking to the pick-up person or attending meetings with workers from nearby LDC centres.

Next, kindergarten teachers were asked: 'Do you think the children from the day care setting have a continuous experience in their new kindergarten setting?'

Interestingly, 21% of survey participants indicated that either they were unsure if continuity existed or they felt that continuity existed 'in-part'. In addition, 63% of kindergarten teachers indicated that continuity did not exist in their current situation. Almost a third of these teachers attributed different expectations and roles of the two settings to this lack of continuity. Several written comments are echoed in the following statements: 'At kindergarten they have more rules to abide by and with

fewer staff ratio, children need to learn to be part of a larger group' (KS140), and 'We find that the children have difficulty at times with the formal side of school' (KS200).

The teachers also cited lack of communication between the two settings and parents (11%), children's own expectations (5%), and behaviour (3%) as factors impacting on the children's sense of continuity. As one participant commented, 'Not prepared for kindy experience. Commonly assumed by parents that day care and kindy are 'the same' type of care" and think day care prepares them for kindy. Day care commonly assumes parents will take a role preparing their children for the changes for schooling' (KS61).

In complete contrast, when teachers felt children experienced continuity, they identified similarities between the two settings as key factors, for example, 'Children who come from day care settle easily into the kindergarten setting. They have the same ideas of what being part of a group entails and to socialise with others' (KS125), and, 'The children from day care are used to groups, mat sessions, helping pack away, and this makes some of the routines of school less alien' (KS136). In addition, teachers revealed that they relied on parental input and involvement (47%) as a means of becoming informed about the child's prior experiences in long day care and/or other care and education settings.

In order to elicit more information about the nature of transition and continuity practices, the 14 phone interview participants were asked to describe and explain the practices they used. Seven indicated that they communicated with LDC professionals and parents or talked to the children about what they had done in LDC centres. The teachers claimed this gave them insights into the children's development and enabled them to build on the children's experiences. Continuity was enhanced for these teachers when they had knowledge of how LDC centres operated. As one participant stated, 'Knowing what long day care centres do helps' (KT5), as does 'Having a shared vision and a hands-on approach' (KT10). Awareness of the language and literacy practices in the LDC centre was identified as a way of continuing a routine and building on what children already know, 'Through storytelling and turn taking' (KT1), and, '[We] build on known nursery rhymes and lots of oral discussion' (KT8). Individual participants also referred to continued 'exposure to books' (KT9) and 'reading favourite stories' (KT12) as part of building continuity.

In contrast, four of the 14 phone interview participants acknowledged that they did not specifically set out to create continuity between the two settings, with three stating 'I don't think that we do' (KT6, 8,13). Interestingly, the fourth teacher reported that she 'had never been asked to have an influence in day care'

although she attended local network meetings for professionals working with children from birth to four years (KT1).

To explore the extent to which teachers planned their curriculum using knowledge of the children's achievements at the LDC centre and shared records of development, we surveyed participants on their curriculum planning and records of children's progress. The survey data showed that kindergarten teachers took responsibility for the curriculum they developed and implemented in their centres. While more than half of the kindergarten teachers (55%) referred to using the state-mandated Curriculum Framework (1998) as a basis of their planning, the majority of participants (71%) reported that they based their curriculum on meeting the children's needs and interests, as well as on their own experiences and knowledge. The overlap in the statistical data suggests many use both approaches. In addition, kindergarten teachers described collaborating with others to design their program, but not specifically referencing LDC centre programs.

Furthermore, evidence from the survey suggests that participants relied on self-constructed forms of assessment, such as observations, anecdotal notes and checklists, to assess and record the progress their children made overall, including development in literacy and numeracy. The majority of kindergarten teachers (97%) said they share records of the children's development with parents, co-workers and administrators. They also passed this information onto the child's next teacher. In WA children move from kindergarten to pre-primary, which offers non-compulsory programs for five-year-olds. However, none of the kindergarten teachers surveyed had requested or received records from the associated LDC centre.

Research question 3: To what extent do kindergarten teachers have a professional relationship with long day care professionals?

In the survey the teachers were asked about their professional relationship with LDC centres, communication with LDC centres and visits between the two settings. In the phone interviews the teachers were asked: 'How do you define a professional relationship? What would a professional relationship entail? Please elaborate on communication between the two settings.' Analysis of the survey data and phone interviews for question three revealed three key factors that appeared to impact on continuity:

- Communication through professional relationships.
- Knowledge, attitudes and expectations of professionals working in the two settings.
- Structure of the two settings.

Communication through professional relationships

More than a third of the surveyed teachers said they had a professional relationship with the LDC centre (37%) and this relationship was central to effective continuity. This relationship was fostered through phone calls, email and personal contact. One teacher wrote about making additional contact through a newsletter: 'We have contact with people who drop off and pick up children every day and we sometimes provide our newsletter, if excursions, incursions are on' (KS122). Several teachers reported that they had daily interaction with LDC professionals, which helped the children to make the transition between the two settings. However, although communication was seen as important to continuity, analysis of the survey data indicated that the majority of kindergarten teachers (89.5%) had never visited the long day care centre their students had attended, and that they had never considered inviting their counterparts to their kindergarten.

The majority of kindergarten teachers who participated in the phone interview admitted a lack of communication between the LDC centre and the kindergarten, and acknowledged this as a barrier to effective continuity practices. One teacher noted that she had a child-parent communication book for each child, but not for the LDC centre. The lack of communication about pedagogy and curriculum design, and the fact that there was no sharing of information between the two settings, were also perceived to be problematic.

For two participants, lack of communication with long day care staff was seen as a result of time constraints; another participant cited lack of response by LDC professionals to invitations to visit the kindergarten. Only two teachers reported inviting the LDC centre professionals to their kindergarten, and one cited the importance of sharing cultural experiences: 'Liaison between the long day care centre and kindergarten is important, sharing information, because we are an Indigenous school—cultural awareness is important' (KT6).

In describing a professional relationship, the kindergarten teachers stated that such a relationship involved either informal talk, including chats at drop-off and pick-up times, some form of meeting or a sharing of information. Several of the kindergarten teachers mentioned the high turnover of LDC professionals as problematic, particularly with a different person from the LDC centre dropping off and picking up children at the kindergarten each day. This was perceived to be a barrier to effective continuity, as building relationships was seen as requiring regular contact over a long period. Another teacher identified the importance of location and communication, suggesting that, if the LDC centre and the kindergarten were located near each other, or housed in the same building, this would make communication between staff easier and more likely (KT7).

Knowledge of settings, attitudes and expectations

Analysis of the surveys and phone interviews suggests that attitudes to and expectations of what each setting would provide impact on continuity. In the phone survey, teachers commented that similarities between the two settings were central to a smooth transition. Comments included: 'Those children that have attended [LDC] experience a smooth transition because expectations are the same' (KT22) and '[Children experience continuity] because day care has routines, structured activities and similar games, play and rules to kindergarten' (KT41).

However, differing expectations held by some of the kindergarten teachers about the two settings, especially in relation to behaviour management, were also evident. Comments included: 'Discipline issues, long day care centres have different ways of dealing with sharing and playing' (KT7); and 'There are different expectations in long day care centres; there are not consistent boundaries' (KT11). Differences between the settings were also perceived to lead to difficulties for some children. For example, 'Doing things at the same time together and not having as much choice not to participate [causes difficulty]' (KT200), 'At kindergarten they have more rules to abide by and with fewer staff/children ratio, children need to learn to be part of a larger group' (KT140). In addition, some kindergarten teachers commented on the need for LDC centres to incorporate perceived kindergarten practices, 'Long day care centres should have more non-negotiable tasks and behaviour management plans' (KT8).

Two phone participants also alluded to perceptions and divisions between the two services, with one stating, 'There is a lack of mutual respect between the two services' (KT6) and the other commenting, 'Are people really interested in what the other does?' (KT12).

Structures

Surveyed participants also reported that many children moved between the LDC and kindergarten in the same school day and several times during the week. This was identified as a concern for many of the kindergarten teachers who experienced this practice. Several commented on the constraints associated with children attending kindergarten for four half-days, then returning to the long day care centre for the remainder of the week. They perceived this as highly problematic for continuity, and indicated that communication between the two settings was essential to ensure the children felt a sense of continuity with such a disrupted daily and/or weekly experience. The following comment sums up many of those written responses to the survey: 'In some instances the child spends most or some of the week in

the day care and it is important to discuss matters with the carers as well as the parents' (KS7).

Discussion

Whereas most of the kindergarten teachers in this study considered transition processes and continuity to be important, continuity and collaboration between the two settings appeared to be limited. Factors such as a lack of planned and deliberate action to promote effective transitions, lack of communication, and the differing expectations of each provision appear to be counterproductive to the development of continuity between long day care settings and kindergarten. Furthermore, the transient nature of some long day care staff would appear to hinder the ability of early childhood professionals to develop strong and lasting collaboration and relationships.

Understanding transitions and continuity

Although the majority of kindergarten teachers in this study claimed that continuity was important, this was not apparent in their practices, which ranged from fragmented to non-existent. Campbell Clark (2000) asserts that how well or effectively individuals cross borders into different settings is directly influenced by the border guards (in this case, early childhood professionals). It seems that, if early childhood professionals recognised continuity as a key component of their role and had a deeper understanding of models and strategies for enhancing transitions, more could be done to help children to improve their movements across settings. In particular, acknowledging and responding to barriers created by institutional, structural and administrative differences and the division between care and education would assist in supporting continuity of experiences for children.

Sharing kindergarten knowledge, information and practices

The study highlighted an apparent lack of knowledge and understanding regarding the daily operation, curriculum implementation and roles of professionals working in LDC centres. Few of the kindergarten teachers had visited LDC centres, or invited those working in LDC centres to visit their kindergarten. In addition, evidence suggests that the kindergarten teachers appeared to lack professional development targeted at assisting children's transition. Indeed, only one participant indicated that she had attended professional development sessions on the transition process. Some kindergarten teachers appeared to believe that settings operated differently and that parents had different expectations of settings even though both

LDC and kindergarten professionals work with the same-age children. This is a concern, as the literature suggests that ongoing professional development and interagency collaboration are necessary components of the transition process (Freeman & King, 2003; Kagan & Neuman, 2003).

Many participants identified a range of practices to assist children's transition—drawn from parental information, their own personal experiences and their professional background. However, a lack of familiarity with LDC centres indicated they had little awareness of the experiences their students were exposed to prior to entering kindergarten. Yet Campbell Clark (2000) suggests that, when children cross borders, such as moving daily across settings, knowledge of the other setting and supportive communication between the two can moderate any ill effects of the new situation.

Although communication between the two settings was seen as important, in practice professional relationships appeared tenuous, where communication tended to be fragmented, informal or irregular, with the majority of participants neither initiating nor maintaining systematic contact. Evidence suggests that lack of communication between the kindergarten teachers and LDC professionals limited their capacity to negotiate a curriculum which promoted continuity of experience, a feature strongly attributed to effective transition programs (Dockett & Perry, 2003). Time constraints appeared to be an issue; participants commented that time factors and work commitments limited their capacity to connect and exchange information. Given that the literature identifies interagency collaboration as a significant factor in the development of quality transitional programs (Freeman & King, 2003; Kagan & Neuman, 2003), the lack of communication is a major concern.

Discrepancies between the participants' expressed beliefs and the fragmentation of practice were also evident from the data. As stated, many participants believed that communication between the two settings was important, yet few engaged in practices that encouraged regular communication and the development of professional relationships. Indeed, several teachers commented on the need for LDC centres to modify some of their practices to resemble kindergarten practices, suggesting a one-way relationship. Recent research suggests there is an increasing trend for relationships between care and education to be one-sided, with education dominating. Woodhead and Moss (2007) remind us that effective transition can work only where there is a strong and equal partnership.

In addition, whereas teachers made efforts to track children's progress, particularly in literacy and numeracy development, they did not access information from LDC centres to build a profile of children's developmental

paths. The kindergarten teachers, unfamiliar with the programs offered by local day care centres, generally did not consider these prior learning experiences when planning and implementing their programs. Briggs and Potter (1999) argue that kindergarten teachers should take into account children's past experiences in order to minimise change and reduce stress. Greater alignment between curricula and pedagogy through a common learning framework, strong administrative links and joined-up services is recognised as a major policy initiative that is needed to address issues of continuity and transition. The *Early Years Learning Framework* (DEEWR, 2009) provides a starting point to address some of these concerns.

Movement of workforce, qualifications and structures

Several teachers cited the high turnover of the LDC workforce as a barrier to effective communication. The movement of the LDC workforce discourages practices needed to support transition and promote continuity. Relationships and supportive communication practices are hampered by this dislocation and make it difficult to build collegial practices across centres and, more broadly, across the sectors. There are historical differences in understanding the nature and role of care and education, and these may be responsible, to some degree, for a level of discontinuity and a creation of barriers to continuity of experience. Part of this divide is a result of different pedagogical practices inherent in the programs the children participate in. This may come from differing qualifications of care professionals and kindergarten teachers from two-year diplomas to four-year university degrees. A structural barrier is also evident at the government level in Western Australia because settings for children from birth to five years are provided by two different government departments, adding to the discontinuity of settings, expectations, funding, and licensing requirements.

The child, transitions and early childhood professionals

This study noted that children make both horizontal and vertical transitions and are being asked to cross a number of borders daily, from home to long day care to kindergarten and elsewhere. Lam and Pollard (2006) comment that, in Vygotsky's view, children's development and their understanding of the world are shaped by historical, cultural and institutional contexts and that moving across settings children may be confronted with completely different cultural models. Further, Lam and Pollard (2006) describe children as building a sense of identity while moving across settings as they shift from the 'child' at home

to the 'pupil' at school. Questions to be asked include: How do children see themselves in long day care? What identity are they being assisted to build in that setting? Is it one that allows for a smoother transition to kindergarten? Is it the ability of children to learn the discourse, expectations and boundaries of each setting that eases transition? The majority of kindergarten teachers in this study did not appear to assist children with active agency in transition processes, and some did not regard children's movement between settings as their concern.

Conclusion

The move to school is recognised as one of the key rites of passage in the lives of young children. For many children in WA, kindergarten may be the first step into the school system, especially if it is located in the school grounds. Creating conditions that promote and support continuity and smooth transitions requires personnel involved in this process to be proactive and thoughtful about provision of experiences and exchange of information. The current Western Australian State Government's initiative to establish integrated centres for children from birth to five years is seen as a major step forward in developing consistent standards, and providing high-quality interventions to meet the needs of families and community. Furthermore, the national *Early Years Learning Framework* (DEEWR, 2009) currently being implemented across all settings (and jurisdictions) for children from birth to five years, emphasises successful transitions as being central to children's sense of security, confidence and self (p. 16). Regardless of these positive trends, in WA and many other Australian states, different government departments administer care and education for children from birth to five years, which makes continuity of settings, funding, and licensing requirements problematic. Furthermore, qualifications for early childhood professionals working with same-age children differ. Unless services are inter-connected and common pedagogy and goals developed and adopted, continuity is likely to remain haphazard or non-existent.

For continuity to exist between the two settings, early childhood professionals from both settings need to collaborate, sharing their expertise and knowledge of the child with each other. Opportunities where early childhood professionals are exposed to their counterparts' settings would assist in developing a degree of familiarity with their children's prior experiences, as well as awareness of the expectations developed within those settings. For this to take place, communication, collaboration and time must be taken into consideration, and further investigation should be conducted into devising ways to make this happen.

In this research we found that settings in WA kindergartens are fraught with discontinuities, and that transitions from LDC centres to kindergartens are somewhat haphazard. Early childhood professionals have the responsibility of ensuring that young children experience a smooth transition, equipping them with the skills necessary to cope with new situations and building on existing knowledge and skills to enhance active agency. Research has identified that, for transition to be smooth and seamless, some form of continuity and collaboration between settings is at the very least desirable (Dockett & Perry, 2003) and at best imperative. Given the importance of collaboration between professionals, our study was limited by the exploration of one group of professionals involved in transition and continuity in WA. Further research needs to be undertaken to explore the perceptions and practices of long day care professionals who work in settings that young children attend before they enter kindergartens in Western Australia.

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